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The Contested Autobiographies of
Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks

Thesis submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Humanities

by

Karen M. Anderson

Dr. Arline Thorn, Thesis Advisor
Committee: Dr. Arnold Hartstein, Dr. Barbara Ladner,
Dr. Fran Simone, and Dr. Arline Thorn

Marshall University

11 June 2003

ABSTRACT

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By Karen M. Anderson

Today autobiography and memoir hold great interest for the average reader as well as the literary scholar. Some argue this form has replaced the novel as the dominant modern/postmodern narrative expression. Its study crosses departmental boundaries, surfacing in disciplines such as psychology, as well as English/literature. This thesis focuses on the autobiographies of two Euro-American actresses of the early twentieth century. Intersecting the study of film, narrative, autobiography (“female” or feminist, as well as canonical or “male”) and modernism, it focuses on text and subtext, analyzing reasons for both the works’ and actress/authors’ cultural marginalization. In art as well as life, Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks offer aspects of both the “masculine” and “feminine”—whether speaking of narrative structure or assigned gender roles in a given culture. Ultimately, however, canonical “male” aspects of the autobiographical genre present themselves in their works as filtered through a more “female”-centered lens.

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Dedication

To my mother, for telling me I'm a "smart girl";

to my father, for forcing me to love words;

to Dorothy Gray, for lifting me beyond "scared Karen";

to Carole Christiansen, for listening to me in the last year of her life.

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And a special thanks to Melville, “the prince,” for all his loving attention.

Introduction: Part I

Women's Bodies in History, Media, and Story: Two Tales

The following text entails an analysis of American, female-authored life writings. However, the chosen autobiographers are not typically recognized as “writers” in the strict, “literary” sense, whether we speak of canonical or noncanonical literature. Though I label their status in the literary realm as more or less “outlaw,” some critics have failed to relegate their output even among the ranks of acceptable *popular* works. More than once, the veracity of their authorship has been questioned. I, however, find such allegations difficult to prove. What follows is a comparison/contrast examining the autobiographies of two Euro-American actresses from the early to mid-twentieth century, namely, Louise Brooks and Frances Farmer. It examines not just what these women have to say about themselves, and the worlds in which they lived, but also *how* they say it. One of the works in question is Farmer's *Will There Really Be a Morning?*, documenting not just her life as a celebrity but her institutionalization for alleged “mental illness.” The other is Brooks's *Lulu in Hollywood*, combining “scandalously honest” tidbits from not just her own life, but the lives of others she knew and observed.

By analyzing their texts from a feminist perspective and incorporating theory on “female” autobiography, I focus both on text and subtext, to explore exactly how these author/actresses perceive their fame and failure as white women in the cultural milieu of twentieth century America. As defined by the society in which they moved, these women existed to a large degree as prime examples of “the feminine,” lauded for their enormous beauty and talent. However, it would seem these traits alone were not enough to brand them as culturally “perfect” females. Perhaps, put more accurately, there was something

about the characters of these women—or their natures—that caused them ultimately to fall short of the ideal. This thesis examines Louise Brooks’s and Frances Farmer’s own stories—taken as their own stories, despite ongoing debates to the contrary.

I view Farmer and Brooks, via their works, as subject/objects; subjects of their own writing, and objects (as they themselves address) within their own culture. They, their mystique, and their stories are steeped in the image of woman as “body,” somehow simultaneously divorced from yet tainted by “mind.” This plays itself out in their works in similar yet differing fashions. Both women, though they may represent the “ideal” female, also represent some deviance from the same. In overall analysis, while Brooks’s writing reveals more of an exploration of “deviant” female sexuality, Farmer’s focuses on the horrific consequences of possessing a “deviant” female mind. Yet culturally and historically, these general concepts have long been linked.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the literal image of the female in western society is in many ways similar to its precursor from the previous century—when the moving image’s reflection of/effect on mass culture first emerged. Beginning with the silents of the teens and twenties, American (and European) film has offered an iconography of womanhood that still exists today—despite the many permutations and stretchings of a cultural ideal. We recognize woman—in youthful beauty—as sexualized object, whether we’re directing our short attention span to the latest Britney Spears video; or gazing more leisurely at the faded black and white renderings of Louise Brooks in *Pandora’s Box* and *Diary of a Lost Girl* or Frances Farmer in *Come and Get It*. My thesis directs its attention to how such “objects-become-subjects” attempt to consider themselves in relation to this objectification (among other things) via autobiography. It is

a consideration that entails—as other commentators have noted of other female life writings—both silence and agency, simultaneously.

Aside from their roles as feminine icons in early twentieth century cinema and the lasting impact of such iconography, one might wonder what interest these particular subjects hold in terms of timeliness—Brooks having died almost two decades ago and Farmer, three. However, both Farmer and Brooks have been the subjects of film documentaries and additional biographies since their deaths. The University of Minnesota Press published a new edition of Brooks’s work in 2000. Martin Scorsese apparently has considered filming her life story within the last four years, with Kathleen Tynan, Kenneth’s widow, supposedly scripting. (Kenneth Tynan interviewed Brooks and wrote “The Girl in the Black Helmet,” reprinted as the new edition’s introduction.) Canadian author Janet Munsil’s play *Emphysema: A Love Story* (2000) reached the London stage as “Smoking with Lulu” in 2002. And a book by Mary Jo Bang entitled *Louise in Love: Poems* (allegedly inspired by though not about Brooks; her photo graces the cover) was published in 2001.

A feature film was made about Farmer in the eighties, followed by a lesser-known made-for-television movie a year later (the latter, bearing the same title as her book, apparently more true to Farmer’s word). And an even more obscure independent bio-pic, *Committed*, was produced at approximately the same time. Seattle-based Nirvana (a rock band that rose to great success in the nineties prior to its lead member committing suicide) made Frances Farmer the subject of a song (as they shared the same hometown), and it has been suggested Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love’s daughter is her namesake. In 1996, another Canadian, Sally Clark, published the play *Saint Frances of Hollywood*,

based upon Farmer's life. Its venues of performance have included Toronto's Berkeley Street Theatre Upstairs (1996) and the University of Manitoba's Black Hole Theatre, scheduled for—as this thesis is being completed—March 2003.

The last few years have produced substantial academic commentary on narrative in the form of memoir/autobiography, its proliferation, and how this genre continues to evolve. An interdisciplinary collection edited by Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh, *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, is one such work. Its introductory paragraphs quite succinctly describe the book's background and purpose:

The starting point of this book was a conference on narrative and identity that took place at the International Research Center for Cultural Studies (IFK) in Vienna, in December of 1995. Scholars from psychology, philosophy, social sciences, literary theory, classics, psychiatry, communication, and film theory gathered to explore, from the vantage points of their disciplines and their individual work, the importance of narrative as an expressive embodiment of our experience, as a mode of communication, and as a form for understanding the world and ultimately ourselves.

Indeed, a central issue around which almost all presentations and discussions revolved was the question how we construct what we call our lives, and how we create ourselves in the process. The question of what type of construction this is proved, thus, to be intermingled with the question of what type of self is being created in this construction. The various approaches to these questions and to possible answers outlined at the conference and in this book focus on the process of autobiographical identity construction. What all of them

highlight is that this construction of self and life worlds draws on a particular genre of language usage: narration. (1)

Farmer and Brooks fit this pattern, using narrative to create particular “selves” in their autobiographies. The editors of *Narrative and Identity* then comment on how different disciplines approach the “same” subject (identity and/or narrative):

Consider, for example, psychology on the one hand, and literature and literary theory, on the other hand. While the psychological investigation of human nature has claimed a particular competence for subject matters like memory, mind, and the self, countless texts of literature and literary criticism have been exploring the linguistic nature of the same aspects of human existence. In doing so, however, both approaches have almost entirely ignored each other. And that is no wonder, as literary critic Daniel Albright (1996) remarks, because they only seem to be concerned with the same subject. In reality, their intellectual interests as well as their concepts of human nature are fundamentally different. “Literature,” Albright writes, “is a wilderness, psychology a garden” (p.19). Albright claims that literature is fascinated by undomesticated nature with all its irregularities and deformations, while psychology is obsessed with gardening instruments and methodological cleanliness. (2)

This last distinction may seem obvious in relation to analyzing Frances Farmer and/or her work: in writing her autobiography, Farmer has taken on her “cure,” as opposed to the “cure” taking on her. . . but one might wonder how this possibly relates to Louise Brooks. One way might be through viewing the body as an extension of the self. More than one “commentator” has viewed Brooks’s body (in its “actual” not just

cinematic existence; e.g., equating “Louise” with her character “Lulu” in *Pandora’s Box*) as somewhat of an “untamed wilderness.” According to biographer Barry Paris, both psychology and psychoanalysis have offered such diagnoses of Brooks, including those of “critic and teacher John Barba, a psychologist who has spent long hours developing his own Tynan-like ‘profile’ of Louise Brooks” and “Rose Hayden” who “viewing Louise psychoanalytically, believes her self-vendetta stemmed from ‘some serious personality disorders that went beyond eccentric and into dysfunctional’” (544-45).

To turn from psychological to medical practice and the female body/mind, recently reported news stories have concerned a surgeon’s “branding” of patients’ uteri (unbeknownst to them) before performing hysterectomies and medical students’ unauthorized “pelvic exams” of anesthetized female patients. In these cases, women’s minds—their voices—were allowed no play in reference to their bodies’ treatment. It is hard to believe such activities are occurring today, yet just as hard to believe the invasive “treatment” of women’s bodies/minds, without necessarily their acquiescence, was occurring a century ago (give or take a decade), as our western culture supposedly “modernized” itself emerging from Victorian times. In the nineteenth century, when remnants of such abuse—documented at least as far back as the Roman era—still existed, asylums full of “hysterical women” were found throughout the western world.

The 1994 book, *Women of the Asylum: Voices from Behind the Walls, 1840-1945*, includes an excerpt from Farmer’s *Will There Really Be a Morning?* among its many female-voiced life writings. According to Geller and Harris, “What these accounts document is that many women in asylums were not insane; that ‘help’ was not to be found in doctor-headed, attendant-staffed and state-run patriarchal institutions, neither in

the nineteenth century nor in the twentieth; that what we call ‘madness’ can *also* be caused or exacerbated by injustice or cruelty, within the family, within society, and in asylums; and that personal freedom, radical legal reform, and political struggle are enduringly crucial to individual mental and societal moral health” (xxv). Illustrating the association of the twentieth century with modernism, however, the authors find that unlike their nineteenth century counterparts whose accounts often reflect a “frame of reference” that is “moralistic, purposeful, philosophical, often religious”; the modern-era successors “face ‘madness’ and institutional abuse alone, without God, ideology, or each other” (xxv).

Gail Hornstein’s “Narratives of Madness, as Told from Within” (2000), looks at both male and female-authored works. Yet in listing “Some Favorite Patient Narratives” within her essay, one notes that of the eight works mentioned, five are by women. And within the text of the article, among the authors discussed whose gender Hornstein reveals, the ratio is twelve women to five men. In addition, Hornstein herself, a female psychology professor, notes her practically lifelong fascination with such works; and further describes how she discovered that a colleague—another female—shared her “obsession,” though the latter’s chosen field was literary studies. It would seem, at least per these limited resources, that this “genre” is not only often the product of “female” voices and of particular interest, like other narrative studies, to academics within “psychology” and “literature”—but possibly, it holds a special interest for some female scholars.

Hornstein seems to assign a “marginalized” status to such authors, whatever their gender. She writes, “Patient memoirs are a kind of protest literature, like slave narratives

or witness testimonies.” And with regard to the issue of “silence” versus “empowerment,” she notes, “Psychiatrists have not simply ignored patients’ voices; they have gone to considerable lengths to silence them.” Pointing to the cultural element, Hornstein comments on the importance of “context”: “Politics and class are often key themes.” She notes that many such memoirists cite “physical and sexual abuse” as the “source of their symptoms,” as opposed to an emphasis on “genetics and brain physiology” in “doctors’ accounts.”

Holloway et al. in *Selves and Others: Exploring Language and Identity*, offer an expanded etymology of the word “hysterical,” explaining how “irrational behaviour” became inexorably tied to “femaleness” (118). According to this account, “Influenced by the Greek idea, the ancient Romans referred to the woman’s womb as an animal that needed to be driven back into its lair. This suggests that they saw the womb and its alleged effects as something dangerous and wild. It also suggests a view of women as threatening, inferior and animal-like, needing to be tamed” (118). To “treat” this, the Romans “would apply substances and objects to the woman’s body that were meant to push the womb back to where it was allegedly meant to be. These practices were brutal and caused great suffering for women” (118).

It would seem there has always been a cultural connection made between the female mind and body. It is a connection that, unlike some current approaches linking mind to body in medical practice, has often expressed itself as denigration. As America burst into the modern era, society found itself in the midst of relatively loose cultural mores (especially within the entertainment world), the “Jazz Age” and the pre-production code era, in which the American film industry developed. Louise Brooks was a part of

that era, entering dance (the Denishawn company) then film, in 1922, while Frances Farmer grew up a product of it, born in 1913. At the same time, there existed the idea of the “wounded man” post-World War I, wounded both physically and emotionally. America, the West, was figuratively and literally scarred by this war that had embraced burgeoning technology, but where did women, as human beings, figure in this cultural mindset? On the whole, women did not fight at the front and come back literally broken and disconnected. In stark contrast to acting as an emblem or constant reminder of death (as in the case of the “incomplete” veteran), women have always served as emblems of *life*. One would think Brooks and Farmer, as culturally “perfect” specimens of the feminine, seemingly ideal for such a role. But woman’s “wound” is found in this very same capacity that they offer. Perversely, their ability to give life is their wound; not an overt, visible one, but one hidden, one of subtext.

Is woman’s life-giving capacity a “painful” counterpoint to the figure of the physically wounded, death-carrying male? As I write this, our country, in a new millennium, sits on the brink of another war, its possibility carrying with it a collective dread of further, formerly unimaginable horrors, already demonstrated quite graphically by the acts of September 11, 2001. The West is concerned about the plight of women among our “enemies” and rightly so; in certain regions of the world, overt oppression and atrocities, at least as viewed from a mainstream-feminist cultural standpoint, still occur on a daily basis. The modern male mind, as western, male-scripted literature (including autobiography) attests, was wounded by the horrors industrialism visited upon the twentieth century, horrors that signaled a backfiring of western, male-oriented progression. But culturally speaking, the wounded female mind—western or otherwise—

is eternal, has always existed, is inherent. While the male has *become* wounded, the female is, and always was, *the wound*.

This thesis is an attempt to address this wound. The topic was conceived at the very onset of the twenty-first century, some twenty to thirty years after the documenting (and some sixty to eighty years after the occurrence) of the events with which it deals. It focuses on the retelling of lives, women's lives, by the women who lived them; "stellar" lives at that, in the most popular sense. But the subject is also something else. It is a response to any deliberate—or implied—negative reading of the same. It is the subtext of these lives, as is revealed in the subjects' life writings.

Introduction: Part II

An Intersection of Autobiography, the Feminine, and Film: Backgrounds

In the present epoch of cultural/literary analysis, what is the relevance of studying two film actresses from the early twentieth century whose backgrounds are steeped in white middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestantism? The appeal for this researcher—aside from sharing their background (more or less) and sex—lies in the women's lack of continued success given such "advantages" and their expressions of same via autobiography. What factors contributed to the marginalization of Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks in the film industry as well as life? How were their experiences similar and/or different? As already noted and contrary to what some may think, such study at this point in time is extremely relevant. Louise Brooks and Frances Farmer represent the objectified female on celluloid, an icon that, despite the women's movement, is stronger today than it ever was.

Again, one of the most prolific areas in current studies centers on narrative/storytelling, including personal narrative. Film and its media offshoots are also more appreciated today than ever both in popular and academic circles, particularly in the classical, narrative sense. Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks, as “celebrities,” fall at the intersection of these two entertainment/art forms. Female sexuality on film for the most part, in the mainstream, is still portrayed in terms of objectification, sans any significant in-text analysis. Louise Brooks and Frances Farmer, too, were “objects” in the medium of their day, though there were instances (arguably less common today) in which such objectification was self-reflexively scrutinized to a point. Most notable among these film vehicles were Farmer’s *Come and Get It* (in which a wealthy older man becomes obsessed with the daughter of a woman he abandoned years before) and Brooks’s European efforts (*The German Pandora’s Box* and *Diary of a Lost Girl* and the French *Prix de Beaute*).

Coming at these autobiographies from another direction, today audiences seem to have a great appetite for—even identification with—celebrity “confession” (both film and print treatments), the more sensational the better. Such life-writings often focus on dysfunctional backgrounds, abuses both physical/sexual and emotional/psychological, and self-destructive behaviors. Some would fall under the category of “narratives of madness” (touched on earlier) and have achieved much recognition of late among popular and scholarly audiences, one example from the nineties being the book, film, and audiobook (read by the author) versions of *Girl Interrupted*. The exploration of women’s sexuality is also of great interest to general audiences as well as an ongoing subject of

feminist study: witness the 2002 motion picture *Unfaithful* directed by Adrian Lyne and the mass popularity of the romance-genre market.

There exists a canonical body of work for autobiography scholarship that will not be mentioned here (James Olney an example of one of the foremost scholars), except as referenced by later theorists (e.g., the feminists). One of the earliest feminist texts is Estelle Jelinek's 1980 *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (to which subsequent scholars have made reference). Jelinek's intent, like some theorists who followed, was to provide a means of addressing those autobiographers who did not fall within range of what eventually—and rather quickly—became canonically acceptable; in her case, namely women. As the author notes in her preface, inspiration for *Women's Autobiography* came to her as she was composing her 1976 dissertation on that very subject and “found practically no criticism on women's autobiographies” (ix).

The intersection of film and autobiography, in its various manifestations, has long been an area of popular and scholarly interest. The autobiographies of actors/actresses stand as only one example. But with celebrity biography/autobiography, it seems that readers are often drawn to representations that culminate in one of two extremes: impending tragic, premature death or incapacitation; or the ultimate surmounting of great hardship. The latter, traditionally, applies more to the canonical “male” literature and the former, to the “female.”

Lori Saint-Martin notes how “the realm of the personal and sexual has always been literary for men (Saint Augustine, Rousseau, Michel Lewis, Henry Miller) and confessional for women (Colette, Erica Jong, Anais Nin)” (qtd. in Gammel 2).

However, the life writings of Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks do not seem to fit neatly into one or the other such category—"male" or "female." And though they proved interesting reading to a sizeable audience upon publication, the works have since often been summarily dismissed as disingenuous in one way or another. It is perhaps because they fail to fit very neatly within a number of specified sub-generic boundaries ("male," "female," "celebrity," "confession") that the authorial voice has been so severely challenged in each case.

Upon close examination, there is a duality evident in the texts of both Farmer and Brooks, but what it actually consists of and suggests is hard to pinpoint. What "two sides" emerge in each text, and to what do they relate? These dual concepts seem somewhat elusive . . . a matter not as simple as acknowledging male/female autobiography in tandem or an attempt at combining two generic formulas. It perhaps represents discontent on the two authors' parts: a discontent that may exist solely in their lack of compliance with the strict gender roles of the time ("female"=marriage, motherhood, non-career, beauty, heterosexuality). But "failings" in other areas, such as faith and patriotism, are also suggested. Do these author/subjects simply *elude* definition? The reader might well muse over how to categorize Farmer and Brooks neatly after reading their life-stories. Are they neither Christian nor atheist? Protestant nor Catholic? Patriots nor anarchists? Heterosexual nor homosexual? Nymphomaniacs nor celibates? Sexual objects nor liberated women?

It is not that they are simply somewhere in the middle of two "extremes" in each case (representing some sense of "normalcy"). Rather, for the most part, they appear to swing between two poles. It seems to be the authors' contention that this

placement/predicament has caused them harm—or at least eventual disconnection from the mainstream, and they choose to express this idea via sharing their life stories. And somehow, strangely, this duality seems not just Farmer’s and Brooks’s *downfall* but also their *salvation*. How do these autobiographical texts exhibit the duality attached to the author/subjects not just in content but in structure? What is at the root of this fluid polarization? One reading may relate it to the division/pairing of the female body and mind.

Problems arise when attempting to study the autobiographies of “celebrities”—generally more so than with other autobiographical efforts—and need to be addressed in undertaking a project of this sort. A primary concern (already alluded to) is whether or not the writing may truly be attributed to the named author. Actors, sports figures, and the like frequently engage the services of ghostwriters in telling their stories, and while usually such writers are credited (or co-credited), it sometimes occurs that they are not. The works of Louise Brooks and Frances Farmer fall under this shadow.

Though it appears that at various points in her life Frances Farmer was actively working on her memoirs/autobiography, she died in 1970; her book was released posthumously in 1972. Though Farmer’s is the sole name attached to the work, it has been strongly suggested—according to various sources—that she had at least a “collaborator.” The person most often named as performing this function is her friend, Jean (also known as “Jeanira”) Ratcliffe, with whom she spent the last several years of her life. Ratcliffe is said to be an “author” (per her own obituaries), however she does not appear to have been particularly prolific with regard to publication—at least under her own name. The most generous of such assertions claim that Ratcliffe merely

“finished” Farmer’s autobiography—readying it for publication (as Farmer died prematurely, of cancer). It has also been suggested that Farmer’s alleged alcoholism (a charge leveled at Brooks, as well), in addition to extensive “psychological treatments” she endured earlier in life (including a possible lobotomy), rendered her too “impaired” to undertake such an endeavor.

To this writer, denying the author’s voice in her own story is equally as suspect as the veracity of the authorial voice itself. The most telling factor in choosing to accept and study *Will There Really Be A Morning?* and *Lulu in Hollywood* as autobiography is the fact that they are presented as such; and that there exists just as much evidence—considering their acknowledged backgrounds—in favor of the authors’ capabilities along those lines. Brooks’s writing, in her later life, was accepted and published by scholarly film journals. Before turning to acting, Farmer was a journalism major and student reporter; a few years previous to that having won a national essay contest. However their words transferred to paper, they do not appear to be women who lacked an adequate gift of self-expression (capable of emoting, as well, through drama and dance). They do not appear to be women with no “voice.” On the contrary, a thread that runs through both actresses’ works would be an acknowledgement that somehow their having a voice did them damage.

The following chapters will look at the ways in which Farmer and Brooks, though writing for the popular market in the guise of “standard” autobiography, nevertheless represent themselves in not-so-standard ways. This includes elements that feminist scholarship has noted are prevalent among female autobiographers. In addition, while the two actresses’ published works seem to fall within the parameters of generic formula,

many details in and of their production fall short when placed under the scrutiny of canonical scholarship and critique. As female “autobiographers,” their marginalization along lines of cultural psychological/sexual norms, despite and/or because of their seeming honesty in this endeavor, is effectively aided by those critiquing the efforts. But a more overriding concern may be how the social marginalization of these women—ostensibly examples (as twentieth-century Euro-American celebrities) of their gender’s “cultural elite”—is replicated in the marginalization of their life writings.

The first half of the twentieth century constituted the “golden age” of American cinema, which had its start on the East Coast (New York and New Jersey) as early as 1903, then transferred its locus to Hollywood in the teens and twenties (Bordwell and Thompson 293-94). There the legendary studio system developed that did not begin to languish until the fifties (with the advent of television); and finally expired in the sixties (Bordwell and Thompson 316; Katz 1109, 1321). One of the milestones in this development was the transition from silent to sound films that occurred during the late twenties. And at least equally significant was the creation of the Production Code that closely followed in 1930, becoming fully enforced in 1934 (Katz 1109).

The Hays Office, which instituted the code, changed and delineated to a large extent the manner in which American film and subsequent media would be produced and perceived, even long after such restrictions were theoretically shed (i.e., when graphic “gratuitous” sex and violence became once again “permissible”) (Katz 91; Haskell 1109). This concern with cinematic morality/immorality has focused to a large extent on female images. The loosening of the code hasn’t really done women any favors; regardless of whether female sexuality is dealt with in terms of text or subtext, a larger

cultural code has always dominated, requiring them to exist typically in only certain sexual ways—cinematically or otherwise (as Molly Haskell’s *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* points out).

What is now termed the “Classical Hollywood Cinema” came to be synonymous with narrative filmmaking and even more restrictively, only certain types of narratives per the mandates of the Hays Office (Bordwell and Thompson 294, 314; Katz 1109). American film’s development, then, is tantamount to the development of film as “narrative”; so much so that film, at least as entertainment, is nearly impossible to conceive of in any other manner (Bordwell and Thompson 316). This brings up another question related to this thesis: which are more “real” in the public imagination—Frances Farmer’s and Louise Brooks’s autobiographies or the narratives they “lived” on the screen? Does one type of narrative need to live up to the other? The “fallen” Louise Brooks has constantly been compared to her most famous portrayal, that of the prostitute “Lulu” in Pabst’s German film, *Pandora’s Box*. And Frances Farmer constantly found herself up against her mother’s (and others’) displeasure at her shunning a film career.

As the film industry developed, American art and literature (“high” as opposed to movies as “low” or “popular” culture) entered a new age at the onset of the twentieth century, the age of modernism, from roughly 1910 through the thirties (Henderson 426). Such works/authors/artists questioned the very tenets that underpinned many a studio-produced, classical Hollywood narrative film, whatever its genre, be it western, musical, gangster, or romantic/screwball comedy. Popular narrative cinema may quite rightly be perceived as an offshoot of popular/pulp fiction (and nonfiction in the form of, for example, “true crime stories” and sensational biographies). Such works had for some

time existed alongside of/in opposition to “literary” fiction/nonfiction. But popular film and the media forms that have succeeded it arguably have had a much more profound impact on the American psyche than popular literature—a primary reason being one need not be literate to partake in and appreciate visual media. And during what by some is defined as the pinnacle of American film’s golden age, the thirties (with the Great Depression in full force), Americans somehow found the quarter or so for a ticket it took to keep the Hollywood factories churning. Though the stage in its more popular forms obviously existed as a precursor to film for such audiences, its presence could not have been as pervasive in all locales as that of film (or its stepchild, television, which was to offer an even greater mass impact).

Among the players entering the arena of American cinema during this classical or golden age were some who claimed to seek (at the time and in retrospect) something more “artful” in the enterprise (by contemporary definitions). One such person was the actress Louise Brooks, whose film presence found its strength in Hollywood’s pre-code silent era and even more so, if briefly, in Europe’s (by comparison) “codeless” one. Another was Frances Farmer, who starred in thirties’ code-dominated Hollywood sound vehicles, as well as on the more “radical” New York stage. Their less than conservative activities, in the midst of the very structured worlds in which their careers primarily moved, seems to have contributed to their marginalized status. Farmer’s and Brooks’s resulting circumstances prompted them to write in what some consider a very modern or postmodern form (though it predates the modern era by centuries), the autobiography. It is a form that pervades both “high” and “low” literature. Modern autobiographical styles often consist of a treatment of the author’s own life that is intensively introspective

and/or confessional. While Farmer (a student of Method acting) carries such treatment to the hilt, Brooks (quite appropriately, having terpsichorean training) “dances” around it.

Some details of the two actresses’ lives reveal aspects that are conducive to the modernist mindset. Fresh from Kansas in 1922, Brooks studied with the Denishawn Dancers in New York (a modern dance company founded by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn in 1915) alongside Martha Graham (Brooks xi). Farmer traveled less far immediately after secondary school, attending the University of Washington in her hometown of Seattle; and rather quickly switching her major from journalism to theater (Farmer 50). In the latter department the aspiring actress found her niche, amongst a group of leftist-oriented classmates and professors. Farmer herself claimed to be not quite the Soviet sympathizer, despite her having penned a national award-winning essay in high school proclaiming “God Dies”; and despite—as an undergraduate—winning a local communist newspaper’s subscription contest: first prize being a trip to Russia (Farmer 160, 57). (Each activity earned her significant negative commentary in the mainstream press, which her mother railed against.) Farmer maintained that her primary interest lay in the contest’s delivering her to the same city, as a layover, to which Brooks had earlier fled. Both Farmer and Brooks possessed an interest in perfecting via this mecca the serious crafts in which they had first shown promise: theater and dance respectively.

New York was home to the “Group Theater,” derived from the “Little Theater” and its “modernist Russian origins” (Henderson 258, 335). The “Little Theater Movement”—running from 1910 through the teens—had actually spread into France, Germany and the United States (Henderson 258, 335). Its successor, the Group Theater,

flourished in England from 1933 to 1953, as well as America from 1931 to 1941 (Henderson 257-58). Such was the training Farmer had received on campus; and in fact, the “Method” still holds sway today as a means of formal theater study: witness New York’s New School/Actor’s Studio. However, though later in her career Farmer would spend time with the “Group,” this first New York visit would find her venturing quite quickly down a very different route. Rather than locating substantial theater work, she found herself propositioned instead by a Hollywood studio.

Brooks, in her day, had similarly downgraded herself from an elite modern dance company to the “George White Scandals” and “Ziegfield Follies,” not small-time by any means, simply “entertainment” as opposed to “art” (Brooks 17). But Brooks admitted that it was she herself who had brought about this ousting; she simply could not abide by the “rules” the company had imposed on her behavior (Brooks xi; Paris 39, 47-48). Soon she, too, was wooed by not one, but two film factories. Coincidentally, in fact, both actresses ultimately signed with Paramount; and soon found themselves in Hollywood. It was only later that Brooks, like Farmer “escaped” into more “modernist” venues of performance. While Farmer was for a time “in” with the “Group,” Brooks made her most memorable films by venturing abroad to Berlin and Paris, as did other American expatriate “artists” of every variety between the wars (Henderson 258). And also similarly, upon returning to more mainstream Hollywood following these digressions, neither actress returned to open arms.

Frances Farmer’s autobiography, entitled *Will There Really Be a Morning?* (taken from a poem by Emily Dickinson) was published in 1972, although her death occurred in 1970. Farmer was known primarily as an American screen actress of the late thirties and

early forties, who possessed the “right stuff” to make it at that time in Hollywood; the right mix of performance and photographic brilliance. However, for various reasons (ostensibly because of her debilitating mental condition) Farmer found herself an eventual outcast in the industry, following the path of a few other actresses who one way or another alienated themselves from the system.

It is hard not to consider Farmer’s autobiography in comparison/contrast to Brooks’s, after making a brief examination of each. The writers’ styles and approaches to the “material of their lives” seem quite different, yet the women themselves apparently shared the label “outcast” in virtually the same industry/culture. These are points worth pursuing. Farmer ended her days supposedly nearly catatonic (due to an alleged lobotomy, not mentioned in her autobiography) while Brooks was always (if Farmer was for a time) the “active object.” Culturally, the “active object” is still alive and well today and even less apologetic, though often morphed into a more sedate guise with advancing middle age (e.g., “Madonna”). While Farmer professes peace at last, the reader cannot help but note a certain pitiable, lackluster air at her book’s close. On the other hand, one imagines Brooks in the end as fiery and spellbinding, still conducting “bedroom interviews” (though their nature has changed with time), arguably more clouded by drink.

What follows is an analysis, both textual and structural, of two early intellectual attempts at grappling with the personal effects of such iconography: Louise Brooks’s *Lulu in Hollywood* and Frances Farmer’s *Will There Really Be a Morning?*. Vivian Gornick describes the shift from the modern “novel” to the “memoir” as narrative’s predominant literary expression: “Thirty years ago people who thought they had a story to tell sat down to write a novel. Today they sit down to write a memoir” (89). Estelle

Jelinek notes, “It has only been since World War II, when the formal analysis of all branches of literature flourished, that autobiography began receiving consideration as a literary genre worthy of serious critical study” (1). With these statements, they offer a chronological explanation for the genre’s placement (which others have noted) as a successor of sorts to modernist fiction. Frances Farmer’s autobiography seems to have appeared on the cusp of such a transition. Similarly yet conversely, Brooks produced most of the material for *Lulu in Hollywood* for film periodicals primarily in the sixties and seventies; but died just a few years *after* the publication of her compiled “autobiography.”

The two images of the female noted above—the active object and the catatonic—are by no means anomalies in the century-long history of the moving visual image. They are but two facets of a more generalized media objectification of women addressed by this thesis. Such objectification has larger societal implications, in which the female mind/body figures prominently. Despite the simultaneous leaps and bounds of feminism, within the mainstream media the iconography of the female remains, with surface variation, fundamentally unchanged. Written for a popular audience when feminist academia began asserting the presence of a “female” autobiography (in various configurations), the life writings of Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks capture this iconography, and at the same time, comment upon it.

Frances Farmer and *Will There Really Be a Morning?*

Frances Farmer's *Will There Really Be a Morning?* in many ways appears your standard trashy celebrity autobiography, which is enough, perhaps, to suggest the actress is not its author. It seems such presentations on notable figures more often than not are ghostwritten. In fact, considering its publication date, to some extent Farmer's book might be labeled a prototype for the genre. The "trashiest" elements according to certain critics are its references to abuses that took place while the actress/author was institutionalized. However, one needs to consider why readers might find such depictions trashy. Does the author describe scenes that are extremely distasteful? Does it seem incredible that such events should have taken place in a "hospital?" Does society as a whole prefer not to contemplate the existence and treatment of the mentally ill within it? Many readers would honestly need to answer such questions in the affirmative—and yet be disturbed by having to do so. Discrediting such accounts, as sometimes occurs with other forms of testimonial (as Hornstein notes in "Narratives of Madness"), is one way for readers to deal with such discomfort.

Yet such scenes provide much of the meat for analyzing Farmer's autobiographical technique. Like Amy Weiss's "Autobiographies of Women's Madness: Evidence of Both Agency and Silence," my thesis has as its concern—in part—an exploration of the so-called female "narrative of madness." Farmer's text is one rife with conflict, conflict that comes to a head during the account of events at Steilacoom. But the conflict has its roots elsewhere. If one considers the book progressively by chapters, the locus is in the bickering between Frances and her mother over the battered kitchen table in the Seattle family home. There is, however, another way to get at the "roots."

Applying Roberta Kyle's observation (regarding other autobiographies) in "Textured Lives: Women's Autobiography/Personal Narrative as a Tool for Understanding Cultural Identity," Farmer's work, like many a female-authored life writing, not only offers more of a family focus than many "male" autobiographies, it also fails to follow a linear or chronological progression (Kyle 2). Instead, she interweaves flashback with further flashback, achieving a somewhat layered effect. She achieves this primarily by alternating chapters between the distant and less distant past. We, as readers, have to dig through the layers to get at her meaning, her "story." And her account is extremely personal, Farmer's career ultimately more backgrounded, seeming to replicate the author's own attitude toward it—at least as it turned out.

Interwoven in this recounting, buried more in the middle than at the start, is what seems on the surface to be a typical American "pioneer tale"; Farmer renders her concise genealogical history. This element would seem representative of the standard "male" formula; life-writing striving for cohesion (Kyle 2). In addition to this, one might read Farmer's more horrific passages (e.g., her commitments to asylums) as obstacles faced then overcome—another conventional aspect of male-authored autobiography. Yet these passages are among those some critics find less believable or "authentic." According to Gary Storhoff:

Frances "wrote" an autobiography, *Will There Really Be a Morning?*, but this text does little to dispel the confusion regarding the objective events of her life. Part of the text was "ghostwritten" by Lois Kibbee, and when Frances died before the book was completed, Kibbee withdrew from the project. Jean Victoria Ratcliffe, Frances's friend who shared her house, assumed responsibility for the

work, apparently embellishing several scenes (including her own characterization), and finished the book, publishing it in 1972, two years after Frances's death. Ratcliffe dedicated the book to herself.

After publication, Frances's sister Edith described the book as filled with lies and misrepresentations, particularly of her own family. Even if we assume that Frances's own voice controls most of her autobiographical narrative, we still confront major problems of reliability. Filled with silences, rationalizations, and omissions, this text was begun years after Frances had suffered countless electric shock treatments, pacifying drugs and consciousness-altering injections, and finally, a transorbital lobotomy. Many elements of the book should be read skeptically, especially the text's evangelical tone (no doubt an addition from the religious Ratcliffe), and Frances's apparent indifference to international and domestic politics. (271)

This author's conquered hardships *as reported*, for some reason, are not perceived as "real," a perception that mimics how such allegations made by women frequently find (or rather, fail to find) reception in life as well as art. Farmer apparently did consult with Kibbee at the book's genesis per other reports, though she is not universally described as its "ghostwriter"; however she conducted interviews with Farmer not unlike Tynan's with Brooks (Tate). It seems, as well, that Farmer denied the lobotomy in her comments to Kibbee and others, and in the eighties, three nurses who admitted assisting with the procedures at Steilacoom claimed Farmer was not a recipient (Tate). Farmer acknowledges Ratcliffe's help with the book, though not Kibbee's, and Arnold mentions Kibbee's connection but doesn't quite describe her as a "ghostwriter," again noting that

she “withdrew from the book project” (312-13; 248-49). While I myself tend to find the “religious overtones” in its latter half rather heavy, it is difficult to determine whether they represent Ratcliffe’s voice or merely Farmer as influenced by Ratcliffe (she apparently exerted a tremendous influence in the actress’s later life). But *what* exactly does the phrase “objective events of her life” mean? As Storhoff notes a little later regarding Farmer’s main biographer: “many of the people contacted by Arnold either refused to discuss her or gave distorted, self-serving testimony. Much of the objective, evidence, especially having to do with her treatment at La Crescenta and Western Washington State Hospital, has long since been destroyed, so that often Arnold is forced to proceed by inference and educated guess” (271-72). If no one can provide a sufficient “*objective*” perspective, what is wrong with acknowledging Farmer’s *subjective* one?

Her text, despite its fragmentation, strives finally to be very “pulled together,” to value wholeness and an ultimately unified, if tragic, self. It is somewhat ironic that the elements endemic to this process are those most often used as evidence against Farmer’s authorial voice. But while Farmer’s prose seems to borrow from existing generic formula, it also diverges from the same. On closer examination, her pioneer tale is hardly typical.

And Farmer does not offer it until nearly midway through her book: chapter nine of twenty-two chapters. It comes after she presents the details of her commitment, a rather shocking entrée into the work after the initial brief overview of chapter one. The point in time that Farmer chooses to launch her life story is the “downtime” she experienced between her first commitment to the Washington state mental asylum and her mother’s *re*-commitment of her, within a year, to the same institution. The details of

this institutionalization are broken up by the insertion of flashback chapters on Farmer's career growth and its beginning downward spiral. This middle point seems a significant location for the author's genealogical or "genetic" explanation of her circumstances. In the asylum she has "lost" herself; chapter eight ends, a few paragraphs in, with Farmer commenting, "I was not some wild plant that accidentally sprung up in some planted garden and spoiled it. I was a person. A daughter. An identity. Living. Breathing. Fearing. Retreating. Failing" (140-41). And directly preceding this, she boldly states:

But one does not "go crazy" in a day or two. And one does not end up in an asylum overnight. The road to it is taken a step at a time. And once the mind is locked inside, it takes with it its total heritage and pieces of everyone and everything it has ever known.

Man is built genetically, and there is no deviation, nor is there an escape. Environment may alter but it cannot change the inherited nature. In each, there is a wild, untamed seed that can unexpectedly break through.

I was the result of my parents, and their parents before them, ad infinitum, and my frailties and my defeats, my victories and my conquests were all traceable to that mystic part of my past when I was being formed by those who came before me. (140)

Farmer then acknowledges that she must "begin a quest [. . .] lay the foundation for my recovery [. . .] retrace the lonely, unhappy years I spent as a child [. . .] force the gate to the past even wider" (141). But what follows in chapter nine is not so much a proud pronouncement of identity via one's roots (utilizing the classic pioneer or immigrant tale) as it is Farmer offering up her lineage as a plea for understanding,

attempting to attain a degree of exculpation for her wretched existence. Still, at the same time, something else is at work. By perverting the classic tale, she makes it transparent; the reader sees its “bones,” reads the original as cliché. Farmer demonstrates how such a tale, and the autobiographical format it customarily supports, does not serve the interests of women’s life writing. As Weiss has commented about other female autobiographers, Farmer’s self-expression conveys agency and oppression simultaneously.

Describing her ancestor, Zacheus Van Ornum, Farmer offers the following:

Headstrong beyond reason, giving no quarter and fueled by raw whiskey, he muscled his way through life. Garbed in ragged skins with a great bush of black hair and a wild unkempt beard, he would shout defiance to the heavens and dare God to strike him dead. Then, when nothing drastic happened, he would inflate his chest and shriek his victory over the universe. His favorite word in describing himself was “infidel.”
(142-43)

While reading this, it is hard not to envision—hair color aside—some infamous photographs of Farmer herself (constituting two of the four inset illustrations in her autobiography), taken upon her arrest in 1943 for violating a DUI probation. An appearance of “unkempt defiance” is certainly what manifests most visibly when viewing these images of the (at that time) usually glamorous actress. But almost in explanation of this curious mix of inherited attributes, Farmer goes on to describe in her “genealogy” another ancestor: the wife Zacheus took, Elizabeth Rowe, who “was a strikingly beautiful woman, fair and fine-boned” (143).

It is three pages into chapter nine before Farmer lets the reader know that these relatives were, indeed, her maternal grandparents. And it is just before so doing that she concludes (echoing how she has sketched her mother's personality, already, within the work): "The match was healthy but turbulent, and the frontier soon knew that Zacheus had married a woman who could shout him down and argue him senseless, either vocally or, when necessary, with a skillet to the side of the head" (144). Farmer makes clear, too, that her grandfather is the source of her mother's (and in turn, her) "atheistic beliefs":

Quiet congregations shuddered whenever the Van Ornums appeared en masse, for they knew that the devil and his disciples had arrived.

Zacheus, along with his brood, would sit on the rough-hewed benches in mock but rapt attention, as the nervous circuit preacher tried desperately to ignore the faces of the notorious infidel and his offspring.

Sooner or later Zacheus would leap to the pulpit, throw the helpless man of God to one side, level a cocked pistol at the congregation, and proceed to deliver a sermon of his own Darwinistic choosing, always ending with a defiance of God and the devil. (144)

Yet despite dwelling within an environment of "high tension" and occasional "bloodshed" as Farmer describes it, she finds that her clan "shared a deep family loyalty" (145). In fact, as incredulous as it sounds, she follows the aforementioned passages with the statement, "My mother would recall her father's exploits with adoration and respect" (145).

Finally, after tracing her family's trek from the Midwest to the Northwest, Farmer seems to proffer a physical or geographic "explanation" for her peculiar genetic twist on the American trait of "independence":

They lived in the open until a log cabin could be built, and it was there, on a homestead plot in Chico, California, that my mother was reared. And it was there that my grandparents, at last, became tired of trying to change the world and instead directed their attention to making their children independent enough to 'fearlessly walk the face of the earth.'" (145)

In conclusion, she says of her grandfather, "No longer able to wreak havoc in the territory, he thundered down on his family and produced a headstrong, erratic clan who worshiped him" (145).

At this point that Farmer switches gears and turns to describing her paternal ancestry. It is obvious, from the book's onset, that though her father is depicted as weak (and lacking financial stability; i.e., hardly a patriarch), he is the parent with whom she shared a fondness. On the first page of chapter one, Farmer lets the reader know, "My life never brimmed with pleasant memories, for I was born into a disturbed environment. I was born too late in the lives of my mother and father, always to be the last of a long and bitter series of encounters between them" (11). By the next page, a finger is pointed at one parent in particular in answer to the question, "Who was responsible for the pain?" Farmer writes simply, and sardonically, "There is a Jewish saying, 'God could not be everywhere and therefore He made mothers'" (12). By the start of chapter two (chapter one running slightly over three pages), we witness a full-blown kitchen-table showdown between Frances and "Mamma" (15). Father, in his absence, is vindicated from blame,

apart from his ineffectuality (her parents, though not legally, ultimately separated); chapter two opens: “I was living in my mother’s home in Seattle. . .”(15). Later in the text, Farmer reveals more openly her affection for one parent over the other.

But in chapter nine, the subject of her *father’s* roots is reduced to merely three nondescript paragraphs (compared to the four preceding pages covering the Van Ornums):

During this same period eight sons were born to a state supreme court judge in Spring Valley, Minnesota. One of these sons was my father, Ernest Melvin Farmer.

He grew up in the secure comforts of the conservative well-to-do, and each boy did the expected, becoming either a lawyer or a doctor.

Their household was undemonstrative and quiet, even with eight boys, for Grandfather Farmer’s word was law, and no one ever considered challenging it. My father’s mother, a thin, spindly woman, given to convenient attacks of the vapors, leaned heavily on her husbands and sons, and they, in turn, always fearful for her health, stumbled over each other in their rush to provide her with the most insignificant need.

My father dutifully attended the University of Minnesota, studied hard, and pleased his parents. The routine of his life matched his placid personality.

(146)

And Farmer’s “placid” prose matches the image she creates of her father and his family, in contrast to the rather jarring, extended image capturing her mother’s side. Interestingly, though we read that “Grandfather Farmer’s word was law” within his

household, we find no explanation as to why or how he achieved this (aside from his status as “judge” and our knowledge of middle-class patriarchal culture). This, too, contrasts the author’s depiction of Zacheus Van Ornum: the reader is not left to speculate as to the nature of *his* authority. What *is* inserted in the brief Farmer history, however, is a rather detailed, unflattering account of Grandmother’s behavior, obviously inferring that she was manipulative. The rest of the chapter, for the most part, is devoted to the pairing of Farmer’s parents and their resulting offspring, with the majority of the text focused on “Mamma.” The author closes showing the mother’s influence on Frances the adolescent, followed by a reestablishing scene, via flash-forward, in the asylum.

In establishing her family history, we see that Farmer repeatedly paints unfriendly portraits of the “matriarchal” over the “patriarchal.” Though Grandpa Van Ornum may be viewed as an anarchistic, ungodly tyrant, he is yet *beloved* by his family—Farmer’s detailed description aims to convey this. However, he is her *mother’s* father—a bad link. Conversely, the Farmer patriarchy is more or less glossed over and made uninteresting; we glimpse instead in this terse account—seething below the surface—the story of an apparently neurotic woman exercising great “control” over her family. And in the elaborate saga devoted to her own mother, Farmer presents a character—a force—truly governed by the desire to control. Farmer’s penchant for subtle (and not so subtle) misogynistic characterization finds play elsewhere in her text. And as this work is ultimately an autobiography, such an observation leads the reader to question how, exactly, this affects Farmer’s self-image.

It would seem Farmer employs “male style” in an attempt to deviate from it, while at the same time exhibiting some of the stylistic elements of “female”

autobiography. However, in so doing, she ultimately provides a somewhat misogynistic text: is Farmer in effect saying the “evil roots” of her difficulties lie not solely in her ancestry but in the feminine? One comes to this reading through a rather convoluted process. And yet, it offers a possible explanation for her apparent self-destruction; one based perhaps, in part, on self-hatred. Though the “pioneer” element might be evident in many a masculine tale, Farmer’s also focuses on family, a concern more common among female autobiographers. Ancestral roots are explored as an “explanation” for the author’s issues beyond simply “Mamma,” and yet “Mamma” is where we end up again, full circle. Ultimately, the female is to blame.

Turning the lens to Farmer herself, her Hollywood career success was rooted in large part on her culturally-lauded photogenic qualities as a woman, a sexual object, probably more so than other obvious talents. And her text reveals another element found in many female-authored autobiographies: a focus on the body and its constituent parts. It is in the fragmented presentation that constitutes the bulk of the work that we see Farmer’s concern with her “image” and “body”—a concern she shares with Brooks—in full force. This plays out in two ways: Farmer’s beauty is equated with her success at “being female,” at least superficially. Yet the physical in terms of female reproduction is also touched on—or rather, its lack. Farmer bore no children, which apparently caused her some distress: she speaks in later life of her “guilt” over her “Hollywood abortions” (306).

But in Farmer’s book, we see also a degradation of the physical, primarily via description of patient treatment at Steilacoom that focuses on herself (and mostly other women). The climax of this institutional abuse Farmer endured comes after the reader

has learned, through flashback, of her natural beauty, not to mention its “enhancement” by the entertainment industry. And there is another aspect of body-centered female imagery presented here: a metaphorical birthing takes place in the midst of the physical abuse. A standard metaphor for birth—water—is used to signal Farmer’s transition within the asylum; the shift that takes place within her leading to her release. The “birth” induced is her own, not that of another life. . . or is it another life in that it is not the “real” Frances Farmer? Or is this new entity simply “another” Frances Farmer? The hydrotherapy ice-bath treatments she endures are base, bodily torture, as opposed to water as a soothing, facilitating medium for the renewal or birthing process. What kind of a shift does she experience? Is she “renewed?” Or is she “acting” her re-birth via this perversion of the healing waters motif?

Within her autobiography, Farmer speaks of her ability to be something else—an ability that asserts itself most noticeably in her acting—but she suggests that it has deeper implications:

As an actress I had always been able to submerge myself in a role so that a part of me actually became the character. Another part of me was able to stand in the wings, so to speak, and observe the performance.

I first became aware of this while rehearsing for a college play. My role was extremely demanding for an inexperienced actress, and I had a great deal of difficulty separating my own personality from that of the character. During this period I began to sense a mysterious dual faculty within me. The prospect of this schizoid condition was fascinating, but it also left me uneasy and frightened.

(24-25)

The “new” Frances Farmer (whoever she is), the one “born” of “the treatment,” is noticeably more docile, to the point of numbness.

Physical degradation crops up early in the text; immediately, in fact, after Farmer’s commitment in chapter three, or to be accurate, upon her “capture” at the end of chapter two: “They each grabbed a leg, jerked off my shoes and clamped heavy leather manacles around my ankles, trussing me up like a pig on the slaughter line. A thick roll of gauze, stuffed in my mouth, silenced me, and I thought I would vomit from the gag” (32). Once inside Steilacoom, Farmer’s description becomes even more vivid. When other “inmates” are mentioned, it often seems to serve (at least in part) as a reflection of the author’s own state:

His face had a weird, wild cast, but it made me aware of how I must have looked. My hair was wet and soured from perspiration, and it hung in limp strings. Blood and vomit soiled my face and clothes. My nose was swelling and full of blood, and I felt it dripping down into my mouth. Until then I had not realized that I was drenched in my own urine.

In the struggle of strapping me to the chair, my dress had been pulled up, and with my ankles tied to the two front legs of the chair, I sat spraddled and exposed. When I realized he was trying to see up my dress, I clamped my knees together.

“You rotten freak,” I snarled. “When I get out of here, I’ll poke your goddamned eyes out.” (38)

The paragraph directly preceding this consists of dialogue attributed to the gawker: “This is a bad day. It’s bad of them to treat pretty women like this. I’d never

treat pretty women like this. I like pretty women” (38). Evident in this scenario, then, is not only a repellant physical description but also the suggestion of its opposite: beauty. (The word “pretty” is repeated three times.) The focus of these two extremes is one and the same: Farmer herself.

Farmer’s hydrotherapy treatments begin in chapter ten, after she has elaborated her family history. She describes how she was led, exhibiting “no resistance” (having found overtly fighting her commitment ineffectual or worse), hands and feet manacled, into a special ward:

The ward bristled with attendants. This was the area of shock. Electric shock. Insulin shock. Hydrotherapy. Experimental medication. Women who had not been able to adjust were brought here for treatment. And I was petrified. (167)

As with some previous descriptions, Farmer first focuses on other patients before she turns the lens on herself, resulting in a sort of reflective foreshadowing:

A cart being wheeled down the aisle carried a black girl, lifeless except for great beads of sweat that hung on her face like a heavy dew. Her tongue twisted out of her mouth, and her throat muscles jerked as though she had gagged on something. Two attendants flopped her on a cot, and as the sheet was pulled off, she lay in a twisted, naked heap, unaware that urine was pouring from her body. (168)

In addition to this graphic depiction, Farmer writes of how other women lay still trapped in tubs with “canvas sheets stretched tightly over,” wearing “bathing caps” that “made

their heads look like skulls” (168). After acknowledging death’s presence—or near presence—in the room, the author launches into her own experience:

Before I could organize myself, the trustee had taken down three canvas straps from a hook on the wall and had looped one around my chest, pinning my arms against my sides until my breath was cut short. The second was buckled around my thighs, and the third around my ankles.

She left the room as I tottered to keep my balance. I tried to hop after her but tumbled headlong. My chin cracked against the floor and I felt a sharp pain as my teeth sliced my lower lip. I lay there screaming, flopping, trying to maneuver myself into a sitting position, but, tied as I was, I was unable to do little more than rock back and forth on my stomach.

The trustee returned with a student nurse and another attendant, who pulled me to me to my feet and stood behind me while the nurse checked my bindings, easing the one around my chest. I was still screaming and gabbling, spitting blood from my mouth, but the wound was ignored. They picked me up, one by the ankles, the other by the shoulders and dropped me into the empty tub, bruising my spine.

They pulled the heavy canvas sheet up to my neck, and while one tightened the neck drawstring, the other took a long dirty rope and looped it under the lip of the tub, gathering the canvas into the lasso. She tugged and pulled while the other one stretched the sheet across the tub. The rope was wound around and around until it made a tight band that kept the canvas secure.

The first crash of icy water hit my ankles and slipped rapidly up my legs. I began to shake from the shock of it, screaming and thrashing my body under the sheet, but the more I struggled, the more I realized that I was helplessly restricted in a frozen hell.

I began to gnaw on my lip, flinching from the pain of my teeth digging into the wound but praying that it would take my mind off the freezing water that burned my body like acid. (169)

In the instances of Farmer and the other patients she observes, we see “assaults” both on the *bodies* and *heads/faces* of women. In addition to the scenes just described, this plethora of violations includes frottage, manhandling, and rape, inflicted upon female inmates by various parties: orderlies, trustees (the “better” patients deputized as attendants), and even men brought in from the outside (bearing cash for “pimping” staff) expressly for that purpose (42-43, 91, 104-05, 126-29). And Farmer makes frequent reference to injuries above the neck: “One of the attendants slapped me hard across the face and my nose started to bleed again”; “she stood up and with one hand clamped her fingers around my chin in a steel grip and pinched my jaws until my mouth was held open involuntarily”; “she grabbed my hair and yanked me to my feet” (42, 77). In the same venue, Farmer depicts violation *as violation*, as well as violation *as therapy* (electroshock, hydrotherapy, degrading physical examinations and living conditions)—all the more disturbing given that the venue is a “hospital.”

One recalls how the ancient Romans “would apply substances and objects to the woman’s body that were meant to push the womb back to where it was allegedly meant to be. These practices were brutal and caused great suffering for women” (Holloway

119). It is not a far leap to interpret many of the “treatments” described in female “narratives of madness”—including those examined by Hornstein and Geller/Harris, as well as the personal events described by Frances Farmer—as an extension of such “therapy”: e.g., electroshock, insulin shock, lobotomy. In these twentieth-century instances, it would seem “the mind” had literally replaced “the womb.”

After being in hydro ten hours (due to an apparent oversight), the author describes the experience of a rubdown: “Hands, from far off, hardly seemed to touch me, but then inch by inch they moved closer until my flesh became sensitized. I heard a deep groan roll from my throat and I tried to speak” (171). Then follow brief moments of slightly caring attention, as when she notes, “I was laid on a cot and a blanket pulled under my chin. A foreign hand soothed the hair out of my face and rested briefly on my forehead, then went away” (171).

This attempt at comfort, in preparing Farmer for bed, is a gesture one might ordinarily associate with the “maternal.” However, here it is proffered by “a foreign hand”; the humane gesture is unexpected and unusual. One recalls Farmer’s statement about her mother made near the end of chapter nine, as the author shifts away from the story of roots and back into the asylum: “Many times as a child, and even as a young adult, I would slip into her room and touch her hairbrush or nuzzle my face into a dress hung in her closet, simply to be near her. But these unrewarding substitutes took a toll” (165). Again, significance with regard to the female is placed on the physical: her mother’s “hair”; her mother’s *person*. Farmer blatantly expresses that a physical female (i.e., maternal) presence in her life—one that is *authentic*—was sorely lacking.

The gratuitous presentation of many of these “asylum” scenarios (some centered on Farmer and some not) might be interpreted as a sort of soft-core sado-masochistic pulp—exploitation literature—that is ostensibly meant to shock (i.e., enrage) its fascinated audience, all the while providing a substantial amount of titillation. But it is hard to imagine Farmer herself, if her mind did indeed remain somewhat sound, presenting her life story in that guise. Such a reading does lend itself to “ghostwriter” speculation. However, whether the text is intended as deliberate sensationalism or not, one cannot ignore its other elements.

Farmer’s own acknowledged motivations for writing her life story are scattered throughout the book. Two-thirds of the way through she states:

I write with the passionate plea that lawmakers pause in their deliberations to remember the more than one-half-million souls currently committed to state or county mental institutions, and the other half-million confined to homes for the mentally retarded. I ask for extreme efforts and charitable assistance for the millions who exist as outpatients, neither sane nor insane.

Never console yourself into believing that the terror has passed, for it looms as large and evil today as it did in the despicable era of Bedlam. (215-16)

After giving some very specific examples of “patient care,” she urges the reader:

Go to any state or county, and look into the ancient buildings or behind the modern facades. Search through the long dim corridors and peek into the grieved souls of the patients. . . and then say to yourself, if you can, “Things are getting better.” Indeed, in comparison to our times, they regress, and the terror of insanity still screams into unresponsive ears. And so, as I recall the five years

that I spent locked in the violent ward of a state asylum, I do so with the knowledge that the same force of evil still lives in so-called hospitals.

My story is not unique. (217)

Farmer sets herself up as advocate for institutional reform as well as a figure who has undergone—if not a universal experience—a shared one. She is a member of a minority group, an “underclass” of the so-called mentally ill.

In the next chapter, she details the absurd circumstances surrounding her release—and the warped mechanisms by which “lapses” in mental health are ascertained and “corrected”:

Papa arrived on the twenty-fifth to take me home. For five years I had survived every conceivable torture and had been considered too dangerous to be allowed at large. Now, suddenly, not only was I sufficiently cured to warrant a parole, but also I was considered capable of accepting the responsibility of caring for the two people who had been singularly responsible for my commitment.

I was insane one day and competent the next, and now, whenever I reread my hospital records or study the court charges brought against me by my parents, I find that I can forgive their actions, but I cannot forget. (226)

And Farmer elaborates:

So the question that badgers me to this day is that if my family really believed that I was insane and had kept me all those years in an asylum, why would they risk bringing me out, ever? To be released from a mental institution after so long a confinement is practically unheard of. Yet the facts, in my situation are undisputable. A simple letter from my father asking for it freed me.

The question then arises: What was I doing there in the first place? It is distasteful for any one to believe that the innocent suffer. Society insists that only the guilty are punished. But is that always the case?

The law reads that any “interested person” may initiate a petition to the courts for competency, and it is a fine legal distinction to judge whether an individual is eccentric or insane. None is safe from this danger despite constitutional protection. A neighbor, an employer, a husband, or even an angered stranger can petition the courts against any individual, and by law, a competency hearing results. (227-28)

With this turn in discussion, Farmer makes a “universal” appeal: “None is safe from this danger. . .” One might argue, given history’s example, that “none” could be expressed more appropriately—and more often—as “no *woman*. . .” Note that as an adult female in a patriarchal culture, Farmer is released at the request and ostensibly handed into the custody of her *father*, in order for *her* to become *caregiver* to two aging parents.

Near her book’s end, she offers advice on rebuilding one’s life after such trauma and accepting “true” help: “I hope to relate in accurate detail the step-by-step progress we made, for by so doing there might be others who could benefit from our efforts. I use ‘our’ and ‘we,’ for it was not a solo trip, and I could never have done it alone, nor can anyone” (299). The “our” and “we” refer to her friendship with Jean Ratcliffe, and through not only her advice but her phrasing, Farmer again paints her “story” as a far from isolated one.

Considering female relationships, Farmer’s feelings about lesbianism/bisexuality are expressed ambivalently in her work. She mentions associating with many such

“types” in acting school and (in apparent conjunction) speaks of Method actors (herself included) doing what was “necessary” for a role (51-52).

Yet Farmer’s depiction of a “lesbian rape” in the institution is horrific and does not merely border on the pornographic but is the type of sensational description that might be found in anti-gay propaganda (126-29). In her later life, others speculated that Farmer’s “friendship” with Ratcliffe (her book’s sometimes-alleged “real” author) was in actuality one of sexual love (270). The book itself offers only vehement denial of such allegations. Farmer is presented primarily as a (rather unfortunate) heterosexual serial monogamist (the highlighted affair with Odets constituting a “great love”) who dies “alone.” However, as previously noted, sexual identity is not the only aspect of Farmer’s personality her book presents ambivalently. The reader learns of her association with communism—and yet Farmer claims to have no real ties with it (62).

As for religion, she vacillates between being a “believer” and “nonbeliever” (her institutionalization prompting a spiritual shift). In later life Farmer, who as a teenager won a national essay contest proclaiming “God Dies” (160), converted to Catholicism. The book itself is infused with textual and photographic documentation juxtaposing the Hollywood starlet and stage Method actress, glamour shots and mug shots. At her autobiography’s conclusion, Farmer comes off as having been at one and the same time a willful intellectual/activist and sexual object.

But more accurately, Farmer’s final “self” seems almost a victim of psychic if not physical “female circumcision.” She overtly favors the patriarchal over the matriarchal, constructs a strong matriarchal image only to denigrate it. However, she also constructs an image of woman as sexualized object, herself as the superficially “perfect” female, in

order, it would seem, to denigrate *that*. Farmer seems to be saying that being either agent or object is problematic. Both empowerment and oppression are evident in Farmer's portrayal of the feminine, and *both* are problematic. Being *female* is problematic. How much more problematic, then, is Farmer's cultural status as a "willful," "beautiful" female?

Just a few short years following her death and the publication of *Will There Really Be a Morning?* (for which her "supposed" lesbian lover, Jeanira Ratcliffe, has been repeatedly charged with the crime of ghostwriting), journalist William Arnold published Farmer's "true story" in his book *Shadowland*. Much of the 1982 feature film *Frances* is based upon that book. Interestingly, Arnold, turned character, appears to work his way into the film *Frances* itself. Though the two never met (the worshipful Arnold is the product of a later generation), the screenplay transforms him into Farmer's journalist "friend," who brackets the film in a form of commentary; seemingly the only character who *truly*, and *personally*, understands her. Indeed, at the end, he knows Farmer better than she knows herself, as she is portrayed as the zombified victim of a transorbital lobotomy. Ironically, Arnold himself charged that the character was one of fiction and sued the movie's producers post-release, as another shady individual had stepped forward (with their backing) claiming to be this "friend" (Hammer). Whether or not Frances Farmer was actually "secretly" subjected to this operation, it is not mentioned in *Will There Really Be a Morning?*. Whether Arnold's revision is based on a professed empathy is beside the point; what we are left with is a male authority "improving" on a female's life writing.

Louise Brooks and *Lulu in Hollywood*

Both Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks landed major Hollywood contracts early in their careers, though their true interests and fame (or infamy) lay elsewhere. This predicament appears to have left both women, despite their success, ultimately marginalized personally and professionally, at least on their home turf. Marginalization, in any case, is a significant theme in each of their stories. And each text adopts a “confessional” tone in service of this theme. Frances Farmer, as previously described, goes into almost embarrassingly minute detail revealing personal aspects about herself and her life experiences. Her self-revelation is complicated, however, by charges that her book (at least the portions that seem the most “dramatically” personal) was penned in large part by someone other than herself. In Brooks’s case, though she seems to *promise* confession (she certainly speaks openly about those with whom she rubbed elbows—the proverbial “fly on the wall”), she is admittedly quite mute about herself, at least with reference to intimate details. All of this tends to leave the reader/researcher wondering (even apart from questions of “authenticity”) just how “confessional” the confessional genre actually is.

In relating her early Hollywood days (adopting a somewhat gossipy tone), Louise Brooks digs more overtly into the character of director William Wellman than herself, or so it seems on the surface. Unknown to most audiences today, Wellman was director of the first Oscar-winning motion picture, *Wings*. Devoting a chapter to him, or rather, her working relationship with him on the film *Beggars of Life*, Brooks writes, “So fascinated was I by a quiet sadism practiced by Billy behind the camera, especially in his direction of women, that I began to investigate his past life. From him I learned nothing, because

he was extremely shy in conversations with women. A slim, handsome young man, he resembled an actor who was uncertain in his part more than he did a director. It was from Richard Arlen, who had recently worked many months with Billy on *Wings*, that I obtained Billy's history" (25). Brooks experienced demonstrations of this "quiet sadism" on the set, as when Wellman required her to "hop a fast-moving boxcar, which nearly sucked me under its wheels" (25).

But while Brooks appears to shift the focus of her so-called autobiography to examining the underside of others, she does not totally avoid self-analysis. In fact, she opens this, her second chapter, speaking of herself. She notes how accepting a motion picture contract forever divorced her from her "dream of becoming a great dancer" (20). And in discussing her dilemma over choosing a film company to sign with (she had *two* offers), Brooks describes the reaction of a powerful friend in whom she chose to confide:

He had taken me under his protection after meeting me while I was a specialty dancer in the *Ziegfeld Follies* and after discovering that my blasé insolence was a masquerade. It amused him to find that the decadent black-and-white Aubrey Beardsley makeup covered a sprinkling of Kansas freckles. It aroused his sympathy to learn that my bold décolletage of glittering white sequins was actually an attempt to conceal my childish insecurity. If, at this crucial moment in my career, Wanger had given me some faith in my screen personality and my acting ability, he might have saved me from the predators who prowled Broadway and Hollywood. Instead, failing to understand that I put no value on my beauty and sexual attractiveness and could not use them as a means to success, he advised me as if my career depended on nothing else. (20)

Although she is describing *another's* reaction, Brooks is also revealing what she sees as her true self. And she further develops this image of the naïve girl masquerading as the glamorous woman during this meeting: “I can still feel the pride I took in my new black velvet suit and emerald cuff links, still smell the russet chrysanthemums in their crystal vase on the table, still see the glowing reds and purples of the fruit compote set in a silver bowl of ice. The compote I never tasted” (20). Brooks’s naïveté seems to be grounded not in sexual ignorance/innocence, but in her self-professed lack of ability/interest in using her sexuality “profitably”—at least in instances where profit precluded her intrinsic enjoyment of the sexual experience. This distaste for crass bartering expresses itself in other terms, as well:

Billy Wellman came to the unfortunate conclusion that since I did not follow the pattern of the actors who haunted the studio panting after film roles, I did not care about making films at all. Because he did not know that sycophancy had no merit in the New York studio where I had begun my career, and because I was unaware that prudent Hollywood actors wooed producers, directors, and writers with flattering attention, a coldness was set up between us which neither of us could dispel. Nor did hard work on my part and a willingness to do dangerous stunts under his direction alter Billy’s conclusion. (21)

And despite filmdom’s lauding her as a great beauty, Brooks seems quite aware that this label is relative. Working with Wellman, she notes how she was subjected to her first screen test because the scenarist “thought my forehead was ‘too high’ to photograph well without my bangs, which were unsuitable for one aspect of my role—my disguise as a boy” (22). She comments on how actresses were expected to shed “tears without facial

contortions! Luckily, I had acquired this art from my mother, whose soft hazel eyes could overflow at any suggestion of sadness, from the smell of burning beans to a Wagner *Leitmotiv*" (22). And when she fails to be moved by co-star Arlen's account of Wellman's "illustrious" past, Brooks notes how the half-drunken actor fired back, "You—why, you can't even act! You're not even good-looking. You're a lousy actress and your eyes are too close together" (27).

Though one imagines her legendary sexual exploits to be prolific, Brooks mentions just a single liaison that occurred during the location shooting for *Beggars of Life*. It involved her only sometimes-employed (as previously noted) stunt-double, Harvey. She had admired his diving ability at their hotel pool, when he upstaged the ostentatious Richard Arlen: "Harvey climbed to the top of the thirty-foot tower and began a series of dives that retired Dick to our bench and left me enchanted. The vulgar face and mind I knew him to possess formed no part of this Harvey, executing aerial turns and twists comparable in grace to that of some capricious bird in flight" (27). After he had spent the day replacing her in a particularly harrowing scene, Brooks confesses making the following discreet overture: "At one o'clock, come round to my bedroom window. I'll open the screen and let you in" (30).

Though she does not divulge the details of their intimacy, Brooks is hardly at a loss for words to describe its aftermath; the next morning, in a successful effort at public humiliation, Harvey delivered a soliloquy before his fellow stand-ins:

"Just a minute, Miss Brooks," Harvey said in a loud voice as he rose from the porch rail and sauntered over to me. "I've got something to ask you." Holding the door shut with one hand while his other hand held my arm, he said, "I guess

you know my job depends on my health.” Naming a high film executive whom I had never met, he went on, “Everybody knows you’re his girl and he has syphilis, and what I want to know is, Do you have syphilis?” Following an impressive moment of silence, he ended by saying, “Another reason I want to know is that my girl is coming up at noon to drive me back to Hollywood.” (30)

After hurriedly exiting the stage, Brooks later returned to observe Harvey with “his girl,” who addressed her with only a “stare” and “giggle” (30). When Wellman appeared on the scene, Brooks notes, “it was obvious that Billy had heard every detail of our sordid affair—from the entrance through my bedroom window to the denouement on the hotel porch. He could not resist a small leer in my direction. How the grand Louise Brooks had fallen! It was a sequence he could have directed with relish” (30).

As Brooks here reveals, her “famed” overt sexuality—somewhat admired by latter-day fans for its brashness and boldness—was a rather complex phenomenon. Yes, as a pre-code sex goddess, Brooks was supposed to be *desirable*—which does not preclude being sexually active; quite the contrary. But as the actress/author continues to reveal in her autobiography, being *desirable* and *expressing desire* are hardly the same thing.

As she delves into her next chapter and the “secrets” of an even more obscure figure, Pepi Lederer, one may read Brooks’s focus as the exploration of an alter ego of sorts. Pepi Lederer was Brooks’s friend, and niece to actress Marion Davies, William Randolph Hearst’s paramour. The tale Brooks weaves around Lederer is a tragic one; the tale of one who acted as a “satellite.” This role emulates how Brooks herself, via *Lulu in*

Hollywood, skirts the edges and peers into the lives of those more famous. (Lederer's chapter itself is entitled "Marion Davies' Niece.")

Pepi Lederer was looked upon, in Brooks's words, by the "subhumanity of Hollywood" as "nothing more than a sign pointing the way to Marion's beach house in Santa Monica; to Wynton, Mr. Hearst's estate in northern California; to San Simeon, his castle overlooking the Pacific Ocean, halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco; and to St. Donat's, his castle in Wales" (34). She hardly fit the same mold as Brooks. Though she "had a beautiful face and fine bone structure," Brooks found her to be also a slave to "gluttony, which, made her fat and sexually unattractive," not to mention the fact that Lederer was an alcoholic and cocaine addict (34). Certainly the last two vices were no oddity within the circles Lederer found herself, but her excesses appear to have been self-destructive, leading to her suicide at age 25.

She was also a lesbian, something Brooks comments on repeatedly throughout the chapter, though not to castigate Lederer. In her autobiography, Brooks somewhat evades the question of bisexuality regarding herself, though she adamantly proclaims, both in her writings and interviews, that she is not a lesbian. She describes a 1964 encounter with a young Frenchman who, reciting why the youth of his day were so entranced with her image, somewhat caught the actress off guard and prompted the response: "You talk as if I were a lesbian in real life" (99). His affirmative answer, says Brooks, "made me laugh to realize I had been living in cinematic perversion for thirty-five years" (99). In Kenneth Tynan's introduction to the updated text, Brooks shares how a chorus girl roommate of hers had "seduced more *Follies* girls than Ziegfeld and William Randolph Hearst combined. That's how I got the reputation of being a lesbian. I had nothing against it in

principle, and for years I thought it was fun to encourage the idea”; however, she adds to this a postscript: “But I only loved men’s bodies” (xxxviii).

Regarding Lederer’s lifestyle, Brooks primarily criticizes her choice of lovers: “she had found a lovely companion, Monica Morris, who had come to share her flat, her generous allowance, and Marion’s charge accounts”; “I had not trusted Pepi’s taste in girlfriends since she took up with a scruffy little blond blues singer in 1929” (35). Yet Brooks finds Lederer’s brazen attitude in pursuing her sexuality apparently refreshing; she relates a story involving Pepi’s occupying Marion’s Beverly Hills home in her aunt’s absence. Apparently Marion’s sisters Ethel and Rose had been commissioned to check on the residence regularly. After Pepi had been entertaining the “all-Negro cast” of the film *Hallelujah* for three days running at the estate, a frantic neighbor reported “black people running in and out of the mansion,” prompting Ethel to investigate (47). As Lederer put it to Brooks: “I shall never forget the expression on Ethel’s face when she opened my door and saw me in bed with Nina May” (47).

Brooks likewise scoffs at the discomfort actress Alice Roberts felt playing the role of a lesbian in *Pandora’s Box*. Pulling off the performance supposedly involved director Pabst cajoling and “making love to her off camera” as a stand-in for Brooks, with whom Robert’s character was supposed to be infatuated (99). Brooks seems perturbed, generally, by a less-than-liberated sense of sexuality—whether it entails censoring one’s own or others’ behavior. Yet her attitude regarding her own, as revealed in her autobiography and the expanded edition’s introduction, at times appears contradictory. As Kenneth Tynan points out, though she professed an aversion to “tell all” books, she could be quite glib in conversation: “And Brooks ran on in this vein, discussing her sex

life openly and jauntily, unbuckling one more notch of the Bible Belt with every sentence she uttered” (xxxv). Brooks draws some rather dicey distinctions; e.g., the difference between a “call girl” and kept woman.” She tells Tynan, “I was too proud to be a call girl” (xxxv). However, regarding the other appellation:

“Between 1948 and 1953, I suppose you could call me a kept woman,” she said.

“Three decent rich men looked after me. But then I was *always* a kept woman. Even when I was making a thousand dollars a week, I would always be paid for by George Marshall or someone like that. But I never had anything to show for it—no cash, trinkets, nothing. I didn’t even *like* jewelry—can you imagine?

Pabst once called me a born whore, but if he was right I was a failure, with no pile of money and no comfortable mansion. I wasn’t equipped to spoil millionaires in a practical, farsighted way. I could live in the present, but otherwise everything has always been a hundred percent wrong about me. Anyway, the three decent men took care of me. One of them owned a sheet-metal manufacturing company, and the result of that affair is that I am now the owner of the only handmade aluminum wastebasket in the world. He designed it, and it’s in my living room, my solitary trophy [. . .].” (xxxiv)

Yet viewed one way, this fits in with her idea of *desire* being at least as crucial as *desirability*. Her morality certainly wouldn’t stand the test of even the most liberal “Bible-Belters”: Brooks had no qualms about adulterous relationships—whether they entailed her sleeping with a married man or sleeping with another man while married (e.g., her “one night” with Pabst). And monogamy was not her style. Perversely, at one point she opted to “use” a branch of Christianity other than her native Protestantism (by

converting to Catholicism), in an attempt to avoid the “problem” of marriage altogether (xxxv). By professing to be a Catholic, she reasoned she could successfully maintain her preferred state of “mistress” and ward off suitors’ proposals, claiming a previous matrimonial bond to be still valid in the eyes of the Church (somewhat of a doctrinal misinterpretation, given she was not married by a priest). Brooks’s “conversion,” unlike Farmer’s, however, did not stick.

Perhaps one of the most telling formative experiences constructing her sexual identity would be her sexual abuse at a young age, revealed only in Tynan’s introduction to the autobiography, not Brooks’s text. Brooks herself acknowledges its impact. Regarding what she had “blacked out” mentally for nearly forty years, Brooks states:

“When I was nine years old, Mr. Feathers molested me sexually. Which forged another link between me and Lulu: when *she* had *her* first lover, she was very young, and Schigolch, the man in question, was middle-aged. I’ve often wondered what effect Mr. Feathers had on my life. He must have had a great deal to do with forming my attitude toward sexual pleasure. For me, nice, soft easy men were never enough—there had to be an element of domination—and I’m sure that’s all tied up with Mr. Feathers [. . .].” (xxxv)

Brooks claims to have attempted full disclosure in an early memoir attempt, entitled *Naked on My Goat*, taken from Goethe’s *Faust* (xxxiii). However, she ultimately scrapped the notion, which included burning her transcription of the same (xxxiii). Her biggest dichotomy (and fuel for those who claim she “wrote” little and “told” more) would seem to lie in the fact that she *does indeed* name names, but as *interviewee*, not as autobiographer/memoirist. Brooks seems to regard her obstinacy—or reluctance to

reveal all, at least on paper—as an act of defiance, perhaps her ultimate act of defiance. She seems aware that others (and she follows suit) judged her manner of living as quite “open.” Perhaps before the end of her life she decided it was time to “close the book.” Other observers have further projected onto Brooks this point of view.

But is there a conflict between orality and “the word,” i.e., the *written* word, in the presentation of *Lulu in Hollywood* itself? Is this suggestive of the minority female voice sifting through a predominantly male structure? Does Brooks ultimately “tell all”—or attempt to—in spite of herself? And ironically, does she do so only posthumously, via the efforts of male-dominated editing in the twenty-first century? (This is assumed, given Tynan’s introduction, previously published as a 1979 article, and the University of Minnesota Press acknowledgement of Thomas Gladysz’s—director of the Louise Brooks Society—“assistance” with the 2000 edition.) Interestingly, the expanded text’s only other addition, Brooks’s own “Why I Will Never Write My Memoirs,” was originally published in 1978, one year before Tynan’s interview/article in which Brooks “speaks” some of her more hidden truths.

Even though Brooks’s “autobiography” exists mainly as a compilation of previously penned pieces attributed to Brooks herself, written for various authoritative film journals, she remains not without the detractors alluded to previously. In a review of Barry Paris’s biography David Thomson writes, “Brooks’s writings are a focus for lively debate. They leave no doubt that she perched, like an owl, or a bird of prey, above the movie crowd. She works so hard to sound shrewd and superior, the style is uncomfortable in more than short pieces. I still find it easier to believe that a proud, struggling [sic], and alcoholic Brooks gave up on attempts at a book rather than achieved

pieces of writing, let alone a coherent account of her collapsed life”; “Paris had access to the family and to Brooks’s journals (which are terse enough to suggest she practiced writing more in her head than on the page).” However, Brooks’s work, including the 1982 first edition of *Lulu in Hollywood*, was published within her lifetime, unlike Frances Farmer’s *Will There Really Be a Morning?*. Yet as already noted, the posthumous re-vamping of Brooks’s text gives it a slightly different flavor.

Regarding theme, just as Farmer’s narrative centers on culturally-defined definitions of “deviant” female psychology, Brooks’s centers on such definitions of “deviant” female *sexuality*. Read this way, one sees Brooks’s “hypersexuality” being culturally labeled in her own time—by herself and others—as “aberrant.” A groundwork for such a reading is provided by two previous studies (noted earlier), Roberta Kyle’s “Textured Lives: Women’s Autobiography/Personal Narrative as a Tool for Understanding Cultural Identity” and Amy Weiss’s “Autobiographies of Women’s Madness: Evidence of Both Agency and Silence.” Farmer’s and Brooks’s life writings might be termed expressions of cultural self-identification. As Kyle notes (studying life writings by other women), “the genre of autobiography has only recently been accepted as a legitimate area of study within the last twenty-five years of the Twentieth Century”; such narratives may be recognized “as dialogues that mediate between self and the world” (1). Her thesis endeavors to “understand the connection between the writing produced and the ways in which these women self-identify culturally” (1). Further, Brooks’s and Farmer’s narratives paradoxically present themselves as at once both “silenced” and “empowered.” Weiss (studying Farmer and others) contends that such narratives do not necessarily need to be read in “polarized” terms; i.e., either as

“empowering” or “silencing” (iv). Rather, she finds that both aspects may present simultaneously. In Brooks’s case, this manifests in part in the tone of her work, which might be labeled as simultaneously “reticent” yet “defiant.” As Kyle asserts, not only “what these women remember” is of importance, but also “how they remember” (2).

The “autobiography” of Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood*, appears in many ways not to resemble the average concept of an “autobiography” at all (if one accepts more traditional definitions). It is not a cohesive, flowing recollection but rather a pieced-together pastiche of the previously published articles. The author is not at the center of the work but on the sidelines, placing others in the limelight with herself as observer. Her notion of self, however, brackets the text: the opening chapter describes her roots; the closing, her existence out of the mainstream. When she does turn the focus of her writing upon her own life, Brooks as subject becomes object, with great attention paid to woman as “image”—to her face, her body. In other words, in a number of ways, Brooks’s autobiography exhibits many of the characteristics certain scholars have ascribed to works representing a certain female “otherness.”

Her chapter titles, for the most part, show a focus on famous celebrities, not herself: “Marion Davies’ Niece,” “Humphrey and Bogey,” “The Other Face of W. C. Fields,” “Gish and Garbo.” On the other hand, Brooks includes numerous textual references to her physicality, though they are not always positive: “she took me to the smart hairdressing shop of Saveli, where Saveli himself attended to my hair. He shortened my bangs to a line above my eyebrows, shaped the sides in points at my cheekbones, and shingled the back of my head”; and the response of her glamorous companion, Barbara Bennett: “As a mat-tra-fact, Pie Face,” she said, “you are beginning

to look almost human” (14). Yet despite Brooks’s noting that she possessed a “short, dancer’s body,” she tells the tale of how in a “fashionable store”: “I met an exuberant Italian woman, who, because I had small, firm breasts, slashed my evening gowns almost to the navel. My back she left bare. Sitting at a restaurant or nightclub table, I was a nearly naked sight to behold” (16). From a non-textual point of view, no one can deny that Brook’s book is image-heavy—with her own image: photographs of Brooks within the work total 59.

Yet Brooks’s approach may be said to lack a peculiar “female” angle in her consistently backing away from the personal, the private—in terms of her own life. Instead, her autobiography revolves around her “career” (or her lack/decline of the same). She does offer a measure of personal self-assessment; and she is rather candid in admitting—via writing at the end of her life—how her own “mystique,” in a sense, has mystified her. Brooks notes her surprise at others’ conceptions of her, as when the young fan “made me laugh to realize I had been living in cinematic perversion for thirty-five years” (99) and when Pabst told her, “Your life is exactly like Lulu’s”; “and you will end the same way” (105). It is only later—years later—that she transforms such opinion, to a degree, into “truth.” Brooks does not leave the reader with the sense of an autobiographer who has completely, and independently, “grasped the meaning” of the life lived. In this regard, her style might be said to be less than “masculine.”

Lulu in Hollywood is an interesting work, even if how much of it is actually autobiography is open to question. The compilation of essays comes from journals such as *Sight and Sound*, in which she describes herself in part but also focuses on several major/not so major figures (directors, players) in the film industry, primarily in America.

Though she paints her portraits of various celebrities in terms of her connection to them, it is in the opening and ending chapters that the reader is actually allowed to look with some detail at Brooks herself. The manner in which the chapters are arranged and titled seem part of this “construction.”

The book’s title, *Lulu in Hollywood*, is taken from the name of the character for which she is most famous, the “Lulu” of G. W. Pabst’s German silent film, *Die Buchse der Pandora*, or in the title’s English translation, *Pandora’s Box*. The film’s story, in turn, was taken from two plays by Wedekind about Lulu, a character who “uses up and destroys the men that love her until she meets an even more destructive sexual monster than herself, Jack the Ripper” (Wakeman 861). Obviously this film was not made in Hollywood, or even in the East Coast silent film industry that existed prior to Brooks’s (and motion pictures’) move to Hollywood. Louise Brooks traveled to Europe making just two silent films in Berlin and one sound picture in Paris after appearing in more than a dozen American movies. Yet this small body of work—three European films in all—is that for which Brooks is most remembered. The actress was something of an outcast in the Hollywood system, one of a handful of actresses who in one way or another found themselves at first highly lauded then alienated by the industry (Farmer falling into this group), their careers tending to form a similar arc. Brooks returned to the United States after her brief European venture, but like some others, she found work of lesser stature, in productions of lesser quality, than she had previously experienced. She made her last film at age 32.

Despite her continental success, Brooks was born—and died—an American. Her book’s title and arrangement, however, seem to speak to her marginalized status in her

country of citizenship, within her chosen career field. In the closing chapter the reader travels abroad with Brooks the expatriate (it is entitled “Pabst and Lulu”). The opening chapter, “Kansas to New York” (or more specifically, the opening paragraph), in a sense is structured as many an opening to an American “pioneer tale.” Here we find another similarity to Farmer. Brooks, like Farmer, gives a twist to the formula. This introduction appears a commentary not just on her roots but the roots of a nation, as well. The nation is hers, yet one could say she looks at it “from the outside.” Her writing seems a predated example of what would later become more common in the re-writing and de-mythologizing of the classic American “history text”:

The Brooks family were poor English farmers who came to America on a merchant ship at the end of the eighteenth century. They settled in the mountainous northeastern part of Tennessee. During the Civil War, they fought against the slaveholders who owned plantations in western Tennessee. In 1871, my great-grandfather John Brooks, with his son Martin and Martin’s young family, journeyed by covered wagon a thousand miles across Tennessee, Arkansas, and the corner of Missouri to homestead in the southeastern part of the free state of Kansas. The government let them have one hundred and sixty acres of land near the village of Burden. There they built a log cabin, ten feet by twelve, in which all twelve members of the family had to live. The Pawnee and Cherokee Indians had already been driven into a reservation in the Oklahoma Territory, to the south, while the last of the Plains Indians were then fighting hopelessly against the United States Army and Cavalry, which soon swept their survivors west into Colorado. Furthermore, by 1875 the Indians’ subsistence—

the millions of buffalo—had been slaughtered by the white hunters. Thereafter, homesteaders poured in. (4)

But what kind of an “other” is Brooks? She is not a descendant of the African Americans and Native Americans of whom she speaks in this paragraph. Her father, a lawyer, and her mother, a skilled classical musician (though not professional), were both of British lineage. She describes herself as a female born into a provincial middle-class American setting, of unusually liberal parents. Frances Farmer, who also chooses to explore her roots via autobiography, was likewise born into the middle class with a (none too successful) attorney father.

In some ways it appears Brooks is attempting to write almost an “anti-autobiography,” in the manner of an anti-hero. Her approach to the material (as well as a central, self-described personality characteristic) appears, again, to be one of defiance, that of a renegade. In addition to that, her book seems a way of talking about herself without really talking about herself. Lulu/Louise bookends the center of the work, the chapter titles of which “announce” the “greats”; e.g., “Humphrey and Bogey”; “The Other Face of W. C. Fields”; “Gish and Garbo.” Looking at some of these titles, one sees how Brooks applies to others the device of an “identity split.” In describing herself, she employs a “split,” as well, contrasting “screen” with “reality” ostensibly but suggesting further divisions, as well. Brooks uses a similar approach in examining the various celebrities. (She reveals, through her connection to them, their “real” stories as opposed to the Hollywood gloss.) Finally, an announcement in print “against” memoirs seems to build on this concept of the identity split and holds additional interest as an assertive “no” published not by the subject herself but as a posthumous, editorial postscript. In the

“self-construction” of Brooks’s identity, then, we have not just Brooks telling/not telling about herself but others still “improving” on that activity. In her heyday, Louise Brooks was a silent screen actress, playing characters not particularly prized for their linguistic acumen, verbal or otherwise. Though the actress was “rediscovered” not only through her films but as a well-received film commentator in her later years—many years after this brief, initial success—Brooks’s place in the industry is still not on a par with others whose names populate her “autobiography.”

Whether or not Brooks in fact deteriorated mentally due to alcoholism, as some have charged (or any other cause), it appears she continued to exhibit until her death both a physical and psychological vibrancy. She makes no effort in her later life to denounce her overtly sexual past (apart from the brief Catholic conversion), though she obviously reflects upon it. (Yet she wears the face of discretion—not wishing the details fully exposed.) While Farmer, near the end of her life, did stay busy with some community theater and a small-town talk show, the efforts seem pale and sad compared to her previous screen and stage presence. Brooks, on the other hand, found cult status while still alive—well into her seventies, not only via art-house retrospectives but as a “scholarly” film commentator.

As does Farmer, Louise Brooks incorporates into her autobiography the self-knowledge that her image was important; both women recognize their status as objects in terms of their female beauty. Both Farmer and Brooks owed much of their fame to this status as sexual object for the cinematic lens. They fulfilled the westernized cultural ideal of beauty, each presenting a quite different concept of the same while falling within a circumscribed spectrum. Louise Brooks was petite (five feet, two inches) with short,

very dark hair, sometimes referred to as a “helmet” (Paris 39; Tynan vii). Farmer, on the other hand, was statuesque with flowing, apparently naturally blonde tresses; photographs of her before the “Hollywood treatment”—sans makeup—show her representing this cultural ideal even then. Both were of Euro-American ancestry, a prerequisite for Hollywood starlets of the era (while the likes of Josephine Baker and Lena Horne were barred from being American “leading ladies”). In other words, their looks—their bodies—figure significantly in their cultural definition; their cultural “selves.”

Comparing Farmer’s autobiographical effort with Brooks’s in terms of style, one may observe some striking differences. While Brooks’s tends to be somewhat coy (despite frequent references to her penchant for brutal honesty and brazen behavior), Farmer’s is almost “overly exposed.” Overall, Brooks shrinks away from discussing herself in too much personal depth, focusing instead on the famous “others” she has brushed elbows with and then some (leading some to give it labels along the lines of “semi-autobiography”). Farmer, on the other hand, almost immediately gives us a close-up view of herself, painting intimate portraits, such as the repetitive scenes involving her mother and herself, arguing vociferously—and viciously—over their small, beaten-up kitchen table. We see Brooks often as this shining (even if doomed to be extinguished) little satellite flitting about major stars, while in Farmer’s prose the focus is extremely inward, with a lens attuned to the extreme detail she finds there. Farmer’s writing is like that of one recalling deep memories that have been captured with a photographic quality; her portrait of her past has an intimate immediacy.

The autobiographies differ in length, as well: Brooks’s (her original work, published in 1982) runs 109 pages; Farmer’s is somewhat more weighty, at 318. Brooks’s

book is embellished with two sets of inserts, multiple pages of glossy black and white (also the stock in which she was filmed) stills of herself, as well as personal photos gracing the head of each chapter/essay. Farmer's work is much more text-heavy, containing only four photographs within (two of which are extremely unglamorous and only one of which features her alone), in addition to her photo on the book jacket. The text is dense with dialogue in *Will There Really Be a Morning?*, while *Lulu in Hollywood* is, for the most part, lifted from the essays that Brooks had formerly published in film journals. Brooks's treatment of herself features a "table of contents" announcing the topics of chapters/essays to come (simply seven in all), whetting the reader's appetite with the likes of "Gish and Garbo." Farmer's, by contrast, has no contents; merely numbers at the heads of chapters totaling twenty-two.

Brooks reveals herself, defiantly, as a somewhat self-styled outcast; Farmer offers a picture of one who has more forcefully had control snatched away from her. Both women had luminous careers that were prematurely curtailed and ended their days alone. But with Brooks it was in a manner a self-imposed exile, her "cult rebirth" erupting even before her death and leading to a rather successful mini-career in film commentary. Farmer died never revisiting Hollywood even in fond recollection, never quite rebounding from her stints in various mental wards.

While in Farmer's text it is apparent, where is the "family focus" (if it is a more typical feature of "female" autobiography than "male") in Brooks's work? Farmer's book ends with her having finally found a "familial" niche—through Jean Ratcliffe and her kin. The actress's biological family and past marriages by this time are entirely out of the picture. But Brooks's first chapter, "Kansas to New York," contains the meat of

her reference to same; in fact, for all intensive purposes, all of it. Up until her death, Brooks maintained a close relationship only with her brother, Teddy (though she had two other siblings), but a photograph of them together inset among other pictures constitutes all further reference to him. However, there is little mention of siblings in Farmer's book, either, though Edith Farmer Elliot wrote yet *another* posthumous biography of her famous sister. Published by a vanity press and trashing all previous accounts, Elliot blames Farmer's downfall not on "Momma" or any aspect of American culture, but on a bio-chemical/nutritional disorder (one of Mother Farmer's favorite avocational interests) and the evil grip of communism. Brooks speaks little of her marriages—yes, there was more than one—and this seems appropriate, for as already presented, marriage does not seem high on her "to do" list of life. There is no mention, either, of any children or the desire for same, though biographer Paris offers some information related to that subject:

Which leads to the last—and darkest—question in Louise's life: What *was* "the whole sexual truth" she could never tell?

In all of her diaries, letters, and interviews, there is not a single reference to pregnancy or abortion. "She always called herself 'Barren Brooks,'" says one confidant, "and she never took any preventative measures. She was convinced she could never have children." No medical confirmation or refutation exists. Her view of motherhood was that, for her, it would have been a disaster. Her own mother—never a traditional "nurturer"—she viewed as both the curse and blessing of her life. (546)

Like Farmer, however, Brooks veers with the more common non-chronological order of female personal narrative. Most interesting, perhaps, is the fact that she also

presents a quite similar “pioneer tale”—an explication of her genealogical roots. *And*, like Farmer, though such an emphasis is typical of male biography, Brooks gives her story an odd turn, making it seem more “counterpoint”; a “female” version, perhaps, of the all important lineage saga.

Unlike Farmer, Brooks makes no attempt at presenting a “unified” picture with her autobiography; rather, her life is presented in “snippets”; the resulting pastiche coming verbatim from a variety of previously published sources, with further editorial comment provided solely by others. Farmer takes readers along on a ride through hell via fame, but despite her terminal state at the end, she exudes—or wants readers to perceive—a sense of peace. In Brooks’s epilogue, tacked onto the second edition, she states what is perhaps the reason behind such a lack of cohesion. Calling to mind how Farmer’s work is often received, Brooks writes “that many exposes are written to shock, to excite, to make money. But in serious books characters remain as baffling, as unknowable as ever” (110). However, this assertion seems at odds with conventional biography formula.

The emphasis on definition (or lack of definition) in this thesis with regard to Farmer and Brooks (with a focus on “duality,” male/female, body/mind) is not to imply that human beings tend to be simple creatures, free of any conflicting features. . . it is just that in the case of Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks, the conflict is pronounced—and brought out in their life-writings.

While “horror” might be an appropriate sub-genre classification for Farmer’s (to exaggerate only slightly), Brooks’s text seems in a way a light-hearted romp through life—with a few kicks in the backside along the way. Some of these kicks pack quite a

walloping, but Brooks appears to project a buoyant attitude. Yes, she lost it all; but what was she really losing? Whether her wounds are deeper than she reveals or not, she presents herself as one who has stayed true to her convictions. What these convictions *are* precisely—and whether they are worth sticking to is another matter. Taking a perceptive outsider’s point of view, Brooks can acknowledge the validity of Pabst’s prediction ; i.e., his telling her “Your life is exactly like Lulu’s,” adding “and you will end the same way” (105). But at the same time, Brooks knows her nature is her nature, and there is nothing she can/could have done about that, except fail to play into the hands of gossip-mongers. Even though many readers may question just how reticent Brooks is, in sympathy with little-known writer Grant Clark she notes: “I too am unwilling to write the sexual truth that would make my life worth reading. I cannot unbuckle the Bible Belt” (111).

A disturbing episode that may hold more of a personality key than she chooses to ponder concerns not just Brooks’s molestation as a child, but her mother’s *blaming her* for it. This is a fact Brooks skims over in Tynan’s introduction; a point she does not seem interested in pursuing—and yet chooses to bring to light in “formal” conversation. Yet she also notes how her mother, like herself, worshipped “freedom,” freedom, in a sense, of the *mind* and *body*. In this first chapter, however, Brooks’s description of her female ancestors is somewhat less than flattering (as is Farmers):

As the eldest of six children borne by a tiny, withdrawn mother who “enjoyed poor health,” Myra Rude had been forced to sacrifice her girlhood to the care of what she called “squalling brats.” When she married, she told Father that he was her escape to freedom and the arts, and that any squalling

brats she produced could take care of themselves. And that is what happened.

My mother pursued freedom by writing book reviews to present at her women's club, by delivering lectures on Wagner's *Ring*, and by playing the piano, at which she was extremely talented. (5)

Though we do not see in Brooks's work the monster Farmer paints as "mother," we do see the image of a driven, forceful woman, determined to live, in a sense, through her daughter. In this portrait her father, though reasonably successful, definitely occupies the background family-wise: "My father thought I had been mutilated when Mother, in the interests of improving my appearance, had a barber chop off my long black braids and shape what remained of my hair in a straight Dutch bob with bangs. He called my dancing career 'just silly'" (5).

To return to the idea of the "misuse" of women's bodies brought up in the introduction to this paper; with Farmer it is obvious, but does it really figure in Louise Brooks's story? One might caustically argue that Brooks would be the last to concede her body was capable of being misused—she appeared, after all, open to *anything*. But an examination of her own views along these lines suggests otherwise. It is very obvious that *she* wishes to be in control of her body. Despite what might lie behind various hardcore fans' fascination with her—admirers caught up in their fantasies, driven to immortalize her in sundry ways ("all the guys love a whore"—and she, herself, was known to refer to the "Lulu" in her this way)—her "free" sexuality did not translate into "up for grabs." And perhaps, most importantly, she is able to put this into *words*.

While her morals might not be particularly clear to the masses, she apparently did abide by her own “code.” She is not at a loss for words when it comes to denigrating the standard “woman as commodity” scenario, at least when interviewed:

It’s simply that I make whoring as ugly as it is, and this is a man’s world and they’re not going to have it. . . Men are the publishers, and anything that kills their sexual pleasure is not going to be allowed. . . It’s all right in [Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Capricorn* and J. P. Donleavy’s *The Ginger Man*] to make up men who beat women and kick them around and give them syphilis and clap and babies. That is fine because that makes the man a *hero* in this kind of world’s eyes. . . I detest what they do to women. And women are forced into that kind of life, and they are not going to let me tell it. . . That’s why they hate [*Pandora’s Box*], because it shows this rich man, this rich man like Hearst, whose whole life is to build power, to get rich enough and powerful enough to live a life of sex with women. That is every man’s ambition. I don’t care who they are or how they hide it or whether they are able to achieve it or not, and I write against that from beginning to end. (Paris 547)

It is the existence of just such “misuse,” she would likely argue, that led to others’ misunderstanding and mistreatment of her. No, Louise Brooks does not appear to have been subjected to the sanctioned physical violation Frances Farmer was; but she was a victim of sexual abuse as a child, however she may have chosen to come to terms with that reality. (And one must remember the atmosphere in which she came to terms with it: the middle part of the last century, before such issues received widespread public acknowledgement, discussion, and concern.)

Brooks existed in large part—on screen and in life—as an ideal male fantasy: the beautiful “other woman” who shuns commitment and lives entirely for pleasure. Her own take on that existence, on a certain cultural level, may be a moot point. From a dominant patriarchal perspective, *her* perception of her sexuality, her focus on “desire” superseding “desirability,” is irrelevant. If this were not to some degree the case, “improvements” upon her autobiography, such as the “expanded” second edition and errata sheets “correcting” her point of view (Paris 553), would not have reached publication. (Recalling how much—or rather, little—of the film *Frances* borrowed from her autobiography, Farmer’s words did not escape a peculiar necrophilic revision, either.) Others’ “editing” of Brooks’s own experience occurred even during her lifetime, as when William K. Everson, in print, pointed out “factual errors” in her writing, to which Brooks responded, “Thanks for the corrections of fact—although I was not writing a textbook” (“Louise Brooks Part III”). And after all, if Louise Brooks had played the game as she was *supposed* to, she most likely would not have found herself an outcast well before middle-age, prior to her re-birth decades later as a risqué raconteur. What her *mind* had to say about her *body* in her youth perhaps damaged Louise Brooks culturally, but in her “old age,” “safe” in the form of reminiscence, it could be told.

Conclusion

Within the last few months, as I have completed work on this thesis, two news stories, in particular, have caught my attention. Both made the national news, though one held local interest, as well. Both involved the misuse of women's bodies (though that characterization, at the center of these controversies, is still being debated), in the name of "science" and a progressively organized, functional society. What is not arguable is that women's bodies were "used" in these instances by others (primarily males) for certain purposes, without the women's full knowledge or consent. This "use," in both cases, involved particular organs/regions of the female body; specifically, those connected to the reproductive system.

Alluded to in my introduction, one of these stories, as reported by Michael Lindenberger of the (Louisville, Kentucky) *Courier-Journal* (and picked up by the Associated Press), centers around a gynecologist who has been "accused of carving the initials 'UK' into the uterus of a woman undergoing a hysterectomy." According to Dr. J. Michael Guiler, the surgeon in question practicing in Lexington, Kentucky, the "markings" "were done for a medical reason, were not intended to demean the patient in any way and were done only with the patient's safety in mind" (Lindenberger). Patient Stephanie Means, after viewing a video of her surgery sent to her by Guiler, found his actions offensive and filed a lawsuit. Guiler, by his own admission, has routinely "marked" his hysterectomy patients in this manner and provided the women with videotapes. Representatives of Central Baptist Hospital, the site of Means's procedure, have argued that "surgeons commonly use markings in such operations to better keep track of where to make surgical cuts" but also added the caveat "surgeons should use

markings that do not offend patients” (Lindenberger). Means claims she was never informed that marking of any kind was to take place. The “UK” stands for Guiler’s alma mater, the University of Kentucky College of Medicine. He has further explained, “I felt this was honorable since it made reference to the College of Medicine where I received my medical degree and obstetrical and gynecological training” (Lindenberger). Yet Stephanie Means reports “feeling violated” (Lindenberger).

Other journalists have reported that Guiler “was named as a fellow at the University of Kentucky for donating more than \$50,000 to the school” and that Means views being given the videotape alone as “intentional, degrading, reckless, outrageous, and intolerable” (Taylor and Kocher). In addition, some papers noted that the “branding” itself was sizeable: an “inch-and-a-half” to “two inches high” (*Daily Independent; Arizona Republic*). While the Means case, in some eyes, may appear to represent the view of merely one disgruntled—or “lawsuit happy” patient—approximately one month later the *Courier-Journal* ran the following update by Deborah Highland: “Nine Patients Seek to Join Lawsuit over Uterus Markings.” Included among those women is “a former nurse in Guiler’s office,” Dana Kelly, who has commented “I didn’t realize he was doing this to everybody” and in regard to her feeling “embarrassed” by the video: “I couldn’t understand why he would put this big UK on the uterus” (Highland). While one of Guiler’s former instructors has defended the “marking” practice, another physician, “Dr. Thomas G. Stovall, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Tennessee at Memphis, said he is unaware of any reason why a surgeon would need to brand the uterus” (Highland).

Whether Guiler’s actions represent “some form of bizarre ‘athletic branding’”—of which he claims he has been accused—or are dismissed by the legal and medical establishment as permissible and routine; whatever are adjudged his “true” motivations, I find either scenario repugnant. The fact remains that his treatment of female patients was literally invasive—and in certain respects, occurred without their knowledge and consent. This leads me to the second news story of late. The following, part of a story by Marie McCullough and Aparana Surendran, appeared in the March 10, 2003 *Philadelphia Inquirer*:

Patients and doctors can have very different attitudes about educational pelvic exams. Doctors often regard them as routine procedures, while patients may see them as invasive and embarrassing.

This attitudinal division was brought into focus by reaction to a story in the Feb. 26 *Inquirer* about pelvic exams of anesthetized patients. The story was prompted by a small 1995 survey of Philadelphia medical students, published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

The study found that a quarter of the students thought it unimportant to get consent before examining an anesthetized gynecological surgery patient.

The story also quoted Philadelphia medical school faculty about what really goes on.

The teaching doctors said they would not dream of having students or residents do a pelvic exam on an office patient without her permission. At the same time, the doctors said they do not usually ask for such explicit consent from patients before gynecological surgery. They might simply explain that a student or resident, or

both, will be “assisting.” Even physicians who describe precisely what that assistance entails rarely explain that it is for educational purposes and that the patient can refuse it.

Later in the story, the journalists note:

In the 1970’s, women’s health activists, medical students, and doctors like Magee decided there had to be a better way to learn gynecological exams than by using anesthetized patients as training dummies.

They also realized that while pelvic exams are crucial to diagnosing everything from cervical cancer to vaginal itching, most women dread the procedure. At best, they feel undignified; at worst, they feel violated.

The solution was the creation of consulting firms such as the 30-year-old Medical Education Teaching Associates. Each year, it conducts workshops for 2,200 fledgling doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners and physician assistants at area medical schools.

Yet despite the existence of such organizations for over three decades—their onset corresponding with the onset of late twentieth-century feminism—the routine “violations” of women have continued.

In this age when western feminist issues, particularly of such a tangible nature, may seem to take a backseat to others in academia, these allegations call into question such dismissive attitudes. While I may seem to be getting rather far afield here, such physical abuses (“abuses” because they are performed on a woman’s person without her overt consent) play a role in female objectification and certainly played an explicit role in the recounted misfortunes of at least one of the actress/authors this thesis examines. It

would seem, at present, institutionalized physical violation of the female is not routinely addressed as a viable concern in the *postmodern West*—apart from narrowly defined domestic violence issues. Yet we see widespread alarm about female circumcision—a horrific practice that the West attempts to address, but which occurs in *other* parts of the world (the media has acknowledged its practice in the West; e.g., Linda Burstyn’s 1995 article in the *Atlantic Monthly*—though not by westerners). Similarly, the West expresses a more cohesive concern about women’s rights in *other, less advanced* parts of the world, than in the West itself (i.e., “Campaign for Afghan Women”).

In the new millennium, are women’s bodies—particularly here in the United States—*really* their own? The escalated push over the past several years to overturn the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision may seem to suggest otherwise. Such an environment would not appear to aid in any feminist move to lessen media objectification of the female. While the recent American stories may not be quite so shocking as compared to female brutalization reported globally, they are still worth mention and of interest, most particularly since the media have taken note. What does this sudden eruption of “concern” say about our culture?

This writer finds that the exploration of related issues, particularly in the United States, and the roots from which they stem, is a worthwhile and timely pursuit (given the recent, though scant, attention) and hence an appropriate subject for this Humanities dissertation written in 2003. My program emphasis in the area of American literature and culture, as I have demonstrated, has shaped this chosen subject matter in a particular way.

Paul John Eakin’s 1999 *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, melds the “scientific” with literary discussion (neurology, cognitive science, developmental

psychology, memory studies and the like), expressing a great concern with “the body” as it relates to identity formation. In supposed opposition to some other theorists discussed in my thesis (but reflecting the heterogeneity in autobiographical construct and critique), Eakin does not view gender distinctions among autobiographers in terms of any “sterile binary logic” (50). As he explains, “I keep encountering women’s autobiographies that strike me as individualistic and narrative in character; I keep finding important evidence of relationality in men’s autobiographies” (50). With his text, Eakin aims “to suggest that the criterion of relationality applies equally *if not identically* to male experience” (50). While I find some validity in Eakin’s gender-related findings and certainly some elements of “male” autobiography in Brooks’s and Farmer’s works (as previously cited), what seems most applicable to my thesis is his detailed emphasis on “the body” itself. Whether it is ultimately more prevalent in female autobiographical writing or not, there is no denying the *female* body figures significantly in the works of Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks. And Eakin’s findings aside, this “femaleness”—the female body as object, vessel/victim—is of central importance. The “divisions” or duality in Brooks’s and Farmer’s works all seem to lead back, in one way or another, to the female body, as linked to the female mind. The actress/authors’ positions are problematic *primarily* and *precisely* because they are *female*. Woman’s *mind* is tainted by her *body*.

Yet the final selves, these constructions with which Farmer and Brooks leave the reader at the end of their works, are ultimately more conservative than the preceding portraits they paint. However, while Farmer’s “unified” self appears sedate to the point of being numb (the “catatonic,” lobotomy or not), Brooks’s “active object” seems more “scattered.” She admits to being out of tune with her supposed construction; i.e., she

didn't realize—as she lived it—what others thought of her (e.g., the comments of Pabst and the French youth). Farmer's "tamed" subject seems more in sync with the canonical, "male" autobiographical self (though as a "whole" female she is "empty"), while Brooks's is less cohesive, though nonetheless simplified by her "Bible Belt" statement (her "out"; i.e., "excuse" for not being "whole").

But within the texts, Brooks to a large extent expresses *comfort* in possessing her female body (as *she* perceives it), while Farmer, conversely, goes to great lengths describing the *discomfort* possessing one invites. Each woman expresses some ambivalence on this point, however, as well as ambivalence with regard to sexual identity. Though each appears rather liberal in her views on sexual orientation, neither claims the label "lesbian" or "bisexual," despite others' fervent attempts to attach it.

At the conclusions of their life stories, Farmer's journey toward conventional unity via autobiography seems ultimately to end in vacancy, while Brooks is left split ad infinitum. An ironic further correspondence with such placement is suggested by the fact that Farmer was deceased at her book's initial publication, while Brooks was not. Yet one must remember that it is only with the posthumous 2000 edition that Brooks's "Bible Belt" comment is tacked on as part of her "life story." The female "wound," in their experience/example, cannot be "healed" without the loss of the identity at its center. Their words that aim to counter their dominant cultural construction must ultimately die with them. It is their celluloid, objectified selves, their "edited" "texts," that live on in the final cut—or so it would seem.

However one interprets these "final selves," they do not erase the impact of the less conventional presentations that precede them. Silencing does not erase an

empowered act. To use an analogy from film analysis, a placid “black and white” ending—e.g., the tag line “There’s no place like home” in *The Wizard of Oz*—does not negate all the color and animation that was “Oz” itself (Bordwell and Thompson 34-35).

Today, in 2003, a similar dominant cultural construction still pervades the media. We may, in fact, be in a stage of regression. And it seems few of the female “players” choose to comment on this phenomenon. Frances Farmer and Louise Brooks represent only two small voices—and images, given their cultural roles—within the realm of modern/postmodern “female autobiography.” Perhaps there are many such tales still to be told.

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