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Tanks, Guitars, and Wands: Feminine Subjectivity and Phallic Cultural Spaces in Three Contemporary Texts

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**Tanks, Guitars, and Wands: Feminine Subjectivity and Phallic Cultural
Spaces in Three Contemporary Texts**

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Babelogue
Patti Smith

I haven't fucked much with the past, but I've fucked plenty with the future. Over the skin of silk are scars from the splinters of stations and walls I've caressed. A stage is like each bolt of wood, like a log of Helen, is my pleasure. I would measure the success of a night by the way by the way by the amount of piss and seed I could exude over the columns that nestled the P.A. Some nights I'd surprise everybody by skipping off with a skirt of green net sewed over with flat metallic circles which dazzled and flashed. The lights were violet and white. I had an ornamental veil, but I couldn't bear to use it. When my hair was cropped, I craved covering, but now my hair itself is a veil, and the scalp inside is a scalp of a crazy and sleepy Comanche lies beneath this netting of the skin. I wake up. I am lying peacefully I am lying peacefully and my knees are open to the sun. I desire him, and he is absolutely ready to seize me. In heart I am a Moslem; in heart I am an American; in heart I am Moslem, in heart I'm an American artist, and I have no guilt. I seek pleasure. I seek the nerves under your skin. The narrow archway; the layers; the scroll of ancient lettuce. We worship the flaw, the belly, the belly, the mole on the belly of an exquisite whore. He spared the child and spoiled the rod. I have not sold myself to God.

Introduction

After taking the class Postmodern Feminist Culture the spring of my junior year, I was intrigued by the interactions between postmodernism and feminism. Watching the film *Tank Girl* was not only a riotous experience, but it also set me on a path of critical cultural analysis that led to this thesis. I was enamored with the film, but uncomfortable, as my feminist alarms sounded—over and over again—at the film’s sometimes problematic portrayals of gender stereotypes. Regardless, I borrowed it from my professor and watched it again. I couldn’t quite pinpoint why the film made me feel liberated, sexy, and powerful, when, if I were examining it using the feminist critical theory I’d been studying and familiarizing myself with over the last three years, it would seem to be anti-feminist. This tension was, for a young feminist and a scholar just beginning to be in conversation with critical theorists, daunting. I wanted to like the film and yet knew I shouldn’t. As my postmodern culture class continued, however, I began to apply many of the postmodern theories we were learning to *Tank Girl*. In doing so, I discovered that although not overtly feminist, *Tank Girl* in many ways combats phallogentrism and enacts many postmodern theories.

Once I got a hold of these postmodern theories I began to apply them to other texts. The relationship between postmodernism and feminism is sometimes a tense one. During my first three years of study I read Simone DeBeauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics*; I immersed myself in bell hooks, Karla Jay, Jennifer Baumgardner, Amy Richards, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich when I should have been answering telephones and filing at my summer temp position; I got to know the employees at Half Price Books well as I visited nearly weekly to add to my growing collection of feminist literature. I discovered quickly the necessity of identity and

embodiment in these women's writing. Once, I saw a ripped poster on a lamppost proclaiming, "Your body is a battleground." This idea of womanhood so embedded in the body permeated many of the feminist writings I read during my undergraduate career. In Helene Cixous' essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, she says,

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (Cixous 876)

As Cixous stresses, knowledge of the female body as something to be spoken of and written is essential because it has been so often been written about and characterized by men.

I write this as a woman, toward women. When I say "woman," I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history. But first it must be said that in spite of the enormity of the repression that has kept them in the "dark"—that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute—there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have in common I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible. (876-877)

Here, Cixous acknowledges the pitfalls of writing of women as universal, and yet simultaneously, she recognizes the need to develop a subject of a 'woman' in order to fight against the systematized oppression that has been deployed against this 'woman.' For many third-wave feminists, especially in the queer community, traditional feminist critique is not representative of gender queer or trans* identities, instead relying on a semi-static concept of the universally oppressed woman. While fighting against favoring males and masculine characteristics in a binary opposition, some feminists simultaneously reinscribed the oppression inherent in such an opposition. It is here in the space of embodiment, subjecthood, and identity that postmodernism and feminism clash. This tension is summed up succinctly in Linda J. Nicholson's introduction to *Feminism/Postmodernism* when she says, "Does not the adoption of postmodernism really entail the destruction of feminism, since does not feminism itself depend on a relatively unified notion of the social subject 'woman,' a notion postmodernism would attack?" (7). In postmodernism's aversion to universalism, it sometimes alienates feminists who believe strongly in the necessity for community and recognition of mutual oppression in order to fight the patriarchal systems.

However difficult this fault is, through this thesis I hope to explore these tensions and offer some possible grounds for connection. First, postmodernism, in its critique of the very notion that we can have a theory of knowledge, offers a critique useful for feminists: if our ideals of what knowledge is are historically and culturally constructed in a system of Western ideas that values masculinity over femininity, postmodernism then offers a useful critique of the patriarchy. Additionally, Judith Butler's essay, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, offers a theory of gender as an unstable, constructed identity that allows for a critique of how gender is constructed

and why it is constructed the way it is. Butler's theories theory first allowed me the space to analyze the gender portrayals in *Tank Girl*.

At the intersection between these two schools of thought, I will discuss three contemporary texts that have been important in my life: *Tank Girl*, Patti Smith's 1975 album *Horses*, and Hermione's character in *Harry Potter*. The supposed "truth" about any of these texts is not the question I wish to pursue in this study. I began with a simple question, based in feminist literary critique: where are the women? That led me to other questions, such as: how do we define woman? How are women constructed and portrayed in this text? What are the cultural and political implications of these portrayals? After studying postmodernism, my questions began to form themselves around gender representations as a whole rather than solely focusing on women. What follows are my readings of each text, based on my study of postmodernism, my background in feminist theory, and my lived experience. My goal is not to set myself against traditional feminist readings of gender portrayals in these texts or to argue for the complete deconstruction of gender as a social category, but to use traditional feminist critique, as well as a postmodern approach, to provide an alternative reading of these texts. While I do argue against theorists such as Andrea Dworkin, I hope to demonstrate that experimentations with power structures do not always reinscribe those structures, but sometimes deconstruct them. Feminist scholarship is multifaceted and ever-changing. What I argue against in these papers is not feminism or even a defined category of 'woman,' but rather an unquestioned power association between penis and phallus. The following texts, though not necessarily feminist, deconstruct the connection between penis and phallus when postmodern theories are applied, and in this way, do feminist work.

My engagement with these texts comes from an intensely personal place: *Tank Girl* made postmodern theory approachable for me; I spent many summers with Patti Smith's *Horses* playing on repeat in my car; I grew up at Hogwarts with Harry, Ron, and Hermione. My history with these texts made me *want* to read each as feminist. The texts I have chosen don't exist apart from theory, but enact and engage this theory. Although Patti Smith never claimed the label "feminist," her performance and songs are still capable of doing feminist work. I define "feminist work" here as work that advances gender equality. I will use bell hooks' definition of feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression" (hooks viii). Building from this definition, I argue that deconstructing the connection between penis and phallus ultimately leads to a deconstruction of the myth that penis is power and in this way contributes to feminist work.

My goal in this analysis is to further break down the connection between penis (a biological organ) and phallus (a representation of male power). I base my definitions of each on Sarah Smith's distinction in her essay, *A Cock of One's Own*:

Phallus and *penis* do not mean the same thing, but they are often treated as synonymous: 'the imaginary symbol which represents male power—economic, social, political, and cultural as well as the sexual.' The penis has been the primary phallic symbol in so many different cultures throughout time...that most people, including many feminists, assume the penis *is* the phallus, that is, that the penis is power personified." (Smith 295)

Recounting the feminist dildo wars, in which antidildo feminists such as Andrea Dworkin argued that any form of penetration with (penis or dildo) was "exploitive, male-identified, sexual behavior" (Smith 296), Smith and other prodildo activists argue that lesbian dildo play

“represents experimentations with power, challenging deeply ingrained gender role assumptions” (Smith 299). This recognition that the penis is only a *symbol* of phallic power, but not phallic power itself, shakes the power patriarchy assigns to the penis and those who biologically have a penis.

Applying this theory to Rachel Talalay’s 1995 film *Tank Girl*, I argue that the film’s appropriation and use of phallic power spaces subverts the phallic power culturally assigned to those spaces. Through the main character Rebecca’s reversal of the male gaze, her co-optation of Water and Power’s tank, and mockery of traditional forms of overly-aggressive, militaristic masculinity, *Tank Girl* is ultimately a parody and critique of phallic power spaces and the social power we assign to them.

In part two I examine Patti Smith’s 1975 album *Horses* using similar theories. Smith occupies the theoretical space of the archetypal male rock performer and in doing so breaks the archetype: as a woman inhabiting male rock space successfully, Smith deconstructs the cultural notion of rock performers as only male. While many other female performers in the last 50 years have also contributed to the deconstruction of punk rock’s masculinities, I am particularly interested in Smith because of the postmodern dimensions of her work. Through her androgynous stage and vocal performance, Smith fluidly represents many different subject positions. In representing various femininities through her musical performance, Smith opens up space for women’s subjectivity in rock outside the Madonna/whore dichotomy that permeated the rock scene of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Part three examines the sexual politics at play within the Golden Trio: Harry, Ron, and Hermione in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Focusing specifically on Hermione’s character, I use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theory of the “erotic triangle” as a base for examining the

interactions between the legendary friends. The interactions among the three don't fit completely into Sedgwick's theoretical framework and differ somewhat from classical examples of the erotic triangle developed in her book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. However, using Sedgwick's theory and focusing specifically on Hermione's role within the Golden Trio, I argue Rowling constructs Hermione as a subversive character who challenges traditional gender stereotypes. Like Smith, Hermione's occupation of multiple, non-traditional feminine subject positions allows for readers to identify with a broader collection of subjectivities. For young female readers, this is especially important, and makes Hermione a vital character in Young Adult literature.

This multiplicity of subjectivity is where much of the tension between postmodernism and feminism lies. The stable identity of "woman" within much feminist critique is disrupted by postmodernism's assertion of identity as unstable and fluid. However, particularly in the cases of Patti Smith and Hermione Granger, this fluidity allows for exploration and eventual deconstruction of masculine power spaces.

My exploration of these cultural texts is far from complete. Each time I watch *Tank Girl* I catch more interesting postmodern dynamics; each time I listen to *Horses* I notice a different aspect of Smith's vocal performance; each time I read *Harry Potter* I am again enchanted and excited to continue my exploration of postmodernism and feminism interacting with pop culture. My study of these texts led me to many late nights in the library, many unsure emails and frustrated phone conversations. But somehow the intriguing dynamics at play beneath three of my favorite things kept me coming back, just as every year, Minnesota predictably snowing outside, I find myself curled up, *Harry Potter* in my hands. I hope that my study of these texts will continue. As one of my favorite quotes says, "It is also admirable and necessary—indeed,

essential—to work hard, read books, and spend long hours in the library, because the things you learn there may just save the world” (Hopkins 33).

“She’ll break your back and your balls!” Post-Phallic Culture and the Limited Feminism of *Tank Girl*

Created in 1988 by Jamie Hewlett and Alan Martin, the *Tank Girl* comics are set in post-apocalyptic Australia, featuring punk-heroine Rebecca Buck. Rebecca spends her time fighting, farting, spitting, screaming, shooting, and finding trouble with her mutant kangaroo boyfriend, Booga. Directly following the comic’s publication, *Tank Girl* became popular in the politically active, counter-cultural punk ‘zine community. Readers identified with *Tank Girl*’s aggressive, shit-talking, take-no-prisoners attitude. In an interview, Hewlett and Martin said, “[*Tank Girl*] was Thelma and Louise before the fact; she was Mad Max designed by Vivienne Westwood; Action Man designed by Jean-Paul Gaultier” (Thompson). *Tank Girl*’s eclectic mix of Spunk Beer cans and sophisticated cultural references, along with its freeing, non-linear narrative made it popular among readers. Because of the anarchic tone of the comics, many different groups could claim *Tank Girl* as their own. Rebecca, positioned as the mascot of an anti-homophobia campaign against Margaret Thatcher and part of lesbian “*Tank Girl* nights,” was also appropriated by the emerging “Bad Girl Fashion” scene, featured in more mainstream media such as *Elle*, *Time Out*, *Select* and *The Face* (Thompson).

The success of the *Tank Girl* comics eventually led to a film, directed by Rachel Talalay. From the beginning, *Tank Girl* (1995) was a difficult sell for Hollywood executives. In an interview for *Wired.com* in December of 1994, Talalay says, “Sometimes the guys are threatened by it—the older agents. Like, ‘What is this? Why are the only good guys in the script mutant kangaroos?’ ‘Yeah,’ I go, ‘isn't that cool?’” (Bates). A big worry for studio executives was the bestiality component of Rebecca relationship with her mutant kangaroo boyfriend, Booga.

“‘I think we've tried to push the envelope as much as we can,’ says Talalay. ‘Tank Girl still has a relationship with Booga; we're trying to keep that in there. That doesn't mean we plan on hardcore kangaroo sex.’ Rachel laughs, adding, ‘Kangaroos have double penis heads,’” (Bates). Arguments between the studio and Talalay led to “much fighting, some agreement, and too much compromise” (Thompson). Faithful readers of the comics were disappointed by the glaring concessions the film made in order to please the studio, angry with the “Hollywood-ization” of the comics, a perceived betrayal for mass-appeal. While the film tanked at the box office and many consider it a failure, *Tank Girl* continues to attract a cult-like following. The odd position of the *Tank Girl* comics—adopted by mass media while still claiming a subversive, counter-cultural stance—translated to the screen. Both the film and the comics seem to embody the same tension, leaving *Tank Girl's* attempted feminism many times flimsy and compromised, backed only by a shaved head, punk style, and neutering sexual quips.

Feminist Science Fiction

Feminist utopian science fiction flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, a direct result of the feminist movement for equal rights, flexible gender roles, and an end to sexism. According to Gary Westfahl

science fiction and fantasy serve as important vehicles for feminist thought, particularly as bridges between theory and practice. No other genres so actively invite representations of the ultimate goals of feminism: worlds free of sexism, world in which women's contributions (to science) are recognized and valued, worlds that explore the diversity of women's desire and sexuality, and worlds that move beyond gender. Whether in the form of super heroines, escapist or

struggling utopias, cautionary dystopias, or alien-gendered cultures, feminism in science fiction and fantasy offers textual exploration of theoretical and activist ideals for progressive social change. (Westfahl 292)

While idyllic feminist utopias call for societies in which power imbalances based on gender don't exist, feminist dystopias accentuate these differences in order to demonstrate the dangerous effects of gender-based discrimination, arguing for a continuation of feminist work. Presenting liberated gender roles and non-linear narratives, many feminist dystopias of the 1990s allow for a wider interpretation of the consequences of an oppressive patriarchy, examining the results of out of control pollution, technology, and corrupt governments and corporations. Jane Donawerth, author of *The Feminist Dystopia of the 1990s: Record of Failure, Midwife of Hope* notes that feminist dystopias are almost always set in urban areas. "Whereas the settings of many earlier feminist utopias are rural, garden-like, essentializing a feminine connection to nature, these urban settings reveal the wear and tear of modern technology and its political causes and consequences on the environment" (Donawerth 50). *Tank Girl* was released in 1995, at a time when many well-known feminist dystopias such as Suzy McKee Charnas' *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988), had already defined the genre. *Tank Girl*, positioned with these texts in contrast to the earlier idealized utopias, exaggerates gender roles and sexual violence rather than presenting a world in which these oppressions and power inconsistencies are nonexistent.

Though some may read *Tank Girl's* exaggeration of sexual violence as damaging as it recreates violent situations in which women are victimized and abused, this exaggeration is based in the feminist dystopian tradition. Reading *Tank Girl* in this way, I argue that this overstated portrayal of sexual violence allows readers to critique power inconsistencies based on gender difference.

The Limited Feminism of *Tank Girl*

Tank Girl is not a traditionally feminist film. Although Rebecca is refreshingly avant-garde as far as comic book heroes or heroines are concerned—a swearing, shooting, boot-wearing, punk protagonist—Rebecca, played by Lori Petty, is still stereotypically beautiful: thin, blonde, dressed in ripped fishnets, tight tops, and short shorts. Additionally, Rebecca’s “rock-me” brand of feminism, as Elyce Rae Helford calls it in her essay, *Postfeminism and the Female Action-Adventure Hero: Positioning Tank Girl*,

seek[s] to ‘project’ sexuality as a form of individualist empowerment; however this ‘projection’ tends to be aimed directly at men, to attract their attention and, ultimately, approval. Rock-me feminism thus emerges as a new arrangement of an old song. Women’s sexuality has long been mobilized in service of a patriarchal agenda linking women with sex and the body and not with other kinds of power (economic, political). (Helford 297)

While Rebecca does team up with Jet and the Rippers later in the film, demonstrating a kind of collective action based in community, Rebecca’s sexuality is for the most part used in order to gain power within an oppressive system. Continually offering sexual favors as bargaining chips with the soldiers of Water and Power (WP), and later, the Rippers, Rebecca’s actions need to be read within a system of violence and oppression: Rebecca’s feminism relies solely on the power of individual choice, dismissing “feminist ideology and its fundamental insight that ‘women operate within a sex/gender system that limits choices’” (Helford 298). For viewers searching for Rebecca’s feminism in this context, there is a glimmer of hope when she teams up with the Rippers, who operate as a committee, relying on a system of voting and majority-rule. However, Rebecca’s individualist, “rock-me” feminism is “the necessary catalyst...for the activism of the

Rippers, who, before her arrival, made attacks and raids, but never brought down the [WP]” (Helford 300). Because Rebecca is the needed impetus for the Rippers’ direct action against WP, it is problematic to argue that they operate as a communal unit.

Rebecca’s individualist tendencies are sidelined only with respect to Sam. With Sam, Rebecca is a boot-wearing, swearing, ass-kicking, mother figure. Sam is kidnapped by WP in the beginning of the film, the necessary impulse for Rebecca’s aberrant behavior. Though it could be argued that Rebecca’s relationship with Sam—as the impetus for her violent behavior—is anti-feminist as it upholds traditional female gender stereotypes and only allows Rebecca the faculty to fight due to maternal instinct, Rebecca and Sam are an example of the communal aspect that Helford argues is missing in *Tank Girl*. Without Sam, Rebecca’s actions have no purpose or meaning beyond chaos for the sake of chaos. While the film is nothing if not chaotic, Rebecca and Sam’s relationship allows viewers to identify with Rebecca’s motives. In addition, Rebecca, Sam, and Jet create a pseudo-family at the end of the film. While Jet and Rebecca pair off with the Rippers, their non-traditional, communal family unit survives despite Rebecca’s usually individualist, unpredictable behavior.

Kidnapping Sam in an attempt to subdue Rebecca, the soldiers of WP continually seek to control the female body. This conscious, attempted manipulation could be read as the catalyst for *Tank Girl*’s feminist expression, as viewers instinctively detest the soldiers’ violent behavior toward Rebecca, Jet, and the other women in the film. However, the camera work in *Tank Girl* mimics the soldiers’ attempted control of the female body. This use of the “male gaze” as Laura Mulvey terms it in her essay, *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema*, is most clearly why Rebecca’s sexuality cannot be read as liberating. A common cinematic trope, the camera’s obsessive fixation on women’s bodies in the film many times forces the audience to view the

women in the film through the eyes of the heterosexual male. In this way, women's bodies become sexualized, public space. Rather than allowing Rebecca and Jet any subjectivity, the film's camera work relegates them to the status of objects. This manipulation of the female body for male viewing pleasure is easily seen in the unnecessary sand shower scene while Rebecca is working as a slave for WP. According to Helford, the shower "is clearly intended to serve the traditional function of every film shower scene that features a young, thin, beautiful woman: objectifying the female body" (Helford 301).

While *Tank Girl* leaves feminist viewers cringing in many places, the film is not completely devoid of redeeming moments. One obvious example of the male gaze is when Rebecca is on guard duty near the beginning of the film, cutting her tights and clothing, performing a strip tease for her boyfriend. The camera follows her scissors as she moves them up and down her legs, across her chest and neck. While this is an obvious example of the male gaze, here Rebecca uses it as a form of empowerment: she wants to be looked at. Some critics of Mulvey's theories argue that the concept of the male gaze assumes that all women don't want to be looked at in a sexual manner. While it is true that the over-sexualization of the female body is problematic, so is the assumption that the male gaze is always problematic. There are arguments on both sides, however, with regards to Rebecca in this scene, I argue that Talalay manipulates the gaze and shows that it is not necessarily oppressive to women in all scenarios. In Rebecca's case, she is performing for her boyfriend. She *invites* the gaze. She *wants* to be looked at. Another example in which Rebecca mocks the male gaze is when she forces her boyfriend to strip at gunpoint. While the scene is meant to be humorous, the sexual politics at play satirize the much more commonly seen male gaze. Pointing her gun at Richard's hands covering his penis, Rebecca says, "salute me" ("Tank Girl Script"), to which he replies "I'm not good under

pressure.” Not only does this paint Richard and Rebecca’s relationship as sexuality comfortable and fluid, it calls into question the power of the erection and the male penis. “Well you’ll learn then, won’t you?” Rebecca asks. Here, viewers are presented with an inverted version of the male gaze. Rebecca recognizes and mocks the erection while at the same time presenting a level of sexual ease and relational fluidity that provides a picture of a humorous, consensual, sexually expressive relationship. This interchange sets up *Tank Girl’s* repeated critique of the connection between the penis and systematic phallic power.

(Post) Phallic Culture in *Tank Girl*

Rebecca’s sexual quips and mockery of the male penis throughout the film ridicule gender stereotypes and dominant sexual paradigms. As Helford notes, “her relationship with her tank clearly exemplifies her tendency to ridicule male power via attacks on male sexuality” (Helford 304). Rebecca’s ridicule inadvertently subverts the connection between penis and phallus, and this seems to be *Tank Girl’s* saving feminist grace.

In *Tank Girl*, symbols of phallic power are everywhere from the tank Rebecca drives to the guns used to subdue her. As Smith argues, assigning phallic power to physical objects “positions maleness at the center of power, indicating...that men possess the ‘superior’ organ” (296). When phallic power is assigned to physically threatening objects such as weapons, maleness is asserted as more powerful than femaleness. However, in *Tank Girl*, Rebecca and Jet take representations of phallic power normally assigned to militaristic males and use them against WP. Their use of outward manifestations of phallic power against patriarchal institutions is a powerful symbol, similar to that of lesbians who use dildos. Just as some anti-dildo feminists view any form of penetration with a penis or dildo as exploitive, one could argue that

Rebecca's use of WP's tank merely plays into the militaristic, male-identified, and violent nature of war. However, I argue that by appropriating and redecorating WP's vehicles into machines that can be used against them, Rebecca and Jet re-categorize these masculine power spaces and show that women too can exercise this type of power: phallic power is not synonymous with the penis. In this way, it seems that Rebecca and Jet are not just fighting against WP, but against an oppressive, militaristic patriarchy as well.

This reading of Rebecca and Jet's use of traditionally masculine weapons is decidedly optimistic. And while I am not arguing that *Tank Girl* is a feminist film; I do maintain that it is postmodern in its relationship with gender roles. While many sexist, anti-feminist stereotypes are upheld, the film's tongue-in-cheek, entertaining interactions with commonly held gender assumptions call those assumptions into question. In this way, *Tank Girl* does feminist work.

For example, when Rebecca is captured by WP, the captain steps in front of her and demands a blowjob. He holds a gun to her head, unzips his pants, and threatens to shoot her the moment he feels teeth. In this scene, Rebecca is faced with a gun as a stark example of phallic power exercised through violence and tied directly to the penis. The penis as intrinsic to male self-esteem is evidenced throughout *Tank Girl*, but in this scene, it is particularly obvious.

Commenting on the rise of Viagra use, Gay Talese says, "the astounding success of Viagra testifies, I think, to how integral the erection is to men's self-worth. The penis is a weapon, and much of society has been aimed at controlling it" (qtd. in Barr 68). Rebecca seeks to undermine the captain's sense of self-worth, asking for a pair of tweezers and a microscope to help her find his penis. This could be read as Rebecca simply upholding the commonly held belief that masculine power lies solely with the penis: by insulting the captain's penis, she can undermine him as a leader as well, and therefore has simply reinscribed the power structure she is fighting

against. However, it is clear that the captain needs his gun to protect himself from Rebecca. His comrades recognize this, warning him, “don’t be stupid. She’s gonna bite it off,” (“Tank Girl Script”). If the penis were as powerful as the captain would like Rebecca and his comrades to believe, he wouldn’t need the gun to protect himself. Recognizing his vulnerability, the captain warns, “the moment I feel teeth, you feel lead.” The power he holds over Rebecca can only manifest itself through violence. The societal construction of phallic power surrounding the penis is debunked; only the threat of death can force compliance. While the captain still carries a representation of phallic power (the gun), Rebecca soon takes care of that as well and snaps his neck.

Rebecca’s appropriation of WP’s tank is a similar deconstruction of the connection between phallus and penis. Upon first sight, Rebecca straddles the tank’s barrel, a thought bubble in a brief cartoon interlude proclaiming “the sheer size of it!” (“Tank Girl Script”). Hearts pop up around her head as she says, “I’m in love!” This love at first sight parody links the tank’s barrel to the penis. While this may be problematic for viewers attempting to read *Tank Girl* as feminist, it is important to note that although Rebecca does reinscribe the connection of the penis and phallic power in this scene, it is she who controls this power. In Smith’s essay she says “dildos represent increasing complexity in female sexuality. Strapping one on permits women to embody phallic power, weakening the myth that the phallus can only be represented by the male sex organ” (Smith 298). Rebecca’s tank, a manifestation of male phallic power now under her control, can be read in a similar way to the dildos Smith describes. Rebecca’s use of the tank raises questions about the phallic power assigned to it: if a woman without a penis can operate the tank, what does that say about the metanarrative that only men can control phallic power?

This subversion can also be seen later in the film when Rebecca and Jet attempt to hijack

a shipment of weapons from WP. With the barrel of her tank pointed in the window of a semi-truck as two men drive, Rebecca sits astride the barrel of her tank in an obviously sexual pose.

“Feeling a little inadequate?” (“Tank Girl Script”) she asks the men. In doing this, she not only makes the audience laugh by tossing out the idea that “bigger is better,” but also makes a connection between military power and phallic power, and between phallic power and the penis.

The barrel of her tank is an obvious metaphor for a penis; however, again, it is Rebecca who controls it. The tank becomes her dildo. Rebecca acts out in this scene what Smith argues in her essay. Phallus and penis are not the same. The tank, as a manifestation of phallic power, is not only controlled by a woman without a penis, but is also used against those with penises.

Rebecca’s appropriation of phallic power symbols throughout the film reinforces that this power is not biological but symbolic. Smith addresses this as well, saying, “Postmodern feminists and sex liberals do not believe men have the hands-down right to the phallus” (299). As *Tank Girl* sometimes surprisingly shows, power structures cannot be connected with the biological human penis.

Tank Girl is an interesting study of post-phallic culture, in which the penis and the power assigned to it is no longer the dominant paradigm. This is a common trope in utopian feminist science fiction. While *Tank Girl’s* universe is by no means a utopian feminist construction, the Rippers as non-human sexual beings and Kesslee’s recreation into a cyborg are excellent examples of post-phallic culture.

In the opening scene of the film, Rebecca describes the Rippers as “a demonic army of bloodthirsty, human-eating, purse-snatching, mutant creatures...They’re led by the infamous Johnny Prophet. They spend most of their time raiding the WP” (“Tank Girl Script”). The Rippers, enemies of WP throughout the film, are also sources of fear for Rebecca and Jet. The

animalistic descriptions coincide with the images of the Rippers viewers see. However, once Rebecca and Jet find the Rippers' lair, they discover that these creatures, created by the army to be the ultimate fighting force, are surprisingly human in their behavior, their DNA a mixture of human and kangaroo. Played by male actors and exhibiting sexual attraction to Rebecca and Jet, for the sake of my argument I will read the Rippers as non-human males. Examining the Rippers as male and Jet and Rebecca as female upholds the heterosexual matrix. However, I choose to read the Rippers as non-human males. In this way, the Rippers represent a failure of heterosexual sex. While categorizing the Rippers as non-human males does invoke some problematic paradigms of assumed heterosexuality, when the Rippers are contrasted with the human men of WP, their sexual relationships with Rebecca and Jet take on multiple queer and post-phallic dimensions. The Rippers are representations of imitation or replacement (possibly even superior) bodies. Their non-human penises are still capable of sexual pleasure. As Rebecca's sexual relationship with Booga shows, a human penis is not necessary for sexual pleasure. In this way, the Rippers embody non-human sexual power, representing a failure of heterosexual human sex. According to Marleen S. Barr in her essay, *Post-Phallic Culture: Reality Now Resembles Utopian Feminist Science Fiction*, this brand of post-phallic culture can be seen in 1990s sitcoms depicting alien sexuality:

These 1990s versions of *The Planet of the Apes* make sexual encounters alien and eradicate human heterosexuality....Late 1990s television is also quite post-phallic. *Ellen* is the first lesbian sitcom. *3rd Rock from the Sun* portrays a sexual relationship between a human woman...and an alien....Solomon's extraterrestrial dick is no human penis. Or: Rocks in *3rd Rock* are not testicles. (Barr 70-71)

As Barr explains, by separating sexual pleasure from the human penis through inter-species mating, *Tank Girl* further breaks down the correlation between phallic power and the human penis. While it could be argued that because Booga is male Rebecca's relationship with him is simply another manifestation of naturalized, assumed heterosexuality, Booga's non-humanness is a radical defamiliarization from heterosexuality, a shock to many viewers. While this does not necessarily make Rebecca's relationship with Booga feminist, Rebecca's omnisexuality, according to *Elyce Rae Helford*, "challenges a lot of traditional gender norms through her behavior, appearance, and placement within a nonrealist, nonlinear narrative that 'plays with the frame and generally subverts conventions' (Felperin 55)" (Helford 300). The Rippers, created to be the ultimate soldiers, are acknowledgements of the limitations of the human body. While the film makes no allusions to why the army needed to create these soldiers, the creation itself is a recognition of lack with human soldiers. The army participates in its own castration: the human penis is no longer necessary, usurped by the nonhuman Rippers. Additionally, the Rippers "fight without the corruption of guns" ("Tank Girl Script"). In this, they ultimately undermine the penis-as-weapon paradigm, which is important when reading the Rippers as a further separation of phallic power and the human penis. Earlier in the film when Rebecca was taken by WP, the captain only asserts his institutionalized sexual and phallic power while holding a gun to Rebecca's head: acquiescence only occurs in the face of death. Contrarily, the Rippers refusal to use guns speaks to their power. While the soldiers need guns in order to maintain their superiority over women, animals, and others, the Rippers find them unnecessary in their fight against WP.

Science fiction—especially feminist science fiction—emphasizes reproductive independence: cloning, non-biological family structures, cyborgs, and machines all hypothesize a

future independent from penis, sperm, and traditional biological procreation. Barr examines feminist science fiction's depictions of reproductive independence, saying,

post-phallic culture signals [U.S.] America's congruence with feminist science fiction. For example, Paul Raeburn, when reviewing Lee M. Silver's *Remaking Eden: Cloning and Beyond in a Brave New World*, mentions that Silver 'raises the possibility of a lesbian couple [who] might have a child that is genetically related to both of them, through a process known as embryo fusion' (Raeburn 11).

Raeburn...is obtuse regarding the congruence between feminist science fiction and current cultural manifestations...He never mentions that embryo fusion raised the real possibility of a feminist science fiction scenario...Feminist science fiction always knew what is now being said...foresaw a reproductive method accomplished without a penis. (Barr 75-76)

The feminist science fiction Barr examines in her essay emphasizes female autonomy and the unnecessary male. Fictions containing futures where cloning is possible represent complete independence: women not only do not need men to reproduce, but can create genetic doubles of themselves, literal reproductions. While *Tank Girl* does not go as far as to suggest the complete inessential nature of the penis as some feminist dystopia fictions of the 1990s do, the film exposes the myth of the superior penis, and calls into question overarching heterosexual paradigms.

Tank Girl further debunks the connection between penis and phallus through Kesslee's character. The head of WP, Kesslee is Rebecca's nemesis throughout the film. He wears suits, quotes poetry, and speaks articulately: a classically cultured villain. Kesslee is left in severe medical condition after an ambush by the Rippers. Body broken, he hires a specialist in

cybergenic reconstructive surgery, recreating himself and augmenting his human body with technology. Now a cyborg—both biological and mechanical—Kesslee continues his attempts to capture Rebecca, Sam, and the Rippers. However, Kesslee now embodies important post-phallic dimensions: the human body (and specifically the human penis) cannot control the phallic power *Tank Girl's* post apocalyptic society ascribes to it. Kesslee must become a cyborg in order to continue in his pursuit of Rebecca and the Rippers. The expectations of a phallogocentric culture can no longer be contained within the male body. Soldiers need guns. Kesslee needs a new body. The myth of phallic power connected to the human penis crumbles.

Metafiction and Performativity

One of *Tank Girl's* most charming postmodern moments is the dance scene at Liquid Silver. After discovering that Sam is being held in a post-apocalyptic version of a brothel, Rebecca and Jet race to save her. However, once they arrive at Liquid Silver, the action-driven plot takes a holiday, and Rebecca and Jet engage in a myriad of activities seemingly unrelated to rescuing Sam. The scene may leave audience members frustrated, as instead of realizing the gravity of the situation Rebecca, with no sense of urgency at all, takes the time to publicly humiliate the Madam (the woman who sent Sam as a schoolgirl virgin to an old male customer) by forcing her to sing “Let’s Do It” by Cole Porter. As the Madam sings, the sex workers and male customers slowly join in until the entire room is singing and dancing, with piano accompaniment. The scene is funny, notoriously out-of-place, and provides an interesting opportunity for the audience to step out of the story that Talalay tells. This metafictional moment, while reinforcing Rebecca’s complete unpredictability, also reminds viewers that they are watching a film. In real life, sex workers and clientele wouldn’t break out into a

choreographed song and dance routine, and yet in *Tank Girl* they do, unapologetically and in precise harmonies. In doing so, the film draws attention to the fact that it is a fictional creation and allows viewers to ask important questions about the relationship between *Tank Girl*'s fiction and our reality. The actors are seen as actors, not as the characters they are playing, and for a moment, the audience's collective suspension of disbelief disappears: we see through the veil.

Another way in which *Tank Girl* forces the audience to be attentive to the performance is when Rebecca gets dressed in Liquid Silver's dressing room. A woman appears on a television screen in front of her and begins to provide instructions on how to dress. She says, "Dancers, welcome to Liquid Silver. First we are going to create your look" (*Tank Girl Script*). The creation of the dancers' look is a recognition of the performance aspect of gender: in order to perform correctly, there are certain steps each woman must follow. Rebecca, of course, comes out wearing fish nets, a garter, and a safety-pinned version of the dancers outfits. Smiling, she says, "Lock up your sons." For Rebecca at least, there is room for subjective female sexuality outside Liquid Silver's norm.

Tank Girl's disruption of the symbolic connection between phallus and penis, as well as the film's repeated questioning of gender roles is an interesting critique of how power is located. *Tank Girl*, when read as a postmodern film rather than an overtly feminist one, does feminist work. The subversion of the male gaze, Rebecca's relationship with Sam, her sexual relationship with Booga, and her appropriation of WP's tank upset dominant gender paradigms and allow Rebecca, as a female, to embody masculine power spaces. This embodiment breaks down the previously accepted cultural narrative that phallic power and the biological penis are synonymous, therefore critiquing corrupt systems such as WP, which relies on the continued connection between penis and phallus to remain in power.

Part II

Patti Smith: Interactions with Punk-Rock's Masculinities and Multiple Subjectivities

Renegades of High Culture

Patti Smith moved to New York when she was 20 years old, and after spending some time studying at the Pratt Institute, she left college to pursue her art. In Smith's memoir, *Just Kids*, she recalls nights spent tucked in a small, furniture-less apartment, lit by candles, letting a record play over and over into the night. During the 1960s and early 1970s Smith spent her time writing poetry, creating art, and working odd jobs at bookshops and diners to pay the bills. She recalls this time, living with her sometimes lover, Robert Maplethorpe in New York. She says,

Our first winter together was a harsh one...we had very little money. Often, we'd stand in the cold on the corner of St. James Place in eyeshot of the Greek diner and Jake's art supply store, debating how to spend our few dollars—a toss-up between grilled cheese sandwiches and art supplies. (Smith 56)

Though in her early days Smith was forced many times to choose between eating well and her art, today her contribution to music is unquestioned. Pioneering a style of music that incorporated poetry and spoken word, Smith and her band successfully entered the male-dominated rock arena. Smith's contribution to the emerging counter-cultural punk scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s came at a time when women were only just beginning to participate in the male-dominated music scene. Populated with characters such as Andy Warhol, Jim Morrison, Gerard Malanga, Robert Maplethorpe, and Allen Lanier, the world Smith occupied was one of severely limited choices for women. Though there were women participating in and

creating rock music, they had limited power and choices in what to perform. Additionally, women had to subscribe to different standards than men. As Sheila Whiteley argues in *Wonderful World, Beautiful People: The 1960s' counter culture and its ideological relationship to women*, “both the lifestyle and the musical ethos of the period undermined the role of women, positioning them as either romanticized fantasy figures, subservient earth mothers or easy lays” (Whiteley 23). This woman-as-object paradigm, upheld through the performances and lyrics of many popular rock songs at the time, allowed women very few options, limiting “acceptable” roles to Sigmund Freud’s oft-seen Madonna/whore complex, noted by Whiteley above. The restricted subject positions available to women during the 1960s and 1970s discouraged them from participating in the music business. While male musicians were seen as voices of the revolution, female performers, according to Whiteley, were just entertainment. Relegated to positions of sexual object and eye candy, women musicians were unable to occupy positions of power within the musical community. Fewer studios were willing to produce their music; fewer people heard their voices. As Norma Coate’s says in *Gender in the Music Industry*, “The gender of rock may seem stable, but it is ‘stabilised’ through a constant process of reiteration and the performance of ‘masculinity,’ which act to keep that which is unrepresentable within it firmly on the outside” (27).

This objectification is clearly seen in Simon Reynolds’ book, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock ‘n’ Roll*. Critiquing the misogynistic lyrics of many popular rock groups at the time such as The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and Fleetwood Mac, Reynolds argues that in the Fleetwood Mac songs ‘Black Magic Woman’ and ‘Gold Dust Woman,’ the overwhelming misogyny is in no way diminished because the songs are sung by a woman, Stevie Nicks. A classic example of a female-fronted, male dominated rock band, Fleetwood Mac’s songs many

times uphold damaging gender stereotypes. Interestingly, similar to Nicks, Smith also was the female singer of an otherwise male rock band (Lenny Kaye on guitar, Ivan Kral on bass, Jay Dee Daugherty on drums, and Richard Sohl on piano). Like Fleetwood Mac, the Patti Smith Group could have easily fallen into the trap of painting women as either untouchable goddesses or fallen whores. However, although Smith does occupy the space of the archetypal male rock performer, she commands new subjectivities, refuses to fall into an easily identifiable identity, and requires respect rather than simply inviting the male gaze. In doing so, she breaks the archetype: as a woman occupying male rock space successfully, Smith deconstructs the notion that rock performers are solely male. She parodies many of the damaging tropes and stereotypes repeated in popular music at the time. While many other female performers in the last 50 years have participated in the deconstruction of punk rock's masculinities, I am particularly interested in Smith's contribution because of its postmodern dimensions. Smith's recasting of traditional rock songs, as well as her performed subjectivities representing lesbian desire on *Horses* iterated a different kind of gendered rock performance, opening up new subjectivities for female listeners. Her performances on *Horses* are examples of musical spaces in which unconventional female subjectivities thrive. In order to analyze these subjectivities, I will focus on the songs *Gloria* and *Redondo Beach*. I will also discuss Smith's androgyny and stage performance in connection to gendered performance, arguing that though she never claimed the label "feminist" her obvious performance of unconventional gender and androgyny demonstrate how constructed our gendered reality is. In this way, Smith participates in feminist work.

***Gloria*: Subjectivity and Objectivity**

Against a backdrop of limited subjectivities and stunted options, Smith released her album, *Horses*, in 1975. Now ranked 44th on *Rolling Stone's* "Top 500 Albums of All Time," *Horses* pioneered a style of music that led many to call Smith the godmother of punk rock. As well as her own original music, *Horses* contains renditions of various popular rock songs, including Them's *Gloria*. By 1975, *Gloria*, originally sung by vocalist Van Morrison, had already been reworked and covered by many musicians. Participating in yet another recreation of Morrison's original tale of masculine sexual conquest, Smith's cover describes *Gloria* in sexual and sometimes problematic terms.

Morrison's *Gloria* begins, "she come around here about midnight / she come around here about midnight / make me feel so good / every night around midnight." *Gloria* is immediately identified as an overtly sexual woman, positioned to make the male narrator feel good, "like a woman do." The rest of Morrison's *Gloria* is similar: "She's a natural born woman / Natural born soul sender / Natural born woman / Natural born soul sender / Come here about midnight." The narrator is in a position of eager compliance, unwilling or unable to control the way this "natural born woman" makes him feel. Interestingly, in Morrison's version, *Gloria* is also described as a "natural born soul sender" a familiar stereotype within cultural metanarratives of the time: women as the gatekeepers of purity. *Gloria* will send the narrator's soul to either heaven or hell, and the narrator has no control over his desire because of her overwhelming sexuality. While this does afford *Gloria* a limited amount of sexual autonomy, it is only within the context of male desire, and simultaneously creates a double-standard in which female sexuality is either idealized or shamed. As the narrator has no power next to the sexual *Gloria*, blame for any perceived wrong in their sexual encounter lies with *Gloria* alone.

In *Daughters of Chaos: Patti Smith, Siouxsie Sioux and the feminisation of rock*,

Whiteley says,

The sense of adopting a sexual pose, of playing with, and performing different gendered identities, is picked up in the first two tracks of [*Horses*]. ‘Gloria’ is sung from the point of view of the predatory male of the Van Morrison original, but Smith’s vocals play on sexual ambivalence. She is identified as the masculine figure in a relationship that includes a feminised partner. (101)

Smith’s occupation of a narrative position similar to Morrison’s leads some listeners to believe that Smith reinscribes the problematic sexual politics at play within the original song, reinforcing the woman-as-object paradigm through copying Morrison’s narrative position of the predatory male. However, it is precisely because Smith’s narrator inhabits a sexual space that is not necessarily Smith’s that *Gloria* becomes subversive. Just as Smith’s ambiguously gendered photo on the cover of *Horses* implies, femininity alone—at least what 1960s and 1970s culture described as femininity—cannot be assigned to her. She occupies many different identities throughout *Horses*, playing with gendered assumptions through ambiguous vocals and lyrics. Though some may read this as an attempt to disavow anything feminine in order to fit into the male-centric rock culture of the time, I believe Smith’s occupation and adaptation of different gender roles, sexual subjectivities, and rock spaces is a profoundly subversive act. Specifically in *Gloria*, by singing from a narrative perspective that is not necessarily her own, Smith demonstrates that not only biological males can inhabit these spaces. Because the narrator in Smith’s rendition is female, she occupies a decidedly different subject position than the voyeuristic male narrator in Morrison’s version. This allows the song to take on interesting queer and postmodern dynamics, leading listeners to question the very power Smith—at first glance—

seems to reinscribe. Just as Rebecca's use of Water and Power's tank could be read as oppressive, one could argue that Smith's narrative androgyny and objectification of Gloria is simply a way for Smith to be accepted in the male rock scene, a way for her to participate on the same level as the boys. However, as Mike Daley argues in his article *Patti Smith's Gloria: intertextual play in rock vocal performance*, Smith's mimicry of Morrison's narrative position is a parody. He says,

Smith perpetrates fractures upon the generally accepted signifiers of Morrison's performance and text, opening up a space for the co-optation of the original 'Gloria's' power and pleasure...At the same time that she invokes the meanings of 'Gloria' and male-coded rock and roll for her own needs, Smith flouts the conventions of rock singing, exposing the cracks in Morrison's macho stance with her exaggerated leering, 'male' vocal performance." (Daley 236-237)

By drawing Morrison's idealized vision of male sexual conquest into a feminine space, Smith parodies the sexually aggressive, overly-masculine, and sometimes derogatory tropes and language found in many rock songs of the time. In addition to Smith's intentional narrative flip in *Gloria*, Daley argues that the features of Smith's vocal performance in the song such as timbre and intonation can "change the affective and attitudinal aspects of a verbal message" (235). Because it had been covered numerous times by 1975, the message of Morrison's original *Gloria* was normalized and easily recognizable. Smith's version, more of a "re-working" than a cover, performed obvious variations on the expected, male vocal performance. According to Daley, "Smith draws Morrison's 'Gloria' into a new context, where its linguistic and musical texts can be distended and reconstituted" (236). In contrast to Morrison's original,

Smith's interpretation of 'Gloria' plays on this ambiguous gender coding, using Morrison's passive male character as a springboard for a more powerful protagonist of vague gender, who retains responsibility and agency even as Gloria spontaneously approaches the room...Thus, Smith co-opts Morrison's text by violating its structural cohesion, the status of its significance; her new text manipulates the signifiers of Morrison's language for her own desires, to enact a fantasy of omniscient control. (Daley 237)

Through repeating and mimicking the common tropes found in Morrison's original song, Smith demonstrates the performativity of narrative gender in rock and roll.

In Sarah Smith's essay, *A Cock of One's Own*, she says

Housing men's phallic power in their penises is not merely a linguistic problem; it affects social policy and cultural belief systems....When sexual power is culturally located in an organ that only men have—as is the case in all of Western culture—the balance of power between the sexes is clearly tipped in men's favor. (298)

Similar to *Tank Girl's* appropriation of Water and Power's tank—a cultural site used to house and demonstrate phallic and military power—Smith's occupation of male rock space also disrupts the supposed connection between penis and phallus. Morrison's *Gloria* is a story of male sexual conquest. So is Smith's. By experimenting with male rock space, rewriting Morrison's classic tale of conquest, Smith proves that women too can occupy what was previously thought of as solely male space. However, Smith doesn't participate in this occupation in a completely serious way. She recognizes Morrison's over-used tropes and, rather than appropriating this form of male dominance and merely backing it with a female voice, Smith parodies this narrative position. Sarah Smith reinforces how this cooptation of masculine space is a powerful act,

arguing that lesbians who engage in dildo play break down the connection between penis and phallus, proving that women can wield phallic power as well. She says,

Their pro-dildo discourse sees that the phallus is symbolized by, but not interchangeable with, the penis, and therefore examines how the penis is granted the institutional authority to represent phallic power and how that authority might be more equitably distributed. Dildo play is encouraged in this camp because it represents experimentations with power, challenging deeply ingrained gender role assumptions. (Smith 299)

Applying this theory to Smith's performance of Morrison's *Gloria*, I argue that rather than reinscribing the oft-seen gender stereotypes of the original song, Smith's *Gloria* breaks down the cultural belief that only men performing a certain sexuality can perform rock music. Through demonstrably commanding this power, the supposed connection between penis and phallus is further deconstructed. Also, as I will show with Hermione in the *Harry Potter* series, throughout *Horses* Smith performs multiple subjectivities. This too deconstructs traditional gender stereotypes, opening up new spaces for women in rock.

Smith's version begins with a couplet taken from one of her earlier published poems, "Jesus died for somebody's sins, but not mine." The inclusion of this epitaph begins the song with a certain feeling of responsibility, "My sins my own, they belong to me," she sings. In stark contrast to Morrison's narrator who is a voyeuristic yet passive recipient of Gloria's sexuality, setting up a dynamic in which Gloria is blamed for any sexual tryst, Smith's narrator, in the first line, accepts responsibility for her actions. This claim of responsibility is also a claim of a sexual subject position, an acknowledgement and recognition of the mutuality of a consensual sexual

encounter. Rather than blaming the “natural born woman” for seducing a passive male narrator, Smith’s narrator claims this sexual space fully.

Additionally, *Gloria* can be read as a song about lesbian desire. While this does not make the song inherently feminist, it does confront listeners with a representation of queer subjectivities. Not only does Smith occupy a rock space traditionally inhabited by males, but by singing in her own voice about a woman, she also presents listeners with a queer or lesbian sexuality which is overwhelmingly absent from traditional rock music. The normalized subject positions for women in rock at the time (mainly Madonna and whore) are mirrored by the normalized masculine narrative positions: pursuer of the virgin-like Madonna or passive recipient of the whore’s overwhelming sexuality. Smith’s insistence on multiple subject positions disrupts the heteronormative male narrative position just as provides further space for female listeners to identify with a wider variety of subjecthoods.

***Redondo Beach* and Androgyny: Queer Rock Space**

The second track on *Horses*, *Redondo Beach*, is similar to *Gloria* in that it represents lesbian desire and provides space for queer subjectivities in punk rock. The surprisingly upbeat reggae backing is belied by Smith’s lyrics: a story of love and loss as Smith laments the suicide of her possible lover. She sings, “Everyone was singing, girl is washed up / on Redondo Beach and everyone is so sad. / I was looking for you, are you gone gone? / Pretty little girl, everyone cried. / She was the victim of sweet suicide. / I went looking for you, are you gone gone?” While there are many interpretations of *Redondo Beach*, I choose to read it as a Sapphic love song. As the woman is taken away in a hearse after she drowns herself, Smith sings, “You’ll never return into my arms 'cause you were gone gone. / Never return into my arms 'cause you were gone

gone.” *Redondo Beach* is simple in its structure. With a verse-chorus-verse-chorus-verse-chorus format and repetitive lyrics, along with its simple reggae beat, it is easily dismissed in the context of the rest of *Horses*. However, its representation of queer subjectivity cannot be overlooked. Rather than occupying rock space as an overly-sexualized woman, or sweet and innocent doo-wop-er, Smith’s look is sometimes referred to as a “third gender.” Influenced heavily by Robert Maplethorpe, her look, as well as her deep, raspy voice, allows her to retain female pronouns in *Gloria* and sing about lesbian desire in *Redondo Beach*, thus opening up more subjectivities for women in rock, particularly queer subjectivities.

In Sheila Whiteley’s essay, *Patti Smith: The Old Grey Whistle Test, BBC-2 TV, May 11, 1976*, she provides an interesting critique of Smith’s androgyny in relation to the androgyny of male rock performers at the time, specifically Mick Jagger. While punk did provide space for women to explore subjectivities outside those of the goddess or the overly sexualized woman, Smith “was the instigator, the sexy androgyne whose extraordinary stare and lithe, sensual body challenged the sexual certainties of mainstream femininity” (Whiteley 85). The politics surrounding androgyny in the music industry, especially regarding performed gender ambiguity are complex. Artists such as David Bowie, Iggy Pop, and the Beatles experimented with androgyny and even drag well before the release of *Horses*, but women’s participation in this trend was more difficult, as the expectations of mainstream femininity provided little space for experimentation. Comparing Smith to Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, I argue that while androgyny and experimentation are not always subversive in and of themselves, Smith’s performance of androgyny rejected gender expectations and allowed her to perform unconventional subjectivities.

Jagger and the Rolling Stones retain a defining misogyny throughout their music.

Directly contrasting the Beatles' nice guy image, the Stones expressed a disavowal of traditional gender roles, domesticity, and family values. In *The Sex Revolts*, Reynolds writes, "The Stones' anti-charisma was inextricably bound up with the notion of an uncouth underclass preying on the most precious property of the respectable classes: their daughters' bodies...the Stones' ruffian image seduced (some) girls with the prospect that they would be treated roughly, without respect" (19-20). The basis for the Stones' music is rebellion. However, in expressing this rebellion the group ends up communicating a rejection of women who do not fit into very limited, suffocatingly defined roles.

Domination and contempt are not the only emotions in the Stones' songs, of course: elsewhere there's the pallid devotion of 'Lady Jane' or the mawkish idealisation of 'Ruby Tuesday,' ...In a 1978 *Rolling Stone* interview, Jonathan Cott suggested to Jagger that there was a split in his songs. Girls are either denigrated for being dominating, malicious or treacherous ('Tumbling Dice', 'Sitting On A Fence', 'Let It Loose'); used up and discarded ('Out Of Time', 'Please Go Home', 'All Sold Out', 'Congratulations'); or else they're idealised as elusive, mystical sprites ('Ruby Tuesday', 'Child Of the Moon')—to which Jagger concurred, reluctantly. (Reynolds 21)

With these problematic sexual politics permeating much of the Stones' music, it would be difficult to argue that the group was in any way feminist. Indeed, it would even be difficult to argue that Jagger was postmodern in his relationship to gender roles. Although Jagger and the Stones did often dress in androgynous clothing (sometimes even in drag), "the Stones usurped the female 'privileges' of self-adornment and narcissism, while belittling real-life women for just such frivolousness" (Reynolds 16). Somehow, the Stones rebellion against traditional forms of

masculinity still left them profoundly misogynistic.

Conversely, Patti Smith's androgynous presentation represents a very different politic. While Smith's representations of multiple feminine subjectivities and lyrical playfulness add to her already subversive gendered self-presentation, Jagger's misogyny belays any possible feminist reading of his gendered performance. Smith's androgynous and sometimes masculine clothing are a concrete cooptation of male rock space. Rather than relying on the fixity of gender by inviting the male gaze or disavowing anything feminine, Smith marks herself as unique through her appearance. According to Whiteley, "Her clothes, her stance, her attitude served as outward marks of difference that were both fluid and curiously asexual. What was at stake in this experience of the dualism of gender and sexuality was the possibility of distancing the feminine through an assumed persona that denaturalized sexual difference" (86). Smith fractures our normalized ideas of women performing music not only through her narrative positioning on *Horses*, but also through her androgynous look. This "denaturalization" as Whiteley terms it, provides an example of experimentation with gender identities. Additionally, just like the drag queens on whom Judith Butler based her theory of performativity, Smith's obvious performance raises questions about the solidity of gender roles. According to Butler, in her essay *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*,

Where the notion of 'proper' operates, it is always and only *improperly* installed as the effect of a compulsory system. Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that

produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the original itself.” (1520, emphasis in original).

By demonstrating that gender is imitable, Smith, like Butler’s drag queens, proves its constructedness. This opens up space for critique of gender norms and metanarratives about gender expectations.

Smith’s obvious performance of *Gloria*’s normalized tale of male sexual conquest parodies this culturally accepted trope. Through her performance, she exposes and mocks rock’s formulaic attempt at subverting the system. While performers such as Mick Jagger attempt to subvert the system through androgyny and drag, Smith demonstrates the performative aspects of rock’s gendered expectations and in doing so, reveals the normalized heteronormativity, sexism, and misogyny present in much of the music and performances of the period.

Part III

Sexual Geometry of the Golden Trio: Hermione's Subversion of Traditional Female

Subject Positions in Harry Potter

Any reader of *Harry Potter* is familiar with the Golden Trio: Harry, Ron and Hermione. Throughout the series, author J.K. Rowling stresses the importance of this unit: from the retrieval of the Sorcerer's Stone in the first book to the group's calculated destruction of Horcruxes in the seventh, it is Harry, Ron, and Hermione together that succeed. Ron and Hermione are not only Harry's best friends, but also his support system. As a long-time lover of the dynamics between the three best friends, a reader who wanted to slap some sense into Ron, one who shouted "Finally!" when Ron and Hermione got together, and turned into a sniffing, sentimental mess at Harry's noble (albeit stupid) attempt to hunt down Voldemort alone, I was both excited and nervous to submit the *Harry Potter* series to critical inquiry. The world of Harry Potter isn't some post-apocalyptic war zone like that of *Tank Girl*, or Patti Smith's poet world of the late 1960s and early 1970s in New York. While *Tank Girl* and Patti Smith caught my imagination as a young adult, I grew up at Hogwarts. I celebrated my birthdays along with the Boy Who Lived. I went through the awkward years of puberty (with braces and a questionable perm) with Hermione as my guide. And while I never defeated a Basilisk, I worried that while writing this paper I would somehow lose part of my intangible, wide-eyed, childhood love of the series; feared I would discover something that would lead me to question my heretofore unflagging devotion to the Golden Trio in all their bickering, lovable madness. Thankfully, that didn't happen. My study of the trio—and specifically Hermione's role within it—has only solidified what my ten-year-old self could only define as their "*togetherness.*"

Tipping the Triangle

In this paper I will examine the Golden Trio, and Hermione's role in it in the context of theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's construct of the erotic triangle. In her book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, she explains the structure of the erotic triangle, focusing relationships among men, and how they relate to women and to the gender system as a whole. Women's primary purpose, according to the classic reading of the erotic triangle, is to solidify bonds between men. It's the oft-heard, eye-roll-inducing classic story of men in competition over a woman with little or no agency of her own. According to Sedgwick, "the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle [is] even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved" (21). Sedgwick argues that in competition over (and pursuit of) the female body, homosocial bonds between males are formed, bonds that are even stronger than the heterosexual bonds between the pursuant and the object of desire. Thus, the relationship formed with another male through rivalry is asserted as more valuable than love. In the pursuit of a female within an erotic triangle, "it is the bond between males that [is] most assiduously uncover[ed]," Sedgwick argues. (21)

Approaching male-male-female triangulated characters in this way, it is possible to read male homosocial bonds as homosexual. However, Sedgwick makes a careful point to note that homosocial bonds and homosexuality exist on a continuum:

"Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual."...To draw the

“homosocial” back into the orbit of “desire,” of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted. (Sedgwick 1-2)

Sedgwick attempts to place homosocial bonds between men back into the realm of the erotic. However, she says, “I do not mean to discuss the genital homosexual desire as ‘at the root of’ other forms of homosociality—but rather a strategy for making generalizations about, or marking historical differences in, the *structure* of men’s relationships with other men” (2). Sedgwick hints here at the possibility of reading male pursuants’ desire as homosexual; however, she is not solely interested in arguing that latent homosexual desire is “at the root of” all homosocial bonds. She explains that homosociality and homosexuality exist on a continuum that is rarely recognized in a culture so permeated with homophobia and fear of difference. Within this context, it is the introduction of a female third party into the homosocial/homosexual continuum that creates the traditional erotic triangle.

The placement of the female into this sexual drama precludes homosexual tension between male pursuants, allowing it an acceptable heterosexual outlet. The typical role of the female within the context of an erotic triangle is contradictory: she deflects homosexual tension between her male pursuants, while simultaneously strengthening their homosocial bonds as they compete for her love. Hermione’s position as a woman within the Golden Trio’s erotic triangle diverts much of the sexual tension between Harry and Ron, arguably making a homoerotic reading of the two boys difficult. However, without Hermione to act as an acceptable heterosexual outlet for any sexual tension, the boys’ homosocial bond would have been less likely to flourish, and they could have been mistaken for homosexual. Thus, the politics

surrounding male homosociality are entirely dependent upon the female as a heterosexual outlet. As Sedgwick says, male homosocial desire is only acceptable “within the structural context of triangular, heterosexual desire” (16). Rowling’s introduction of Hermione as a female character is necessary and calculated. With any homoeroticism between Harry and Ron carefully siphoned into competition (or perceived competition) over Hermione, homosocial bonds between the boys flourish.

Within traditional erotic triangles, females are most often portrayed as passive, while two other active members (most often the men) engage in bond-forming rivalry over the inactive female. It’s a commonly repeated cultural narrative: the princess trapped in a tall tower, captive of some evil magician/prince/lord/what-have-you, awaiting her handsome prince. A battle over the female body then ensues. Within the European tradition, “women appear to be dependent on the power relationships between men and men” (Sedgwick 26). Sedgwick views this canonical portrayal as another form of trafficking women: “the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” (26). While Hermione’s theoretical position within the Golden Trio is apparent and does allow for strong homosocial bonds to form between Harry and Ron, her actions within this limited context subvert the assumed passivity so often associated with the female body in this role. According to Sedgwick,

the triangle that most shapes this view tends, in the European tradition, to involve bonds of ‘rivalry’ between males ‘over’ a woman...*any* relation of rivalry is structured by the same play of emulation and identification, whether the entities occupying the corners of the triangle be heroes, heroines, gods, books, or whatever. (23)

Although Harry and Ron's theoretically recognized positions within the triangle do lead them to be in sexual competition over Hermione, never is it a rivalry between males "over" a woman, as traditionally seen. From the first novel, Hermione refuses to fit into the traditional position of woman within the erotic triangle.

"I'm Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?"

First, it is important to note the way in which Hermione is introduced to readers on the Hogwarts Express. Because of Rowling's use of the third-person limited narrative technique, readers are introduced to characters and live out the books' adventures through Harry's eyes. However, despite the limiting narrative technique Rowling uses and readers' pre-conceived gender biases, Hermione establishes herself as a competent, intelligent character from her introduction.

The toadless boy was back, but this time he had a girl with him. She was already wearing her new Hogwarts robes.

"Has anyone seen a toad? Neville's lost one," she said. She had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth.

"We've already told him we haven't seen it," said Ron, but the girl wasn't listening, she was looking at the wand in his hand.

"Oh, are you doing magic? Let's see it, then." (*Sorcerer's Stone* 105)

Given limited descriptions of Hermione's physical appearance, readers rely on Rowling's portrayal of Hermione's conversation with Harry and Ron to draw conclusions about her character.

“Are you sure that’s a real spell?” said the girl. “Well, it’s not very good, is it? I’ve tried a few simple spells just for practice and it’s all worked for me...I’ve learned all our course books by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough, -- I’m Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?” (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 106)

Hermione exits the compartment saying “You two had better change, you know, I expect we’ll be there soon,” leaving Harry and Ron speechless. (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 106) From this first encounter, the boys seem to have made up their minds about the bushy-haired know-it-all. Due to the third-person limited narrative technique that Rowling uses, readers also adopt Harry’s primary assumptions about Hermione. Instead of viewing Hermione as an obviously intelligent, assertive female, readers too are more prone to think of her as a bossy know-it-all. Since intelligence and assertiveness are traits more positively associated with males, when Hermione is introduced, Harry and Ron channel these typically masculine characteristics into a more acceptable form: intelligent becomes know-it-all, assertive becomes bossy, and Hermione, in the readers’ eyes, is placed into a more easily understandable position through the feminine descriptors used to introduce her character. This is as much due to the narration as it is to readers’ pre-conceived gender biases. However, from this first meeting, Hermione establishes herself as an intellectual superior and social equal of both Harry and Ron.

Readers’ assumptions about Hermione, as well as those of Harry and Ron, change as *Sorcerer’s Stone* progresses. After the trio’s friendship is cemented following a run in with a mountain troll, Hermione spends most of her time in the company of Harry and Ron. “From that moment on, Hermione Granger became their friend. There are some things you can’t share without ending up liking each other, and knocking out a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them” (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 179). While Hermione is trapped in the girls’ bathroom with the troll,

Harry and Ron rush to her aid, knocking out the troll and saving Hermione. Here, it is important to note that it was Harry and Ron who trapped the troll in the bathroom with Hermione to begin with, Rowling's tongue-in-cheek mockery of the erotic triangle narrative, as our bumbling, eleven-year-old princes only attempt to save the princess after first putting her in mortal danger. Through this ordeal, Hermione is aligned with two male characters and her position within the theoretical erotic triangle, as well as within the Golden Trio is solidified. However, even in her assumption of this recognizable role, Hermione subverts its inherent passivity. Instead of sitting quietly and letting Harry and Ron explain the troll situation to Professors Snape and McGonagall, embodying the subject position of damsel in distress, Hermione asserts that the mess is her fault: "I went looking for the troll because I—I thought I could deal with it on my own—you know, because I've read all about them" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 177). Harry and Ron are obviously surprised: "Harry was speechless. Hermione was the last person to do anything against the rules, and here she was, pretending she had, to get them out of trouble" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 178). Hermione, after being saved by the boys, subverts the damsel in distress stereotype, taking action in the situation and covering for them. In a traditional erotic triangle narrative, Hermione's sole purpose would be to embody a position of vulnerability, allowing male pursuants to save her as they attempt to prove their love. Hermione's position as a young female in danger from a monster is stereotypical; however, her actions within this context are not. While in a traditional narrative Hermione would have remained inactive, here she tips the triangle, changing the presumed power dynamic and saving Harry and Ron in turn.

Subjectivity for Women in *Harry Potter*

Just like Hermione the damsel in distress, most subject positions available to women within the *Harry Potter* series are based in stereotypical, traditional female positions. While Rowling's characters are by no means one dimensional, the representation of girls and women within the text is limited, in many cases, to traditional roles: McGonagal, the strict school madam; Molly Weasley, the tutting mother; Petunia, the shrill stepmother figure; Lavender Brown, the shallow competing woman; Fleur Delacour, the tempting seductress; and Bellatrix Lestrange, the sexualized villainess. While many of these representations owe as much to the fairy tale genre Rowling draws from as to her characterizations, girls reading *Harry Potter* identify with the subject positions made available. In this way, *Harry Potter* can reinforce traditional views of femininity.

Hermione's position as a woman within the fantasy genre is already one of passivity. Although fantasy literature has traditionally been more accepting of the female presence than science fiction or horror (other genres containing supernatural forces), fantasy's use of archetypes many times reflects patriarchal gender norms and the limited options available to women. As with her position within the traditional erotic triangle, Hermione's position as a female friend in the fantasy genre contains many assumed characteristics. She is support, a friend, a love interest. Interestingly, all these positions depend heavily on the male hero. Many times, the female friend has few defining characteristics without relation to the male hero. Other commonly seen tropes in the fantasy genre include the evil villainess or damsel in distress. Both these subject positions also rely heavily upon the male hero: an evil seductress needs prey; a damsel in distress needs a savior. As with the erotic triangle, Hermione's theoretical position within the series would have placed her in the damsel in distress category—constantly being

acted upon, a female character created to cement male homosocial bonding, without any real agency of her own. However, because Hermione embodies multiple subject positions throughout the series outside that of the damsel in distress, female best friend or love interest, she subverts the assumed passivity of this role.

According Meredith Cherland, author of *Harry's Girls: Harry Potter and the Discourse of Gender*, “in *The Goblet of Fire* we see Hermione the giggler (on page 77), Hermione the helpful and capable (on page 302), Hermione the emotionally expressive (on page 631)” (278). Additionally in *The Goblet of Fire*, readers are given Hermione the activist and many other subject positions in other books. (374) While Cherland argues that the embodiment of multiple subject positions removes Hermione’s credibility as a character, I argue that Hermione’s flexibility in regards to subject positions allows for a wider array of subject positions for female readers to identify with. Hermione’s ability to move in and out of positions—and to subvert traditional subjectivities she is placed into—allows girls and women to recognize that they don’t need to fit into one single subject position, such as the tempting seductress. As Hermione shows (and as I will discuss later), one can be a seductress for an evening, and continue to be intelligent and book-smart as well. Though this may be perceived as inconsistency in regards to Hermione, I believe it is a statement: worlds do not exist exclusive from each other. Young girls reading Hermione’s character may realize that one can crusade for human (or elf) rights while at the same time being a best friend, a date, a student, and a daughter.

In addition to the multiple subject positions Hermione embodies throughout the series, she is also active in a version of feminist politics. Hermione’s involvement with the house elves is clearly meant to draw a connection between the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare (S.P.E.W.) and the early feminist movement. One of Britain’s earliest women’s organizations,

established in 1859, was called the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (SPEW). Like these early feminists, Hermione faces opposition:

“What’s in the box?” [Ron] asked, pointing at it.

“Funny you should ask,” said Hermione, with a nasty look at Ron. She took off the lid and showed them the contents. Inside were about fifty badges, all of different colors, but all bearing the same letters: S.P.E.W.

“Spew?” said Harry, picking up a badge and looking at it.

“What’s this about?”

“Not spew,” said Hermione impatiently. “It’s S-P-E-W. Stands for the Society for the promotion of Elfish Welfare.” (*Goblet 224*)

Some scholars believe S.P.E.W.’s name undermines a feminist reading of Hermione’s actions because Rowling—even in naming the movement—mocks it. However, I argue that rather than mocking the feminist movement through Hermione’s activism with S.P.E.W., Rowling pays homage to it. Hermione’s fervor surrounding elfish welfare echoes that of the early feminists fighting for equal employment opportunities. Through her involvement with S.P.E.W., Hermione advocates for a political underclass (or political underspecies). Hermione’s actions regarding S.P.E.W. invite readers to identify her with the feminist movement and allow for further feminist readings of her actions.

Erotic Spaces, Romantic Interest

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Rowling presents readers with the first glimpse of Hermione’s sexuality. Outside the context of the Golden Trio’s theoretical erotic triangle, Hermione experiences her first crush. Gilderoy Lockhart, the new Defense Against the

Dark Arts professor, has a profound effect on Hermione: “‘Why,’ demanded Ron, seizing her schedule, ‘have you outlined all Lockhart’s lessons in little hearts?’ Hermione snatched the schedule back, blushing furiously” (*Chamber of Secrets* 95). Because Hermione is viewed as a non-sexual, bookish know-it-all throughout the first book, Rowling’s presentation of Hermione as a school-girl with a crush seems ridiculous. Hermione’s attempts at feminization—drawing hearts in her notebook for example—seem frivolous and overly feminized, her attempts at catching Lockhart’s attention fumbling. It is interesting to note, however, that unlike some of Hermione’s female peers, she doesn’t resort to any kind of physical attempt to impress Lockhart, instead relying solely on her intelligence to catch the professor’s eye:

“...but Miss Granger knew my secret ambition is to rid the world of evil and market my own range of hair-care potions—good girl! In fact”—he flipped her paper over—“full marks! Where is Miss Hermione Granger?”

Hermione raised a trembling hand.

“Excellent!” beamed Lockhart. “Quite excellent! Ten points to Gryffindor!”

(*Chamber of Secrets* 100-101)

Hermione’s use of intellect to her advantage is a recurring theme throughout the series and is especially important at the end of *Chamber of Secrets*. Hermione, petrified by the Basilisk, lies immobile in the hospital wing. Harry and Ron are able to put the pieces together, solve the mystery, and save Ginny, but with Hermione’s help: “It was a page torn from a very old library book... ‘Ron,’ [Harry] breathed, ‘This is it. This is the answer. The monster in the Chamber’s a *basilisk*—a giant serpent!’” (*Chamber of Secrets* 290). Even in her petrified state—one of complete immobility—Hermione still solves the mystery of the Basilisk. Although her body is petrified, she is not acted upon. Still effectively moving the plot-line forward, Hermione’s

discovery is a re-articulation of the importance of intellect and the integral role she plays within the Trio.

Ron's romantic feelings toward Hermione, hinted at subtly throughout the first three books, are more evident in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Sedgwick's erotic triangle is most apparent through Ron, as there is a legitimate reading of the text that suggests no romantic feeling whatsoever between Harry and Hermione. However, because in Ron's mind there is a rivalry over Hermione's affection, an erotic triangle is created. From *Sorcerer's Stone* on, readers are aware of Ron's felt incompetence next to Harry. Ron, overshadowed by his brothers his entire life, feels overshadowed by Harry in their friendship as well. Ron's negative reaction after Harry's name is pulled from the Goblet of Fire is evidence of this:

“It’s okay, you know, you can tell *me* the truth,” [Ron] said. “If you don’t want everyone else to know, fine, but I don’t understand why you’re bothering to lie, you didn’t get in trouble for it, did you?”

...“I didn’t put my name in that goblet!” said Harry, starting to feel angry.

“Yeah, okay,” said Ron, in exactly the same skeptical tone as Cedric. “Only you said this morning you’d have done it last night, and no one would’ve seen you...I’m not stupid you know.”

“You’re doing a really good impression of it,” Harry snapped.

“Yeah?” said Ron, and there was no trace of a grin, forced or otherwise on his face now. “You want to go to bed Harry. I expect you’ll need to be up early for a photo-call or something.”

He wrenched the hangings shut around his four-poster, leaving Harry standing there by the door, staring at the dark red velvet curtains, now hiding one of the few people he had been sure would believe him. (*Goblet of Fire* 287)

Harry, who does not understand that there is a rivalry between Ron and himself over Hermione (however understated at this point), is confused by Ron's strong reaction. Ron however, sees Harry's participation in the Triwizard Tournament as another reason why Hermione should choose Harry over himself. For Ron, the difference in power and social clout between Harry and himself is difficult to navigate and results in feelings of inadequacy. These feelings culminate in the grotesque Horcrux kiss between Harry and Hermione in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. However, because Harry refuses to actively participate in competition over Hermione and the rivalry between Ron and himself exists largely in Ron's own mind, it is ironically Krum who ultimately actively competes with Ron for Hermione's affection and allows readers to witness Ron's budding romantic feelings towards Hermione. Ron's rivalry with Viktor Krum mirrors Ron's perceived competition with Harry. Not only is Krum famous, but Ron also grew up emulating Krum as a Quidditch player, just as he did with "the boy who lived."

The Yule Ball acts as a gathering point for these tensions and is an important example of Hermione's refusal to submit to traditional female subject positions. Hermione arrives as Krum's date, angering Ron and surprising Harry. Presented in a different way at the Yule Ball than she is throughout the rest of the series, Hermione, for the first time in four books, is described as pretty: "Krum was at the front of the party, accompanied by a pretty girl in blue robes Harry didn't know" (*Goblet of Fire* 413). Harry, not accustomed to viewing Hermione as desirable, does not recognize her as she enters the Ball. When he finally does, readers too are presented with a new view of Hermione:

[Harry's] eyes fell instead on the girl next to Krum. His jaw dropped. It was Hermione. But she didn't look like Hermione at all. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes made of a floaty, periwinkle-blue material, and she was holding herself differently, somehow—or maybe it was merely the absence of the twenty or so books she usually had slung over her back. She was also smiling, rather nervously, it was true—but the reduction in the size of her front teeth was more noticeable than ever; Harry couldn't understand how he hadn't spotted it before. (*Goblet of Fire* 414)

Until Krum legitimizes Hermione's sexuality by escorting her to the Yule Ball, Harry does not acknowledge her erotic power. Unlike her fumbled attempts at feminization with Lockhart in *Chamber of Secrets*, Hermione succeeds at the Yule Ball. This is the culmination of the ugly duckling narrative readers have been waiting for since *Sorcerer's Stone* when Hermione is introduced as a bushy-haired girl. Rowling purposefully takes Hermione out of the context of school and classes in order to make this narrative move. Harry says, "maybe it was merely the absence of the twenty or so books she usually had slung over her back" (*Goblet of Fire* 414), suggesting that the erotic cannot exist within the framework of school and classes. While readers are pleased with Hermione's presentation at the Ball (a scene which conjures images of Cotillions), recognizing it as her blossoming into a young woman, on Monday Hermione returns immediately to the world of intellect and books. In doing so, she refuses to submit to the subject position of ugly-duckling-turned-swan. The erotic power she discovered at the Yule Ball, while pleasing for the evening, is nothing compared with the power she finds through intellectual means. Instead of transitioning from ugly duckling into beautiful swan and staying that way as in

traditional ugly duckling narratives, Hermione refuses to accept the limited power allotted to her as a pretty girl. Instead, she chooses intellect. The only remnants of Hermione's ugly duckling-to-swan transformation are her teeth.

Ron, who views Hermione in a romantic way, reacts with obvious jealousy to Hermione's arrival with Krum.

"It's hot isn't it?" said Hermione, fanning herself with her hand. "Viktor's just gone to get some drinks."

Ron gave her a withering look. "*Viktor?*" he said. "Hasn't he asked you to call him *Vicky* yet?"

Hermione looked at him in surprise. "What's up with you?" she said.

"If you don't know," said Ron scathingly, "I'm not going to tell you."

Hermione stared at him, then at Harry, who shrugged.

"He's from Durmstrang!" spat Ron. "He's competing against Harry! Against Hogwarts! You—you're—" Ron was obviously casting around for words strong enough to describe Hermione's crime, "*fraternizing with the enemy*, that's what you're doing!" (*Goblet of Fire* 421)

Ron's reaction is one of belligerent jealousy: he immediately assumes Krum must be using Hermione to get information about Harry. While outwardly refusing to acknowledge that another man could view Hermione erotically, Ron simultaneously feels threatened by Krum's obvious interest in Hermione. For Hermione, however, Ron's suggestion that Krum is only using her to get information about Harry is a rejection of her erotic power.

Hermione and Krum's relationship legitimizes the existence of erotic power in conjunction with intellect. "I s'pose he asked you to come with him while you were both in the

library?” (422) Ron asks Hermione. She replies yes, allowing the erotic and the intellectual to exist in relationship with each other. While Harry and Ron don't acknowledge that these two can and do exist simultaneously, Hermione does not seem to care what either of them think, returning immediately to her daily routine of classes and books, continually, casually, outsmarting the boys. In this, she demonstrates a refusal to bend to what Harry, Ron, and society generally view as desirable. Hermione subverts the passive expectation of “object” within Harry and Ron's (and Ron and Krum's) erotic triangle. Interestingly, Krum's role as rival to Ron in competition over Hermione does not create homosocial bonds between himself and Ron, but further solidifies the homosocial bonds between Harry and Ron.

Throughout the seven Harry Potter novels, Rowling consciously manipulates Hermione's actions from the expected passive to a subversive active. Rowling obviously connects Hermione to the Abolitionist and Feminist movements through her activism with S.P.E.W., and makes a point to stress the importance of Hermione's intellect, which, though it is not mutually exclusive from the erotic, is also not dependent on the erotic. Hermione derives her power not through submitting to the role of desirable object, but by acting on her knowledge and intellect. This intellect is integral to the Golden Trio. Though she is placed in a position that has historically been characterized passively, Hermione's actions within this context subvert the expectation of the role. Through aligning herself with Harry and Ron, using her intelligence instead of her looks to succeed and refusing to accept the limited power grudgingly given if she were a pretty girl, Hermione tips the triangle, making readers question its structure and the female role within it.

My ten-year-old, naive love of the Golden Trio—and Hermione especially—survived long hours of critical inquiry and discussion. And while I do not argue that the Trio is immune to

criticism, I pat my young self on the back for having the good judgment to love a character like Hermione Granger: bossy, assertive, emotional, lovable, and magnificently intelligent. Truly the brightest witch of her age.

Conclusion

The question that seems to lurk in the fault lines between feminism and postmodernism today is whether or not gender as a defining category can survive a postmodern critique. As a young, third-wave, postmodern feminist, I argue that it can. However, I don't believe our current way of categorizing gender into male and female binaries is correct. Instead, we should work from the idea of multiple subject positions that Patti Smith enacts throughout her album. We should look to Hermione, who, though according to history, genre, and context would fall passively by the wayside, instead gives readers another example of embodiment that encompasses both sides of the male and female binary. We should examine Rebecca Buck, who successfully embodies masculine power spaces in a way that exposes the performance behind such embodiments.

As I write this, *Tank Girl* is playing quietly on my television. I've seen this film over 10 times now, and each time I am again struck by the possibility of feminism and postmodernism existing in the same space. I believe, as Nicholson says in *Postmodernism/Feminism*, that the importance lies in remembering that both schools of thought are limited by the demands of specific cultural contexts. (10) I believe feminism can move towards a more attentive inclusion to queer, trans*, and genderqueer identities without losing its focus on embodiment. We can deconstruct these paradigms without forcing erasure upon women who identify themselves as women.

After a year and a half of studying these texts, I am not finished. I continue to question and pry, because these texts and others like them exist as spaces of intersection. While they are not immune to the pitfalls and problems of a world of oppression and power inconsistencies, they

simultaneously provide a space for critique of both postmodernism and feminism. These theories, used together, can do feminist work.

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