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As Her World Turns: Women and Soap Opera

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Abstract

Mass produced narratives that have been designed and targeted for predominantly female audiences have been marginalized by dominant culture. Throughout the history of art and English literature, women have been both objectified and misrepresented. All that has been deemed domestic, emotional and of the personal sphere has been declared valueless by patriarchy. The soap opera genre reverses this negative valorization. It is one that perpetuates the feminine tradition of creating communities through words - talk, gossip, testimony. In this work, the American soap opera is discussed as a venue for the exploration of issues that concern women's lives, as a site for the generation of female pleasure, and as the mother of subcultural networks that inform a female community. While the narratives address women's concerns, the soap opera fan magazines and fan clubs celebrate a form that highlights orality, emotion and empathy in a culture that often depreciates them.

Des récits produits en masse, concus et ciblés principalement pour des auditoires féminins ont, la plupart du temps, été marginalisés par la culture dominante. À travers l'histoire de l'art et de la littérature anglaise, les femmes ont été traitées en femmes objets ou dénaturées. Tout ce qui se rapporte au niveau familial, émotionel ou s'apparantant à la vie privée a été déclaré sans valeur par le patriarcat. Le feuilleton renverse cette valorisation négative. Il offre un style qui perpétu la tradition féminine en créant des communautés nouvelles grâce au bouche à oreille - parler, commérer, témoigner. Dans ce mémoire, le feuilleton américain sert de base afin d'explorer les différents sujets qui concerne les femmes. Le feuilleton joue le rôle d'un temple du plaisir pour des générations de femmes ainsi que celui de mère des réseaux de sous-culture qui servent à informer les communautés féminines. Pendant que le récit répond aux sujets qui concernent les femmes, les magazines dédiés aux fans des feuilletons ainsi qu'aux clubs de fans mettent en lumière une forme qui prône la tradition orale, l'émotion et l'empathie dans une culture qui souvent déprécie ces mêmes éléments.

Acknowledgements

The story of this thesis is not unlike the soap opera genre itself - a never-ending story. I can almost trace its inception but it would be nearly impossible for me to pinpoint its end. I can say it began in the fifth grade. I was eleven years old when I stole my first videotape from my parents to tape Days of our Lives. It was in that same year when I bought my first copy of Soap Opera Digest that I was inaugurated into the soap opera subculture. The years the followed saw the purchase of hundreds of video tapes, three VCRs, thousands of magazines, innumerous books, and nearly half a dozen trips to the studios in New York and California - all bought, consumed and collected in the name of fandom.

However, as time passed I noticed a very specific and uniform reaction to my activities by the people around me. People were perpetually shocked, surprised, and even amazed by the degree to which I was dedicated to my favorite soap. For years I struggled to balance a sense of pride within the soap opera fan community for being the bearer of such tremendous cultural capital with a sense of shame for being so misunderstood by people outside of the sub-culture. It is through the research that I have done in cultural studies, women's studies, communication theory, semiotics, art history, psychoanalysis, deconstructionism, and post-modern philosophy that I have been able to gain insight into the patterns of my own behavior, viewing habits and passion for the Daytime Serial Drama. It was with my introduction to Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, Tania Modleski, Horace Newcomb, Mary Ellen Brown, Christine Geraghty, Martha Nochimson, Charlotte Brunsdon, and Laura Stempel Mumford that I have been able to learn not only about myself but also about the world that surrounds me. To them I am tremendously grateful.

To this list I should also add Berkeley Kaite. The completion of this work marks not only a personal success of mine but a professional success of hers.

To the aforementioned list of academic icons I would like to add David Clearwater, Joya Balfour and Ingrid Begerman whom are as yet unrecognized for their scholarship but whom will certainly succeed at all they attempt. Thanks for keeping me laughing.

On a more personal level, I have to send a heartfelt thank you to the people that populate my world outside of academia. To Guy, I would like to say thank you for your patience, kindness and support throughout this emotional, difficult but thoroughly rewarding time of my life. Bonnie, I do not have words sufficient to express the respect, admiration and sense of gratitude I feel for you. And finally, to my parents and family who have supported me not only on this project but all of the projects into which I have embarked throughout my life. Thanks everyone.

Introduction

You could say that this work is about women and television soap operas. But, you could also say that it is about relationships, language, stories, histories, culture, and discourse. Throughout history, women have sought a venue for the exploration of their communal experiences and feelings. Virginia Woolf created a room of her own, and in turn, created a room for all women. Traditionally, literature has been the greatest source of narrative pleasure for women. Even in terms of popular, rather than high culture, women have been drawn to narrative fantasy through Gothic tales and Harlequin Romance Novels. However, as we move from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, from the 20th to the 21st century, television plays a greater role in touching the lives of masses of women than does text. Although soap operas are often dismissed as a passing social craze or as mindless melodrama, I propose that soap operas represent a meaningful forum where women can explore relevant social issues and emotional experiences in popular fiction form.

Living in Another World

It seems that Irna Philips, the matriarch of the soap opera, was somehow influenced by the proverb, "another world to live in is that what we mean by having a religion" when she created and then developed the daytime serial drama over sixty years ago. Philips approached the genre with a spiritual discipline and intensity, and in 1964 even titled one of her creations, Another World. Furthermore, the soap opera, more than any other art form, creates an alternate world where the characters and their environment seem to exist in a parallel dimension. Unlike other genres and individual works of art - a poem, novel, or film - which require the suspension of disbelief, the daytime serial

demands ongoing belief and daily commitment from the follower. Such surrender to an imaginative universe has engendered a loyalty and devotion that supercedes all rules of engagement: perhaps that is the reason why the soaps and their enthusiasts have been treated with suspicion, and sometimes contempt.[1]

By traditional standards, a well-made work of fiction adheres to a distinct structure; exposition in the beginning leads to a well-reasoned middle, culminating in the catharsis of the conclusion. The never-ending soap, however, is a relentless series of beginnings and middles, without any final resolutions. The soap's characters are equally complex. They take on a life of their own, often growing beyond the intentions, and even the lifetime of the original author. When Guiding Light turned sixty in 1997, the serial had already outlived its creator, Irna Philips, by twenty-three years.

Since the beginning of mass culture at the turn of the nineteenth century, authors and entrepreneurs have tried to hook an audience and keep it coming back for more. Magazines, books, comic strips, and films have all employed a serial nature to actively engage consumers. The soap opera was an invention of American radio. This new form offered writers no temporal restrictions and thus the ability to achieve a whole new way of storytelling with realism unheard of in any other art form. Over time, the daily soap exploited the defining quality that made radio and then television distinct from other artistic experiences: their pervasive presence, day in and day out, in the home. Characters could live and die experiencing the same happiness and hardships through the years as their audience. No doubt this is why a special kinship arose between soap characters and

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[1] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1982) 18.

the listeners and viewers, a relationship so intense that academics and sociologists have speculated upon it for years.

What is more is that it is certainly not the nature of a genre to have a single inventor, but the soap opera comes close, having been infused from the beginning with the philosophy of Irna Philips. More than sixty-five years after her first serial aired on the radio, most of the television soaps can be traced back directly to Philips and her disciples including Agnes Nixon. Like the narratives which themselves focus on women – mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts – the soap opera genre's own birth seems to be able to be traced back to a single parent.

Radio Soap Operas

Prior to cinema and television being brought to the mainstream, radio was the sole tool used by master orators and artists to communicate with the masses. Much of the mystique of the early radio personalities derived from the compelling power of the individual voice. It was with the radio that President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Bing Crosby were able to address millions of listeners in a manner that was intimate, sincere and personal. Furthermore, nearly all of the early radio programs were scheduled in the evening because executives were concerned that housewives would be too distracted while working in the home if serial programs were on the radio during the daytime hours. Then came Irna Philips. This former schoolteacher was struggling to break into radio as an actress when station executives invited her to explore her talent as a scriptwriter rather than as an actor. It was during the early 1930s that Philips melded key elements in the

creation of her first program: the structure of the serial, the philosophy of the woman's program, and aspects of her own life. And so was born the soap opera.[2]

In her first series, Painted Dreams, Irna Philips focused on the role of Mother Moynihan (a part that she played herself) who oversaw a large family and boarding house. The script of the show emphasized the domestic sphere and personal relationships. Mother Moynihan's greatest concern was for her toughest daughter, Irene, who thought of herself as a modern girl, and who was ambitious for a successful career. The tensions between the old and new ways of life were played out in a series of interlocking story lines as characters grasped for their own happiness. Philips was also shrewd enough to develop storylines that might also interest potential sponsors. Entertaining though they may have been, the daytime serial drama was always a business and marketing venture. Home product manufacturers quickly noted that these programs could be used as a tool for disseminating information about the home to educate women while marketing household products.[3]

Television Soap Operas Today

The tradition of delivering quality stories and compelling characters within a socially relevant context continues today as the popularity of the daytime serial drama is as great as ever. The shows reap millions of dollars in advertising revenue for the

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[2] It is interesting to note that although Irna Philips has been recognized within the scope of radio and television broadcasting as having been the master creator of the soap opera genre, she has been largely ignored outside of that scope. Not only is she not mentioned in most surveys of the media, but Philip's own employers scarcely mention her in their autobiographies even though she was an essential money-maker for them.

[3] The late 1920s saw a boom in specialized programs for women beyond the soap opera. The character of "Betty Crocker" was even created. This character first appeared on the radio to give hints to female listeners in how to shop and take care of the home. This was a marketing ploy designed by the manufacturers of household products.

broadcasting networks, and have proven successful in both local as well as global markets. The three major American networks (NBC, ABC, CBS,) collectively broadcast eleven programs that touch the lives of roughly 45 million women in the United States alone.[4] It is a genre that has drawn the attention of women whose differences far surpass their similarities. Throughout the world, regardless of geographic location, economic class, or educational level, women follow these narratives religiously. In the tradition established by Irna Philips, today's soap operas are designed to create an aesthetic and narrative style that is pleasing to its predominantly female viewership. The plots, characters, social situations, and familial responsibilities represented in soap operas are designed to speak to women on a personal level. All aspects of the shows, including camera positioning, narrative style, and music, are constructed in a manner that is intended to be harmonious with the patterns of domesticity.

Since the inception of the genre, women in soap operas have been strong, bold, and driven. Television soap operas continue this radio tradition. However, vestiges of the 19th century characters of the evil woman have not been completely eliminated, thus providing today's viewers with baneful mothers, mischievous sisters, and corrupt daughters. The 20th century soap opera is an amalgam of traditional forms of narrative and mass-produced fantasy. Therefore, the television soap opera is not a redefinition of its precursors, but is a genre that serves specific and meaningful purposes for its contemporary audience - pleasure and empowerment.

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[4] The American Broadcast System (ABC) broadcasts All My Children, One Life to Live and General Hospital, Port Charles. The National Broadcast System (NBC) broadcasts Days of our Lives, Another World and Sunset Beach. The Columbia Broadcast System (CBS) broadcasts The Young and the Restless, The Guiding Light, The Bold and the Beautiful, and As the World Turns.

Rationale and Objective of this Work

When I first set out to analyze the discourse around the daytime television serial drama I was intrigued by the impact that the characters of Luke and Laura Spencer of ABC's General Hospital had on mainstream culture. Being a soap opera fan myself, I am aware that the wedding of Luke and Laura in 1981 penetrated the mainstream press. Their wedding was the highest rated episode in daytime television history. In 1998, this soap opera "supercouple" still remain in public consciousness. Even as the circumstances of the courtship have long since been forgotten and as people continue to confuse on which show they appear, the names Luke and Laura keep resurfacing. With Luke and Laura's wedding as my point of entry into the world of soap operas, I became increasingly interested in the manner in which these characters, the shows, and the genre in general are regarded in the discourse of mass culture. It became strikingly evident that soap operas are not among the more revered genres of television programming. So, I began with an issue of *People* magazine that featured Luke, Laura and their wedding guest Elizabeth Taylor to investigate how these narratives function within women's lives.[5] I asked myself, how could these stories be regarded as legitimate and serious by thousands of women, including the violet-eyed Liz Taylor, yet be simultaneously disparaged by popular culture critics.

In this work I introduce theoretical arguments that support the soap opera genre, and argue that it is a valuable form. Furthermore, I propose that the popular opinion of soap operas should be improved for two reasons. The first reason being that the narratives play a large role in women's lives and the second being that a great deal of soap opera criticism has less to do with the inherent quality of the shows and more to do with the

disparaged category of popular culture to which the soap opera belongs. In other words, the daytime serial drama is a genre deserving of respect and attention not only because it plays such an important role in so many women's lives but also because it challenges narrative forms constructed to reinforce the dominant cultural ideology that promotes the exclusion and belittlement of women. The arguments put forth by Tania Modleski, Horace Newcomb, Christine Geraghty, John Fiske, Ien Ang and Mary Ellen Brown serve to elucidate why soap opera fans continue to watch. These arguments have contributed to the increasing respectability of the genre within an academic and feminist milieu.

In chapter one, Shakespeare vs. Soap Operas: An Illustration of the High Low Debate, I trace the evolution of the public and private spheres and consider the discursive practices that accompany each domain. The English literary canon represented by the work of Shakespeare, for example, is located within the realm of high culture, while mass produced narratives for women such as the daytime serial drama are located within the rubric of popular culture. In struggling to understand the theoretical paradigms that define high and popular art, various theorists are cited including: Michael Bristol, Mary Ellen Brown, John Fiske, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Tania Modleski, Patricia Meyer Spacks, Raymond Williams and Janet Wolff. In chapter two, Whom are We Watching Anyway?: A Semiotic Analysis of Four Primary Female Characters of Daytime Television, I explore four of the primary characters that appear on the daytime serial drama. The characters of the matriarch, villainess, victim and heroine are presented, explored and compared with earlier images of women throughout the history of art. These representations are studied in the context of both patriarchy and post-structuralism to unpack the meaning that women make of them. The theorists that are cited include:

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[5] *People Magazine* (New York: Time Inc., 1981).

Roland Barthes, Charlotte Brunsdon, Judith Butler, John Fiske, Michel Foucault, Tania Modleski, Laura Stempel Mumford, and Martha Nochimson among others. In the third chapter of this work, The Power of the Subordinated: The Soap Opera Subculture, I look at how the fierce devotion and tumultuous vocalization by its audience marks the soap opera genre as unique from any other form of mass produced fiction. I argue in this chapter that the soap opera subcultural community exists for a dual purpose: to create a sense of belonging for its participants and to create a space where women's experiences are valorized. The community that has evolved from the narratives empowers the women that partake of it. Among the scholars that are cited in this chapter are: Robert Allen, Simone deBeauvoir, Shoshana Felman, Christine Geraghty, Mary Ellen Brown, John Fiske, Patricia Meyer Spacks and Virginia Woolf. In the final and concluding chapter, Contradictions and Misunderstanding: The Politics of Pleasure, I look at the experience of pleasure in the context of soap opera genre. Throughout this work I argue for the valorization of the soap opera genre, and I conclude that this form serves to both empower and entertain. In this chapter, the discourse of pleasure is looked at closely from both a Marxist philosophical perspective and a feminist perspective.

Chapter One
Shakespeare vs. Soap Operas: An Illustration of the High/Low Debate

What is art? Clear and concise criteria are difficult to establish. Yet, many theorists, ranging from David Hume to John Fiske, have proposed hypotheses in attempting to determine the qualities constitutive of a work of art. A consensus among scholars as to the definitive characteristics of art and works of value seems out of reach, thus reinforcing the division between high culture and low culture. If it is accepted that Shakespeare is representative of the realm of high culture, then it can be argued that the daytime serial drama stands at the opposite end of the continuum, representing popular culture. A comparison of Shakespeare with the daytime soap opera might seem a futile task, however, upon closer speculation the two bodies of work quickly lead into a greater discourse of taste formations, the appropriation of cultural artifacts and the nature of gendered media. Thus, while volumes have been written analyzing various dimensions of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, the study of popular culture for women, particularly soap operas, has remained one of the most under-developed fields of critical investigation until recent years. In this chapter, I propose that one reason for the diminished attention paid to mass produced narratives for women has been that female fiction forms have traditionally fallen under the category of popular culture, and have thus been relegated to the domain of non-art, unworthy of serious analysis. Furthermore, I argue that the division between high culture and low culture has less to do with the merit inherent within the works in question, and more to do with the gendered division of public and private spaces and media. By tracing the origins of these divisions I enter the debate of high versus low culture that leads into an analysis of the soap opera genre and its particular appeal to women in later chapters of this work.

The notion of Shakespeare as an enshrined figure is undisputed. As Michael Bristol points out in his book, *Big Time Shakespeare*, the mere name of the great figure carries with it enough weight to transcend the high culture/low culture boundaries. Essentially, recognition of his authoritative status reaches beyond literature and penetrates other media:

> Shakespeare is a term with extraordinary currency in a wide range of discursive practices as a complex symbol of cultural value. It is widely used in vernacular idiom and throughout the genres of popular culture from advertising to situation comedies where it refers unequivocally to a particular man, an author, a body of works, a system of cultural institutions, and, by extension, as set of attitudes and dispositions...The term has multiple and ambiguous valences, especially in its vernacular usage, where it may also signify privilege, exclusion, and cultural pretension.[6]

Shakespeare is a celebrity. His name circulates carrying multiple meanings. He represents literature and symbolizes the domain of high culture. Yet, the themes of his plays, his narrative style, his face and especially his name continue to resurface in popular media. In his book, Bristol is asking why Shakespeare has remained a figure of authority over the past centuries.

William Shakespeare is clearly the most recognizable figure of the English literary canon. Not only has Shakespeare attained, and maintained a deified status for centuries, he has also evolved into a popular culture icon, and has become a celebrity in the contemporary, idiomatic sense. As Michael Bristol has shown us, the body of Shakespearean texts have sustained their authoritative status due to traits of inherent artistic excellence coupled with fierce allegiance by the mass population to the official literary hierarchy in general. Various Shakespearean works display elements of literary excellence that would explain part of their lasting appeal. Both his plays and his sonnets

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[6] Michael Bristol, *Big Time Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1996) ix.

profoundly represent the perplexing nature of the human condition. Yet, Shakespeare's renown reaches beyond scholarly expertise. His celebrity seems to be rooted in a more elaborate discourse of taste formations and gender distinctions. The universal acceptance of Shakespeare's work and heavy political position compels the association of Shakespeare with all that is civilized. While Shakespeare's status as a monumental literary figure is uncontested, it is interesting to note that all of the ideological connotations that are attached with the name are equally uncontested.

According to Bristol, appreciation and understanding of Shakespeare would then somehow be constitutive of membership in civilized society.[7] Jurgen Habermas has shown us in "The Public Sphere" that the category of high culture and its strong affiliation with civility, knowledge, and judgement, conversely reinforces the notion that all that is not canonized is uncivil, ignorant and frivolous:

> Public power became consolidated as something tangible confronting those who were subject to it and who at first found themselves only negatively defined by it. These are the "private persons" who are excluded from public power because they hold no office. "Public" no longer refers to the representative court of a person vested with authority; instead, it now refers to the competence-regulated activity of an apparatus furnished with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. As those to whom this power is addressed, private persons subsumed under the state form the public.[8]

Habermas locates the emergence of the public sphere as a period of great transformation when social categories materialized to tangible distinctions that drew a division between power and servant, speaker and listener as well as actor and witness. These social distinctions quickly evolved into gender distinction – distinctions that are analogous with

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[7] Michael Bristol, *Big Time Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 8.

[8] Jurgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere" *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*. ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 400.

the binary concept of the high/low debate. The gendering of the realm of high culture as masculine, and conversely of the low or popular realm as feminine is of paramount importance. The notion of the high contrasting the low and the gendering of these categories are binaries that I investigate in greater depth later in this chapter.

The significance of Shakespeare's work, and others included in the English literary canon are so deeply engrained within the ideological construction of patriarchy that their standing as valuable art is unchallenged. Shakespeare is a figure that emanates cultural authority. Yet, his standing is deeply rooted within a hierarchical structure that glorifies one form and degrades another. The debates over the determination of valuable works of art finds its roots in the essentialist and naturalist theories proposed by David Hume and Immanuel Kant. In *Of the Standard of Taste*, David Hume articulates the criteria necessary to compose aesthetic judgements.

Hume proposes an heuristic theory that attempts to account for the nature of taste formations and aesthetic judgement. He explains that all persons possess a certain pre-theoretical, non-specific intuition regarding the value of an object. The lay person recognizes virtue in objects and in art, but due to his/her lack of refinement is unable to express that which they find beautiful. For Hume, this is precisely the difference between taste and good taste. He insists that there exists a unifying force that compels certain works of art to be deemed valuable in differing countries and in changing times.[9] Hume asserts that the endurance of the English literary canon, exemplified here by the work of Shakespeare, can be traced to the existence of a 'standard of taste' that emerges among lucid men when evaluating an object. He concludes that amidst various tastes there exists

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[9] David Hume, *Dissertation: Of the Standard of Taste* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1965) 9.

certain operations of the mind that account for the determination of worth. Objects do not have qualities of beauty or ugliness, but they do have qualities, and individual judges have the capacity to recognize these qualities in contemplation, and consequently formulate a basis for judgements of taste. Hence, with the body in full capacity, unhindered by biological or mental defect, Hume claims that a standard of taste emerges among men.[10] The notion of a 'standard of taste' is reinforced by his theory of 'delicacy of taste'. Delicacy is the refinement of distinction that allows the judge to make note of the more minute details of the object. Exposure, practice, experiences and comparison in a particular field procures 'delicacy of taste'.[11] It is through practice that the judge is able to conclude with conviction, and it is comparison that affords the judge the experience to recognize the frivolous from the meritorious.

Immanuel Kant promotes the elitist notion, such as the one put forth by Hume, that certain people can develop a refinement of taste that enables them to attain superior judgements. Theories such as this perpetuate the notion of high culture, and thus, of low or popular culture by contrast. Like Hume, Kant believes that a collective standard of taste is developed among a group of people based on experience, comparison, and objectivity. Both philosophers believe that the refinement of personal taste can produce reliable judgements. Although Kant agrees with the foundation that Hume has established when evaluating art, he adds a tremendous stress on the nature of the judge. According to Kant, if a judge is aroused in any manner by an object, the judge is considered to have a liking for it. He claims that if the judge cares for the existence of the object, he/she is

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[10] Hume 8-9.

[11] Bristol 134.

biased, and is incapable of determining its significance. Rather, the judge must remain indifferent to the existence of the object, and consider its beauty only in contemplation.[12]

While the theories proposed by Hume and Kant bring forth possible explanations for the processes of aesthetic evaluation, their theses are faulty in that they, "...imply diminished capacity for the voluntaristic, discretionary, and lucid aspects of human agency".[13] In other words, while not all aesthetic theories must conform to the valorization of autonomous individualism, the aforementioned theories belittle the humanistic aspect of the modern self. The universality of the generalizations that are asserted through these theories are elitist and exclusionary. Class, gender and lifestyle distinctions do not necessarily determine taste formations and individual judgements. The Kantian conception of high culture is a social or class distinction whereby a certain, empowered segment of society sets up their own artistic ideals/taste as a benchmark by which all other cultural products are to be measured. Low culture is thus excluded not because it is not good enough but because it does not share the same social/class concerns. Furthermore, these characteristics provide little insight to explain the kind of pleasure that works of high culture might offer. Pierre Bourdieu reiterates this notion and asserts that such theories of high culture do not explain favor or pleasure but rather merely serve to uphold the elitism of the bourgeoisie:

> The sense of distinction, an acquired disposition which functions with the obscure necessity of instinct, is affirmed not so much in the manifestoes and positive manifestations of self-confidence as in the innumerable stylistic or thematic choices which, being based on the concern to underline difference, exclude all the forms of intellectual (or artistic) activity regarded at a given moment as inferior -

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[12] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987) 45.

[13] Bristol 130.

> vulgar objects, unworthy references, simple didactic exposition, 'naive' problems (naive essentially because they lack philosophical pedigree), 'trivial' questions (Does *the Critique of Judgement* get it right? Is the aim of a reading of the Critique a true account of what Kant says?), positions stigmatized as 'empiricism' or 'historicism' (no doubt because they threaten the very existence of philosophical activity) and so on. In short, the philosophical sense of distinction is another form of the visceral disgust at vulgarity which defines pure taste as an internalized social relationship, a social relationship made flesh; and a philosophically distinguished reading of the *Critique of Judgement* cannot be expected to uncover the social relationship of distinction at the heart of a work that is rightly regarded as the very symbol of philosophical distinction. [14]

The theories of high culture, at least for Bourdieu, fail to explain the affinity felt for cultural objects by repelling the vulgar or popular even though it does not even attempt to explain popular pleasures. In extension of Bourdieu's claims, Bristol explains that a traditional humanistic response to the question of value would emphasize the intelligible contemplation of objects by informed agents. Thus, a humanistic theory would explain the longevity of Shakespearean works as a collective recognition that these works embody significant aesthetic and possible moral value.[15] Janet Wolff expresses such a viewpoint. She places the stress not only on the object, but also on the collective consumption of a commodity and the public identification of the object as valuable.

In contrast to the theories of Hume and Kant, Janet Woolf argues that it is the mass population who determine what is aesthetically valuable in, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*. She emphasizes the public mass and their personal involvement with an object, and does not restrict the definition of beauty to a determined group of people. She claims that the definition of aesthetic value cannot be simply reduced to individual social, political, or ideological specifications. Instead, she claims that the establishment of the

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[14] Bourdieu 498.

[15] Bristol 130.

artistic merit of a work is determined sociologically, among large groups of people. Wolff states that rather than examine which criteria are necessary in order to attain an effective judgement, one must observe which works are accepted as art by society as a whole. For Wolff, the essence of the dilemma is to accurately identify which works are considered to be works of art by the larger society.[16] Wolff maintains that Hume's and Kant's theories are deeply rooted in, and can be aligned with other social, political, and ideological developments of the 19th century.

Although Wolff does not find all of art criticism to be futile, she does claim that all of it is ideologically based. In this case, being socially and politically restricted, only the voices of certain people can be heard.[17] Being ideologically based creates an exclusionary atmosphere in which certain works and certain artists will be ignored — not for the weakness of their work, but for their being outside a certain circle. Wolff is concerned with the distinctions made between high culture, and low or popular culture. She is calling into question evaluations that were once considered unproblematic. She claims that there is nothing inherently inadequate within a work of popular culture that bars it from being considered high culture. She asserts that if art criticism is historically, politically, socially, and ideologically contingent, then the works that were once considered art may be so only circumstantially, and may not be genuinely deserving of the merit and praise that they have been granted. Therefore, if works that are considered art are not artistically deserving, perhaps there are works that have been excluded from a

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[16] Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art* (London: George Allen & Unwin Publishers Ltd., 1983) 12.

[17] Wolff 16.

canon, but are overwhelmingly deserving. Wolff is calling the entire system by which literary works have been selected for inclusion or exclusion within a canon into question.

The skill and artistic creativity within a work is an important element to Wolff's argument. She asserts that the works that have been identified as works of art do in fact possess elements of value even though art and literary criticism are in some ways faulty. She explains that if the determined works display elements of quality, but other works do not manifest similar qualities, then art criticism, and Kant's theories would be valid.[18] However, she claims that other works that are not considered high art do indeed display elements of quality. In other words, if the soap opera form failed to generate viewer identification with the characters, depicted weak plots and foreign themes, art criticism would be correct for not recognizing it as high art. However, this genre does present skill in creating and developing characters, fostering relationships between viewers and personalities, and skillfully unfolding gripping plots structures. Wolff asks why certain narrative forms so rich in content are relegated to being considered strictly popular culture, and not high culture. Although she does not address the daytime serial drama specifically, her argument can be used to defend the form. With an abundance of popular mass culture in the era of electronic communication in which we live, Wolff is asking firstly, why certain works are considered low culture, and secondly, why the works of high culture are considered to be the definitive depository of artistic value.[19] If there is nothing intrinsically defective within a work, why is it rejected by high art and relegated to the derogatory category of low culture, or non-art?

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[18] Wolff 17.

[19] Wolff 14.

Wolff's questions are compelling, especially for our purposes here in speculating upon the value differences made between Shakespeare and the contemporary daytime serial drama. In this work I suggest that soap operas being categorized as popular culture and being placed in opposition to the works of Shakespeare has less due to its inherent qualities of excellence and more to do with the gendered divisions of spaces and media that promote the patriarchal structure through high culture. The public sphere that is characterized by the same aloofness described by Kant in this theory of 'disinterestedness' quickly became gendered as a masculine space. Conversely, the domestic setting highlighted by emotion rather than the rationality became gendered as feminine space during the 19th century. High culture distinctions have traditionally followed the gendered distinctions of masculine vs. feminine spheres. Thus, the rational, the prejudiced, and the refined characterized high culture while popular culture came to be represented by the emotional, the frivolous, and the crude.

Raymond Williams goes through the etymology of the word 'popular' and shows us that during the 16th century the word 'popular' referred to a political system that was shared by the whole populace. Yet, this definition is not free of connotations of being low, common or base.[20] The notion of the popular, while referring to the populace simultaneously refers to a lesser mode. Although the 19th century saw a broadened and improved definition of the word, vestiges of the earlier use had not disappeared.

> Popular culture was not identified by the people but by others, and it still carries two older senses: inferior kinds of work (cf. popular literature, popular press as distinguished from quality press); and work deliberately setting out to win favor (popular journalism as distinguished from democratic journalism, or popular

[20] Raymond Williams, "'Popular' from Keywords" *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*. Ed. Anthony Easthope and Kate McGowan (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992) 231.

> entertainment); as well as the more modern sense of well-liked by many people, with which of course, in many cases, the earlier senses overlap.[21]

Thus, there is a strong sense that the private, the domestic, and the feminine collapse into the category of low or popular culture.

The daytime soap opera represents an amalgamation of the 'popular' and the feminine, thus marginalizing the genre in two respects. Tania Modleski shows us in her book, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, that the soap opera genre is met with three basic attitudes; dismissiveness, hostility and mockery.[22] Manifestations of these attitudes generally present themselves through jokes, and parodic representations of the genre in other media. Academically, the soap opera genre has not been mocked, but it has certainly been neglected as a scholarlySdiscipline until the feminist movement forced the aperture of women's studies and cultural studies into academia within the past two decades. It is through these disciplines that the critical and scholarly analysis of the realm of popular culture, and hence of soap operas came to fruition. The analysis of soap operas has led to the increasing legitimization of the genre by a variety of scholars. John Fiske and Mary Ellen Brown each propose theories that serve to explain the longevity of the narratives, point to their value, and argue against their demeaning label of being popular culture or non-art.

Hence, to return to my original intention of comparing the high and the low through literature and the daytime serial drama, I argue here that the gendering of the public and private spheres has led to the devaluing of the soap opera form, and popular culture in general. The soap opera has been created in a manner in which the storylines

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[21] Williams 232.

and the characters exist within a personal sphere. All experiences and events are examined on a personal level. All occurrences within the soap opera world are felt profoundly by both the characters and the viewers. Unlike masculine programs that take a more superficial stance, the soap opera deals with issues in depth. This manner of dealing with both commonplace and extraordinary situations reflects the manner in which women have been socialized to function within society. The split between the public and the private has been accompanied by a split between action and contemplation, work and leisure, reason and emotion and ultimately, between the masculine and the feminine. Regardless of race, class, political position, and even gender, there has evolved a consensus that binds work with progress. Considering the depreciation of the personal or the pensive and inflation of the public or active sphere, it is evident that there would be a denigration of the soap opera genre that emphasizes traditional women's culture. In the context of the personal as a denigrated mode, it is logical that the soap opera, a genre to which the personal is a staple, would also be belittled. The soap opera highlights the split between the masculine form of physicality and the feminine mode of orality by fixating on language and dialogue rather than on movement. By stressing the importance of words, the narrative style of the soap opera incorporates the feminine tradition of orality.

Daytime serial dramas find their lineage in oral discourses such as gossip. Like gossip, soap operas are a denigrated feminine form even as they provide resistive pleasure to those who interact with the genre. John Fiske shows us in his book, *Television Culture*, that the daytime serial drama, and the extensive sub-culture that has grown out of it can serve to illustrate Boudieu's theory of 'cultural capital' and his own theory of

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[22] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1982) 14.

'popular cultural capital'. The theory of cultural capital follows that, "...a society's culture is as unequally distributed as its material wealth and that, like material wealth, it serves to identify class interests and to promote and naturalize class distinctions...".[23] Thus, cultural artifacts localize themselves along class lines. The affluent have appropriated the works deemed to be high art, while the groups that rank lower on the social scale have appropriated the works of popular culture. Essentially, the tastes of each class manifest themselves through the appropriation of cultural goods, reinforcing the correlation between wealth, power and class with culture. Fiske criticizes the discourse of culture for it veils this connection with snobbery:

> by using words like 'taste' and 'discrimination' and by appealing to apparently universal values such as those of aesthetics, the discourse of culture grounds cultural differences in universal human nature or in universal value systems...in a class divided society.[24]

The vocabulary that Fiske is describing is precisely the one employed in the aforementioned theories outlined by Hume and Kant. His critique is two-fold; the language is deceptive and misleading, and the theories are exclusionary and pretentious. Through this kind of language, the dominant class effectively controls cultural capital as it does material capital.

However, Fiske proposes that existing outside of the dominant social construction thrives an economy of 'popular cultural capital'. While popular cultural capital does not have a referent in the material economy, he explains that it serves to empower the subordinated class by allowing them to accumulate and measure knowledge, meanings and pleasures. The development of this concealed world of knowledge and pleasure is a

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[23] John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Menthuen & Co., 1987) 18.

[24] Fiske, *Television* 18.

source of resistance for the subordinated class, for these meanings and pleasures are defined and experienced outside of the mainstream. By engaging in cultural activities beyond the reach of the dominant value system, the subordinate class is able to resist and oppose dominant ideology. The meaning-making undertaken by the subordinate class glorifies their social experiences without honoring their subordination. The soap opera sub-culture is illustrative of this theory. Soap opera viewers are unlike soap opera fans, for the fans engage in a world beyond the narratives themselves, and participate within a network of magazines, newsletters and correspondence with the networks and other viewers. Participation within this sub-culture is a source of great pleasure for the fans, for is serves to legitimize a feminized space while it simultaneously resists the dominant cultural ideology. Fiske contends that:

> pleasure for the subordinate is produced by the assertion of one's social identity in resistance to, in independence of, or in negotiation with, the structure of domination. There is no pleasure in being a "cultural dope": there is, however, real pleasure to be found in, for example, soap operas that assert the legitimacy of feminine meanings and identities within and against patriarchy.[25]

Engagement within the sub-culture provokes pleasure for the disempowered by serving the interests of the reader/viewer against patriarchy. Hence power is reinserted into the lives of the disempowered for strength is inherent to resistance and independence. Resistive pleasure is the essence of popular pleasure.

Mary Ellen Brown echoes Fiske's assertions. She believes that the daytime serial drama exists within the vanguard of television for it is a source of fiction that serves to empower women by providing them with a resistive pleasure to the dominant patriarchal

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[25] Fiske, *Television* 19.

ideology. Resistive pleasure through feminized discursive practices is illustrated by Mary Ellen Brown in her book, *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance*:

> We have seen that the possibility for resistive meaning generation is present and that the discursive struggle happens to a large extent in the process of conversation within the networks generated by soap opera knowledge that challenge dominant discourses about the roles of women within the family, on the silencing of women's voices and laughter, on the social expectations of women's behavior, and about the power of women's relationships with other women.[26]

Women value the pleasure that soap operas bring to their lives not only because they enjoy the narratives of the shows, but also because they value the space that soap opera gossip networks have created for the experiencing of that pleasure. This refers to the notion of 'popular cultural capital' expressed by Fiske. Groups of women can assert their opposition to dominant values by obtaining and acquiring knowledge of the shows, and by participating in gossip networks beyond the shows that value women's traditional expertise, and sanctify a space where their voices can be heard. By taking pleasure in the resistive activity of soap opera viewing, women force open a window to a revolution against the dominant cultural value system by which traditional women's culture, including and especially soap operas have been devalued. Brown's contention that the daytime serial drama is a valid form for it embodies the potential for the rethinking of women's roles is grounded oppositionally to the theories aesthetic judgement proposed earlier by Hume and Kant. The elitist and sexist theories of 'delicacy of taste' and 'disinterestedness' have been subverted by the contentions of Fiske and Brown that highlight popular knowledge, viewer identification, and promote resistance to patriarchy.

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[26] Mary Ellen Brown, *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance* (California: Sage Publications Inc., 1994) 176.

As Shakespeare can be considered the hero of high culture, the daytime soap opera can be regarded as the heroine of popular culture. It is apparent that there is a great deal of controversy over what criteria determine a work to be considered valuable, and how to establish the border between high culture and popular culture. Although the aesthetic perspectives change and evolve, the dilemma remains constant. Works of literature, such as the plays and sonnets by William Shakespeare, are canonized and respected not merely because they have been widely read and popularly consumed, but because the texts themselves demonstrate elements of skill and creativity as outlined by David Hume and Immanuel Kant. The aesthetic theories proposed by these scholars have provided the guidelines by which one can realize why Shakespearean plays have sustained their popularity through passing centuries. Furthermore, in his book, *Big Time Shakespeare*, Michael Bristol ventures into an analysis that clarifies the reasons for Shakespeare's longevity. Yet, we must ask ourselves why other works that are widely read, or viewed in the case of soap operas, and are popularly consumed are relegated to the domain of popular culture, and spared the same high regard that Shakespearean works have been credited with. Janet Woolf argues against Hume and Kant while Fiske and Brown locate the denigration of female forms in a longer history of gendered spaces. The latter scholars each propose theories that serve to valorize and legitimize both popular culture and the soap opera genre simultaneously. Thus, while the division between the high and the low remains, the discourse around determining which works are to be deemed worthy of deification continues. The criticism of the soap opera genre is often concerned with the visual style of the shows and the quality of the performances. The characteristics of the form that distinguish it from other mass produced narratives are less

aggressively studied. In the following chapter I look at the popularity of the shows and the role that they play in the development of women's popular culture. By looking at issues of popular consumption and the representation of women within the genre, I uncover the soap opera culture.

Chapter Two
Whom are we Watching Anyway: An Analysis of Four Primary Characters on Daytime Television

As the preceding chapter focused primarily on the emergence of the opposing realms of high and low culture and of the public and private spheres, little room remained for a close look at women's roles within either domain. In this chapter I speculate upon the characters of daytime television and the meaning that women make of them. It is within the personal sphere, highlighted by the domestic space of the home, that women are recognized for their strength, intellect, rationality, and insight. If nowhere else, women are deemed the master or, rather, the mistress of the home. The soap opera showcases this reality. In this chapter I look at the characters of daytime television to illustrate that women in soap operas are aesthetic judges and not aesthetic objects.

In his book, *Television Soaps*, Richard Kilborn states that defining the daytime soap opera as a women's genre is largely due to a single feature - that female characters play a more prominent and positive role in soap operas than they do in any other type of dramatic fiction.[27] Kilborn suggests that a wide range of female characters were created as part of the advertisers' strategies for reaching its targeted audience and hence, for maintaining ratings. He argues that not only are the women of daytime abundant, but they contradict the traditional, stereotypical depictions of women that reduce them to the level of sex objects. Yet, other scholars have suggested that the soap opera genre is pernicious for it, like other mass media, endorses the ideology of the patriarchal structure. Laura Stempel Mumford explains the relationship between soap opera and dominant patriarchal ideology in her book, *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon*:

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[27] Richard Kilborn, *Television Soaps* (London: Batsford, 1992) 46.

> I do understand the conventional daytime soap opera as having an implicit and at times explicit political agenda, one that I believe cooperates in the "teaching" of male dominance - at the very least, by persuasively restating it, and the related oppressions of racism, classism, and heterosexism, in such a way as to make them seem inevitable if not "natural".[28]

It is here that the complexity of the genre lies. The soap opera genre is problematic in terms of the feminist project for it provides competent viewers with an opportunity for pleasurable anticipation and woman-centered entertainment while simultaneously representing aspects of the patriarchal order. Thus, we must examine how this genre is made to seem so intensely pleasurable that women viewers, including feminists, keep coming back to watch.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that four archetypal images of women have surfaced throughout history, and that these same four representations appear on daytime television. In speculating upon the women within the narratives I shall look at the ways in which women are represented in the media and have been represented throughout history. I am asking why, even within a genre that has been designed by and for women, do these four depictions continue to appear and why do so many women watch these shows when it seems to have little to offer in terms of personal or collective empowerment? I present the virgin/whore, goddess/mother binary images of women as they appear on daytime television. I then trace their lineage through a larger discourse of the representation of women in the media and explore the problematic role that these stereotypical figures play in the empowerment of women, for they seem to reinforce patriarchy as they populate a venue that may foster the rethinking of women's roles.

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[28] Laura Stempel Mumford, *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon: Soap Opera, Women and Television Genre* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995) 10.

Radio Women

To fully understand today's soaps we must first look to their closest cousin - the 15-minute radio shows of the late 1920s. Having emerged during the post-war years, the period into which the radio soaps were born was one of great turmoil and uncertainty in American history. Unemployment rates were at an all time high in the years following the First World War and later during the Great Depression. Men had been active outside of the home either working or fighting and had suddenly found themselves with little to keep them occupied during the day. Women, who had also entered the work force as part of the war effort were quickly ripped from the assembly lines as jobs became scarce and the demands of the home grew. Advertisers quickly took notice that people were starved for fantasy, adventure and escape and would listen to the radio for pleasure. Thus, the radio daytime serial drama was an instant hit. "In the 1930s-1940s, 20 million people listened to radio soaps. By the early 1940s sixty-four serials were on the air, starting at 10 a.m. and ending at news time, 6pm, Eastern Time".[29] Thousands of men tuned in to the shows as they spent their days at home either unemployed, or recovering from war-inflicted injuries. Women were also drawn to the shows. Without microwave ovens, dishwashers and self-cleaning ovens, housework was grueling. The radio accompanied the housewife as she juggled washing dishes or laundry, ironing, and feeding the baby. These programs helped entertain the housewife while working. The conditions of the period procured a mixed audience for early advertisers. Both men and women sought the escapades and adventures of the characters on shows such as, *The Smith Family* (1925).

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[29] Carol Traynor Williams, *It's Time for My Story: Soap Opera Sources, Structure, and Response* (1992) 15.

Painted Dreams (conceived by Irna Philips, 1930), *Just Plain Bill*, *Ma Perkins*, *and The Romance of Helen Trent*.[30] While it is evident that there were a number of male listeners in the early days of the programs (since one of the first hit soap opera - *Just Plain Bill* - focused on and was written by a man) it is clear that the targeted audience was and still is female.

Since the creation of the genre in the early 1930s, women have dominated the daytime landscape. As such, it has consistently been women that have been the locus of all action, activity, morality and discussion. While the soap opera world is not one in which men are absent, it is one where women outweigh men in both number and importance. In her book, *It's Time for My Story: Soap Opera Sources, Structure and Response* Carol Traynor Williams explains that the early radio shows saw the dominance of female characters over male characters. She sites a comment made by James Thurber, who notes in his article "Soapland" of "...how often soap males suffered crippling diseases or injuries, particularly below the waist, and called the male in a wheelchair a 'symbol of the American male's subordination to the female".[31] However, even within this fantasy of female power, the ultimate objective of each adventure was for the heroine to be reunited with her beloved. The day-to-day stories of the shows were intended to address women's fantasies - love, romance, and adventure. Thus, then as today, the shows geared themselves toward women by highlighting female characters and the matters that concerned women's lives. Issues that were chosen to be dealt with included adultery, unplanned pregnancies, abuse, incest, depression, alcoholism, disease, betrayal, and of course, child rearing. Even when men did appear their thoughts and actions were

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[30] Traynor Williams 16.

consumed by women. In her book, *Loving with a Vengeance*, feminist film scholar Tania Modleski comments on this pattern:

> The man, whether he is plotting the women's seduction or, as in soap operas, endlessly discussing his marital woes with his co-workers at the hospital, spends all his time thinking about the woman. Even when he appears most indifferent to her...we can be sure he will eventually tell her how much the thought of her has obsessed him.[32]

The implication is that while men were and are present within the shows, their presence is secondary to the female characters. Women have used the genre as a forum for the projection of their fantasies by creating a world where men exist only in relation to the women in their lives. By defining the male characters as dependent upon the female characters, women writers have managed to 'even things up' at least in women's fantasies, since the social and political power held by women in real life during this time was considerably weak. Essentially, the women that permeated the radio serials were strong, wise and generous.

Both Modleski and Traynor Williams agree that the popular conception of the daytime characters and/or viewers as "weepers" is fallacious, and insulting. While the notion of male subordination seems to be an exaggeration of actuality, it must nevertheless be noted that the 25 years bridging the first and second world wars saw a change to the face of the American homefront. It was a period when women were gaining social power, and the absence of men was not uncommon. However, even the strongest of female characters and most fantastic of all adventures was informed by romantic heterosexual love thus reinforcing the importance of marriage, and fidelity. Hence, while

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[31] Traynor Williams 17.
[32] Modleski 16.

women drove the narratives, there was a constant masculine (or patriarchal) force that remained present.

In the early days of the daytime serial drama, beginning with the radio programs of the 1930s, the characters that were created were somewhat two-dimensional. While the radio announcer played a crucial role in helping the audience understand which characters were to be liked and which were to be hated, the characters themselves, through the expression and tone of the actor, helped to determine whether a character was fundamentally good or bad. The authoritative announcer (always paternal, even divine at times) would use descriptive phrases such as, "the kindly man" or "the noble mother", as each character entered or exited a room to generate affection or animosity towards specific characters.[33] Rudolph Arnheim's contribution to the study, *Radio Research* done at the Paul Lazarsfeld Bureau of Applied Social research at Columbia University in 1944 outlines the three character types that appeared on the radio serials; the good, the bad and the weak.[34] Absent was the great spectrum of personalities that we currently see on daytime television. However, it did not take long for the script writers to determine that two-dimensional characters would not sustain the programs, contribute to the evolution of the plots or foster viewer identification.

Although the characters that Arnheim places in the category of the 'good' are not perfect, they are fundamentally moral and are characterized by qualities such as wisdom, generosity, and helpfulness. These people were never promiscuous, as sex always led to love, marriage and a baby. These are the same characteristics that we shall later see as

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[33] Matelski 16.

[34] Rudolph Arnheim, "The World of the Daytime Serial," *Radio Research*, ed. Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton (New York: Essential Books, 1944) 50.

descriptive of the contemporary soap matriarch. The 'good' characters define themselves primarily in opposition to the other two character types. While the good characters were often found doing bad things, they never preyed upon innocent victims, and their intentions were always noble. The 'good' character would act deceptively only to protect or help another person. For example, a 'good' wife might lie to her blind husband by convincing him that she is expecting a child when in fact she is not pregnant in order to inspire him or give him hope for the future.[35] It is interesting to note that even though the heroine is aware that her lie is one that will be exposed in time when a child is not born, it is a risk she is willing to take in order to protect her husband from feeling fruitless, and unmanly. It is the 'good' character's own goodness that motivates her to deceive. Thus, the intention justifies the action. Arnheim mentions that this type of behavior was rarely punished in the 1930s serials. 'Good' characters were forgiven for their crimes, for it was understood that by being driven towards excellence, the ends justified the means. It is for this reason that the 'good' characters were far more successful in their deception that were the 'bad' characters.

Furthermore, while 'good' men did appear on these 15-minute shows the majority of the 'good' characters were women. Arnheim suggests that one possible reason for this was to reassure the listening housewife that her role as wife and mother is invaluable. Akin to the conclusions made in later years by Modleski, Arnheim explains that the stories were constructed to convince the listener of her own value. He states that the 'good' characters allow the listeners to detach themselves from the other two character types. The good character:

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[35] Matelski 16.

> provides a safe platform from which to look down on the weak character's unfortunate adventures in an attitude of aloofness and complacency. It adds the embodiment of an ideal to the representation of the true-to-life portrait. It allows the listener to identify herself with a woman who is always good and right, recommended by her virtue, energy, helpfulness, leader qualities, and by the outstanding position which is granted to her in the structure of the play and by her fellow-characters.[36]

Essentially, Arnheim is suggesting that while the 'good' people allow the characters of the shows to feel a sense of superiority above the other two character types, these people also allow the listening audience to identify with a character that is fundamentally good, and right, thus reinforcing the valuable role of wife/mother. Modleski suggests that by representing women as knowledgeable and wise, the viewer is made to simultaneously understand and relate to the heroine as she surveys and evaluates the situation from a distance. The viewer is placed in a position of power over all of the characters within the narrative, for she is aware of all of the details of which the heroine is not always informed. Thus, both radio and television soap operas are used to redeem the often-negated role of the real-life mother/housewife.

Characterized as devious, corrupt and beyond redemption, the bad characters that Arnheim outlines are those that sought to cause trouble for other characters within the narrative, particularly, innocent bystanders. Evil doing unmotivated by a noble cause was deemed reprehensible. With crimes ranging from neglect to revenge, the 'bad' characters, rather than external forces, were held accountable for the unhappiness of others. Yet, these characters rarely displayed any concern over their heartlessness. They were simply evil for the sake of being evil. 'Weak' characters, on the other hand, were the most complex of the three types and ended up being the most appealing to the listening audience. In describing these characters Arnheim states that:

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[36] Arnheim 58.

> The trouble they create, though often directed towards others, makes them suffer themselves because they disturb the harmony of the private group to which they belong. They are selfish, jealous, vindictive, deceitful, and need other people's help to get out of the conflict situations they create.[37]

Although these characters are not inherently 'bad' their actions are equally hurtful and disruptive to the other characters of the narrative as those executed by the 'bad' character. However, unlike the 'bad' characters who are naturally bad, it is clearly stated that the negative behavior of these characters stems from bad past experiences or lack of control. Thus, although they are troublemakers, it is suggested that they may eventually return to their natural, stable selves. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the weak characters were the most popular of the triad among listeners. This is because they were the most dynamic of the three types. They were the most human, and least predictable.

Aware that the 'weak' characters attracted the most interest by the listeners, the writers of the early television soap operas built on this style and created characters that were neither black nor white, but existed in the many shades of gray between the two. As pioneers of the genre such as Irna Philips and Agnes Nixon rejected the predictable characters of the radio shows as they populated this new televised form, they had also cast aside the Aristotelian cinematic model of spectatorship outlined by Laura Mulvey. In her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", she claims that the spectator is positioned to identify with a single male protagonist. However, such a claim is problematic in the case of the daytime soap opera not only because the central characters are female rather than male, but because the narrative is constructed such that the viewer becomes involved in a polyphonic arrangement of characters and not with an individual hero/heroine. Modleski argues Mulvey's assertion is precarious in terms of the soap

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[37] Arnheim 58.

opera for, "...soap operas present us with numerous limited egos, each in conflict with the others, and continually thwarted in its attempts to control events because of inadequate knowledge of other peoples' plans, motivations, and schemes".[38] Hence, rather than identify with a single character, the viewer is encouraged to identify with a number of personalities, and instead of relating to a single powerful, effective hero, the soap opera spectator becomes involved with the lives of the ineffectual, if forever recovering, heroines of daytime.

Furthermore, Mulvey suggests that the hero represents a powerful figure that is more resourceful and effective in controlling events than is the spectator. This too is problematized by the soap opera, for according to Modleski, the soap opera viewer is positioned as a sort of ideal mother. Like the matriarch, the viewer is made to possess greater wisdom than all the subjects of the narrative, not less. Her sympathy is large enough to encompass the conflicting claims of all the characters for she identifies with them all. In other words, the narrative of the soap opera unravels in a manner that allows the heroine to remain forgiving and understanding, while simultaneously sharing these characteristics with the viewer:

> It is important to recognize that soap operas serve to affirm the primacy of the family in constant turmoil and appealing to the spectator to be understanding and tolerant of the many evils which go on within that family. The spectator/mother, identifying with each character in turn, is made to see "the larger picture" and extend her sympathy to both the sinner and the victim. She is thus in a position to forgive all.[39]

Thus, the manner in which the format has been constructed implicitly reinforces the positioning of the female - both character and viewer - as the good mother.

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[38] Modleski 91.

The good mother, or matriarch is the female character with the longest history on daytime television. With several children, and numerous grandchildren, she is wise, honest, kind, generous, loyal to her family and faithful to her husband. The daytime matriarch is a woman can be described as nothing less than heroic, courageous, resourceful, and adventurous. Never fearing the forces of evil, and always fighting for moral goodness, the matriarch is prominent in daytime's adventure stories.

While she is the embodiment of goodness, she is also the bearer of great power and authority. However, unlike the villainess that we shall soon see, the matriarch does not abuse her power. Her wisdom forbids her from doing so. The respect she commands from the community that surrounds her can be partially attributed to her personality and partially attributed to her age. Unlike primetime television, elderly characters are valued and respected on daytime television. Her age is her credit, for it has provided her with the experience and perspective to evaluate life, and love. Female characters of this age appear infrequently in nighttime television, thus are noteworthy in daytime not only for their positive characteristics and leadership but for their consistent presence in the lives of both the characters and the viewers.

As mentioned earlier, the matriarch holds a sense of control and power over the other characters of the narrative. With great social if not actual power, the matriarch is able to lead her family as well as the larger community towards righteousness. Wielding her social power mostly through her approval or disapproval of others' behavior, the matriarch is able to remain in control in a world where influence still carries with it the power to affect change. She is often positioned as the guardian of truth, honesty and goodness. Thus, the viewer is able to determine the moral direction of the storyline based

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[39] Modleski 93.

on the defiance or compliance of the characters to the matriarch's decisions. Although she exercises her social power freely and regularly, it is far less frequent for her to demonstrate any actual power. What is meant here by actual power is the decision making power that carries with it the weight of real consequence, such as the rewarding of money, medicine or opportunity. While exceptions do exist, the actual power of the matriarch surfaces in her demonstration of authority in her role as mother. As the leader in the home of all emotional and moral situations, the matriarch attempts to control the decisions made by her children and grandchildren in areas ranging from career to love.

Although the matriarch exercises her power in ways that resemble traditional male heroes, Modleski has shown us that her domesticity and vulnerability differentiates her from her masculine alter ego. The daily activities and the settings in which she is placed reveal the matriarch's primary function as caretaker and homemaker. Although she may have ties to the public sphere or work force, her actions frequently concern domestic chores -- preparing or serving food and coffee, planning or executing social functions in the home. Hence, while the matriarch is a positive image it is nevertheless a stereotypically feminine image in many ways. So much has the domestic setting been associated with the matriarch that her domesticity has virtually become an element of her personality. Thus, the notion of 'matriarch' has surpassed the concept of motherhood, and has evolved into the naturalization of domesticity as a natural extension of womanhood.

In stark contrast with the matriarch is the villainess. While the matriarch represents integrity, morality and decency, the villainess denotes mischief, selfishness and immorality. Vilified for her lack of concern with family and home, this category of female characters focuses on remaining a free and independent spirit. The daytime

villainess is a master of manipulation. She transforms characteristics of traditional feminine weakness to her advantage. Her drive to remain unattached manifests itself in various forms, although her predominant crimes are being career oriented and childless. Modleski summarized the purpose of the villainess quite succinctly:

> If soap operas keep us caring about everyone; if they refuse to allow us to condemn most characters and actions until all the evidence is in (and, of course, it never is), there is one character whom we are allowed to hate unreservedly: the villainess, the negative image of the spectator's ideal self.[40]

The villainess is punished for her attempts to manipulate the lives of the other characters within the narrative and for having the arrogance of believing that she can better control the narrative than can the viewer. Unlike the matriarch and the victim whose suffering is brought about by no fault of their own, the villainess is punished for actions that she herself has taken.

In opposition to the strength of the matriarch and the villainess, the character of the victim on daytime television is passive, and weak. She finds herself the subject of hard and ill circumstance with no effort or initiative taken by herself. Simply put, bad things happen to her. Her suffering is boundless with injuries ranging from emotional pain, disease, imprisonment, and debilitation, to death. The victim in the daytime soap opera is the character that can not seem to keep herself out of trouble. She is constantly falling in love with the wrong man. In, *The Dynamics of Cultural Resistance*, former editor of the *Journal of Communications*, George Gerbner explains that when women characters on television are involved with violent acts, they are most often the victims

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[40] Modleski 92.

rather than the aggressors, especially in daytime.[41] Furthermore, he investigates a correlation that might exist between the patterns of which characters are victimized, and which are spared. He notes that there has been a clear tendency for the violent act to fall upon the single woman, rather than the married woman. Single women and working women, Gerbner concludes, are more likely to be the victims of a violent crime than are married women with children. Thus, the importance of marriage and motherhood are underlined within the narratives themselves. By punishing the independent woman, and sparing the housewife, the patriarchal, hegemonic structure is upheld and even reinforced.

Since the daytime narrative reverses the male/female character ratio of primetime television it is of particular importance to notice the number of crimes committed against women in soap opera. Female characters on daytime television are not shielded from abuse simply because it is 'women's television'. On the contrary, in a single year the viewers of NBC's long running and top rated Days of Our Lives witnessed the rape of Kayla, the incestuous molestation of Jamie, the attempted murder of Carly, and the imprisonment and torture of Marlena. The primary function of the victim is clear: to position the female at the mercy of her male captor/hero/savior. We are reminded here of the female characters involved in the fantastic tales of Harlequin Romance novels. Modleski shows us that female desire is somewhat misunderstood in terms of these novels. Citing the oppositional theories offered by Germaine Greer and Susan Brownmiller, Modleski rejects both in favor of a reconciliation of the two.[42] In her book, *The Female Eunuch*, Greer argues that the idealized male such as those of the Harlequin

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[41] George Gerbner, "The Dynamics of Cultural Resistance," *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, ed. Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniel and James Benet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 13.

romance is the image desired by women that are content in their subordination while Brownmiller suggests in *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, that the impression of female desire as being aligned with rape attests to the depth at which the female psyche has been penetrated by patriarchy. Modleski, however, asserts that female desire is actually at odds with male ones. She explains that such expressions of desire represent a notion of female adaptation to an unsatisfactory life that has been devoid of choice. Thus, while the victim appears to passively accept her destiny, Modleski asserts that the victim is actually an expression of female desire and resourcefulness in terms of transforming limitations into opportunities.[43] Thus, to return to the 'victim' of daytime television and her meaning it must be noted that this character does not exist within a vacuum. Hence, even as the victim is faced with insurmountable trauma, she exists within a community of women, not all of whom are being incessantly victimized. In this way, the weakness of the character does not become emblematic of femininity or womanhood.

The Heroine

It is apparent that vestiges of the good, bad and weak characters outlined by Arnheim remain present today in the form of the matriarch, villainess and victim. However, the transition of the soap opera from radio to television saw the birth of a fourth staple female character: the heroine. She is by far the most complex of the four characters. In her book, *No End to Her: Soap Opera and the Female Subject*, women's studies and soap opera scholar, Martha Nochimson traces the evolution of the daytime heroine from radio to television.

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[42] Modleski 38.

[43] Modleski 38.

Nochimson explains that by existing within a realm reserved for the extraordinary, the radio serial heroine inaugurated the listening audience into a world of fantasy and romance. The female characters liberated both themselves and their listeners from the routine of ordinary life. The radio soap opera's female subjects acted as a voice for the female listeners. Women were able to acknowledge their concerns about the manner in which men were controlling and managing the real world through the characters. Like the character outlines put forth by Arnheim, Nochimson concedes that the radio soap opera narrative was designed to undermine the notion of a 'man's world' by persistently presenting the male heroes as less effective, less sensitive to others, and less attentive than the female heroines. It is in this manner that the radio soap opera heroines relieved female listeners from believing that they were themselves ineffectual if they found it difficult to deal with their real-life social status, for she represented the embodiment of dynamic and competent female characters:

> First, she defied the ordinary patriarchal assumptions about woman's place: she was neither an object securely under male control nor dangerous. Second, she did not seem to need to fight for her right to deviate from the way the audience knew most women were forced to behave.[44]

She was an incarnation of power, dignity and adventure. Neither plot twist nor male hero could shake her status as pillar of strength.

The stories were designed to highlight the importance of traditional female roles. For instance, in the case of one of the earliest shows, Mary Noble: Backstage Wife the setting was of a theater company in which Mary's husband was the star (attracting the attention and respect of the public) while Mary managed the business affairs from behind the scenes. While Larry was shown to believe that Mary's work and status was less

valuable than his own, the manner in which the story was told revealed the contrary. Mary was shown to be the powerful one by arranging the world so Larry could project the image that society wanted to see. However, it was not merely Mary's ability to understand the nuances of every-day life that exposed Larry's impotence. Larry was depicted as egocentric and stubborn in his own right, unable to conceive of the larger picture. His two-dimensionality kept him from evaluating the complexities of a given situation thus rendering him dysfunctional. The telling of the story highlighted the importance of the supporting role - a role into which women were so often forced. The metaphor of the theater served to reflect the real life hierarchical social structure established by patriarchy while simultaneously criticizing it. The scripting of stories such as these, the creation of characters such as Mary and the recounting of the tales in this manner attest to the uniqueness of this never-before-seen genre, and exemplify the manner in which the early radio heroine paved the way for female agency in mass-produced fiction that became so crucial for the televised soap opera that would follow.

In a later scenario, the theater company was faced with financial problems when the landlord hiked up the rental rates to an unmanageable level. Mary, as business manager is deemed responsible for resolving this problem. In a harsh and quick move, Larry seeks the financial aid of a wealthy socialite, Katherine Monroe. However, much to Larry's disappointment, Katherine fails to help them in addressing their landlord and affecting change. Mary, on the other hand, explores alternative possibilities. She seeks a solution that will prove unthreatening to her marriage. Her's is unconventional power, for she does not use money or influence to resolve this dilemma but rather, she uses her

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[44] Martha Nochimson, *No End to Her: Soap Opera and the Female Subject* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 47.

ability to negotiate difficult situations to develop an effective defensive strategy. While this scenario exemplifies the differences between Larry's and Mary's conceptions of power and problem-solving techniques, it must not be forgotten that these two characters are engaged in a love relationship, and the implications of Larry's decision to seek the help of an outsider rather than trust in his wife's work must not be overlooked. By acting against his wife, Larry implies that Mary is incapable of dealing with complex problems of the real world. By underestimating and undervaluing her, the narrative is addressing the mainstream assumption that women are capable only to a very limited extent. Nochimson points out that Larry's response to this dilemma reveals an Oedipal influence in a dual manner; in his compulsion to determine an immediate, and complete solution that does not threaten his sense of control and in his prioritizing of Katherine over Mary for he believes her to be the more clever one since she holds patriarchal power as a wealthy socialite. As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that it is Mary's resourcefulness that clears them from the control of their landlord. In her negotiations with her landlord, Mary agrees to a bet proposed by Page (the landlord): he shall paint her portrait for an upcoming art show. If he wins the contest, Mary and Larry lose their lease. However, if he loses the contest, the couple is free to do with the theater what they wish. The story concludes by Page losing the contest, and Mary winning her freedom. However, rather than rejoice with her husband in their newly found independence, Mary decides to divorce Larry. With regard to the possession of women by men, Nochimson comments that:

> Certainly, the metaphor of sight is present: the hero does not see as much as the heroine, and the villain sees nothing but possession. Perhaps most startling in terms of psychologically based criticism about male control of the woman

> through the gaze is the bet Page makes with Mary: if he cannot win a prize by painting her portrait, he cannot control her life.[45]

Hence, as the villain fails to control the image of the heroine, he liberates her from his tyranny, as well as that of the patriarchal model. The alternative value system that Mary has developed has led to her victory. Not only has she usurped the control of Page, but also she has made Katherine look ridiculous for bowing to the mainstream ideal. In her refusal to compete with Katherine, Mary is depicted as patient, wise and clever, while Katherine is presented as a fool. Finally, Mary's behavior throughout the ordeal is pushed into an even greater light as she deals with her husband. The lack of mutuality in their relationship drives Mary to ask Larry for a separation - an act that is seen as admirable even within the context of a period as well as a genre that places tremendous importance on marriage and family. Mary Noble typifies the radio heroine, and depicts the fully realized female subject. She is a character that at once explores issues of domination/subordination as she provides a feminine point of view to viewers who had few other narrative sources that confirmed feminine values and ways of knowing.

While the conditions of the story were fantastic and unrealistic in terms of the real life situations faced by women, characters such as Mary can be regarded as the beginning for the evolution of a more probable female character that would come with the televised soap opera. The early radio heroine allowed the female listening public to speculate upon and criticize patriarchal ideals. These characters and the shows created a space where women could distance themselves from masculine priorities and establish an outlet for the exploration of women's issues. The power attained by the creation of such a space

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[45] Nochimson 50.

was only amplified when soaps moved from radio to television. The facileness of the females dissolved with the introduction of the television camera.

With television came a contention with the gaze. However, unlike cinema, the notion of the gaze is not unproblematic in soap opera. To return to the work of Laura Mulvey, we see in her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" that the female subject is placed under the gaze of the male as voyeuristic erotic pleasure is gained from control over the object of the 'look'. It is through the 'look' that the Oedipal male is able to safely experience erotic pleasure from the woman as her allure is made less threatening while under the control of his gaze. Psychoanalytic feminist film criticism asserts that cinema and the camera objectify the female subject by controlling the female body. The transition from radio to television should have positioned the female subject as prey for the male gaze, according to Laura Mulvey's theory of cinematic pleasure. If Mulvey is correct, then the televised daytime serial should have opened the way to scopophilia, thus rendering the soap opera heroine nothing more than a passive, fetishized spectacle. However, like the radio heroine that facelessly over-turned the Oedipal drive of domination, the early television daytime heroine was immune to the penetrating voyeurism of the Oedipal male.

As a matter of fact, in the early days of the television heroine, the camera became a partner to the evolution of the female subject due to its inability to replicate the glamorizing techniques of Hollywood cinema. The technological methods employed to manipulate the female body in Hollywood films into a possessed Other were not in place when the daytime television soap opera emerged. Lighting, filming and editing techniques that were used in mainstream cinema were not in operation at the time when

the early television soap opera appeared. The lighting of the early daytime drama was not manipulated in the same manner that was cinematic lighting. While lighting of the Hollywood film highlighted the female figure to angelic proportions, the same is not true of daytime television. Consequently, the image of the female body was one that can only be characterized by plainness, and matter-of-fact presence and not a glittering fetish. Early television directors also ignored camera shots that accentuated the upper torso of the female stars in cinema. Rather than focus on the 'bust' and tracking the gaze between the person looking and the person being looked at, early soap operas focused on both the male and female concurrently. The 'over the shoulder' shot is a staple of daytime direction techniques for it allows the viewer to see the expression and reaction of both parties simultaneously. According to Mulvey, the lighting, and framing of the female subject entraps her unto the Oedipal gaze, while the editing of film is designed to create an illusion of seamlessness that supports the entrapment of the female. However, the production techniques of daytime television abandoned even the editing of videotape, since the shows were all broadcast live. The lack of editing of any kind, coupled with the numerous breaks for commercials, highlights rather than conceals the fragmentation of the narrative. The inversion of mainstream filming techniques in tandem with the inherent structure of the narrative to resist closure create a genre, as well as a female subject, that exists outside of the Oedipally possessed image outlined by Mulvey. Nochimson points out that, "Instead, an image was created that conveyed its support of the female subject by replacing the domination patterns of cinema with visual patterns of mutuality".[46] Thus, the agency of the daytime heroine remained intact and wholly female.

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[46] Nochimson 57.

These, however, were not the only changes that came with the transition from radio to television. The televised soap opera witnessed the abandonment of the male announcer, saw a need for multiplying the number of characters and plots, and demanded a younger female subject. The camera replaced the male announcer that served to orient the narrative. The male voice-over that functioned as the voice of G-d controlling the women within the narratives was removed when the soaps moved to television. As aforementioned, the camera did not substitute the male announcer for an equally powerful male gaze, but rather, the camera neutralized the images. A mutuality emerged with the introduction of the television camera while the dominance/ subordination binary was lost. Characters, too, needed to be increased in both complexity and in number as radio soap operas moved to television. The elongation of the 15-minute radio shows to 30-minutes in 1956 necessitated a multiplication of plots and characters just to fill the time. Essentially, the singular subject of cinema and the early radio programs was eliminated. What is more, is that the heroines were quickly transformed from matriarchs to young, beautiful women. The heroine is quite similar to the matriarch in that she is honest, generous, and loyal. However, to these characteristics one must add beautiful, adventurous, and inexperienced in terms of raising children, not because she does not want many children, rather because she is simply too young to have had the opportunity to have had any children as of yet. Thus, the heroine is essentially the matriarch in training. Nochimson argues that:

> These girls exhibited a sense of confusion and, in struggling against being overwhelmed by pressures they did not fully understand, constituted a new kind of female subject. These subjects reflected the difficult process of dealing with dominant values".[47]

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[47] Nochimson 59-60.

Unlike the older, wiser women that dominated the radio serials these younger, more adventurous women explored, struggled and evolved as autonomous agents. Essentially, the television soap opera heroine completed the project that had begun with the radio heroine - to reposition the female subject from object to subject and in doing so created a mutuality between male and females that did not exist either in television's radio precursor or in cinema.

Analysis

What messages are being sent to women via these characters? A semiotic analysis might provide some insight into the manner in which these images create meaning for women. It is at this point in the chapter that I shall shift my focus from the actual subjects of the shows to speculation upon the soap opera genre, and its popularity as a form of communication. I am interested here in understanding the ways in which women make meaning from this form. While a great deal of communication studies concerns itself with the level of accuracy in the transmission of messages between senders and receivers, a study of meaning making in soap opera would fall under the rubric of semiology. It is through the school of semiotics that one is able to see communication as the production and exchange of meanings.

Semiologists are concerned with developing a science of signs and an understanding of the ways in which texts interact with people in order to produce meanings. In his book, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, John Fiske explains that a message is a construction of signs, which, through interaction with receivers, produce meaning. If this is accepted to be true, then the importance of the sender's intention is

greatly diminished.[48] Instead, the stress is placed on the text and the manner in which it is received. It is at this moment, as the receiver interacts with the text that 'reading' occurs and meaning is made. Thus, according to semiotics, a message is not the transmission of material between two subjects. It is the product of the negotiation between numerous factors including actuality, circumstance and subjectivity.

What does a theory such as semiotics have to offer us, here, in terms of understanding the representation of women in media, and more specifically in soap operas? The theories that have been offered by Ferdinand de Saussure and elaborated upon by Roland Barthes help to shed some light on the how images of women become loaded with meaning, or in semiotic terminology, how an image becomes either motivated or constrained.[49] The world that surrounds us is inundated with images of women and femininity at all degrees of motivation or constraint. For instance, the word WOMAN is an example of a highly constrained sign while a photograph of a woman is a highly motivated sign. The images of women in television are far more complex than are symbols and words, for they move, speak and belong to larger narrative construction and ideological formation that informs the way in which they are read by the audience.

The role of ideology and meaning is by far the most intricate element of semiology and one that is of particular interest for us in our project of understanding the representation of women in soap operas. Saussure's semiological theories of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of the sign only go so far in illuminating the complexities of the relationship between the sign and the individual, since his primary concern was with words and language and not texts and readers. For Saussure, the

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[48] John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 3.

primary function of semiotic theory was to unravel some of the mysteries inherent within language and linguistic systems. By analyzing the units of a linguistic model (letters, symbols and words) Saussure sought to develop a system by which language could be understood in terms of the reality that it is intended to represent. However, Saussure's theories fail to shed any light on the relationship between individuals and language. Hardly any of his work deals with how language relates to the reader in his/her socio-cultural position.[50] It is through the two-fold theory of signification put forth by Roland Barthes that we are led to an understanding of the ways in which signs circulate and are used to make meaning by readers.

In *Mythologies*, Barthes asserts that there are two orders of signification: denotation and connotation. The first order resembles the one dealt with by Saussure. It concerns the relationship between the signifier and the signified within the sign as well as the relationship between the sign and the reality to which it refers. Connotation, however, is not as systematic. Barthes describes connotation as the intangible phenomenon that occurs when a sign and the viewer (complete with emotion, social class, political opinion, and cultural values) meet. Although his is not a semiological perspective, John Berger explains in is book, *Ways of Seeing* that the subjectivity of the viewer is implicit to all images. He states that both a photographer and a painter invest the images they create with their own subjectivity by capturing their subject in the position, at the angle and in the light in which they themselves have chosen to view them.[51] Furthermore, appreciation

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[49] Fiske, *Communication Studies* 52.

[50] Fiske, *Communication Studies* 85.

[51] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1997) 10.

of the image is drawn not only from the way of seeing beholden to the photographer/painter but to the viewer. What Berger explains as a spectator's way of seeing is akin to Barthes' connotation of an image. It is within this space that the meaning of the sign moves from arbitrary to subjective. In illustration of Barthes' argument, Fiske points out that the tone of one's voice often plays as significant a role in the meaning of a message as do the actual words spoken.[52] Thus, the context and expression of an utterance add meaning to the technical elements of the message. The result is a connotation of hope, despair, joy, anger as well as humor, and sarcasm. The presentation of an image as a work of art contributes to the manner in which it shall be regarded. Presented as belonging to the realm of high art triggers a whole series of learnt assumptions about art by the viewing public.[53] While assumptions relating to notions of beauty, truth, genius and taste inform the spectator's perception of the image, these assumptions are nevertheless subjective to individual experience, historic context and even gender. Similarly, television (re)presents images that can be understood in a variety of ways depending of a number of subjective factors. In the case of soap opera, one must speculate not only upon the individual characters but the context in which they exist. The structure of the narrative, plot twists, and interaction with other characters are all

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[52] Fiske, *Communication Studies* 86.

[53] Berger 11.

This assumption stems from theories of aloofness and disinterestedness such as those proposed by Kant and Hume in chapter one. These theories are exemplary instances of the valorization of a certain form of taste (high culture) that degrades other forms of taste (such as low or popular culture). The concepts of objectivity in judgement and 'delicacy of taste' and, by extension, the division between high and low culture are so deeply embedded in the cultural consciousness that even today notions of snobbery, intellect, class and wealth are still provoked when contemplating high art.

elements that contribute to the perception of a subject as an either positive or negative image.

Moreover, Barthes explains that the meaning of a message is further obscured by myth. His use for myth is unlike the common perception of the word. According to Barthes, a myth is a story by which a culture explains some aspect of reality or nature: including existentialism, divinity, and sexuality. "A myth, for Barthes, is a culture's way of thinking about something, a way of conceptualizing or understanding it".[54] In other words, a word or an image does not spontaneously create meaning. Rather, the meaning predates the utterance, and the speech act merely reinforces a belief already existent within the culture. Thus, the myth that binds women with maternal care-giving includes concepts of nurturing, generosity, helpfulness, and love. A photograph of a woman cradling an infant in her arms would thus reinforce and naturalize the pre-existing myth of motherhood. Barthes asserts that the primary function of myths are to naturalize history:

> There is a myth that women are naturally more nurturing and caring than men, and thus their natural place is in the home raining the children and looking after the husband, while he, equally naturally, of course, plays the role of breadwinner. These roles then structure the most natural unit of all - the family. By presenting these meanings as part of nature, myth disguises their historical origin, which universalizes them and makes them appear not only unchangeable but also fair: it makes them appear to serve the interests of men and women equally and hides their political effect.[55]

In the soap opera, conceptions of domesticity are so deeply connected with womanhood that images of the matriarch instantly return the reader to the original myth. The notion of women as superior caregivers is a myth conceived and disguised by patriarchy. By

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[54] Fiske, *Communication Studies* 88.

[55] Fiske, *Communication Studies* 89.

positioning women as the weaker of the two genders, the social and political structures of a hierarchical, capitalist, patriarchal system are upheld.

The myth of women as nurturers is reinforced and naturalized by the fact that women are the biological bearers and givers of life. History, however, reveals quite a different truth. Although the political origins of this myth have been obscured, they must not be forgotten. The 'naturalization' of the nuclear family was a direct consequence of urbanization in industrial nineteenth-century England. As people were torn from the extended families of rural communities, circumstances dictated that children remain at home with someone to supervise and care for them. Agricultural living allowed the children to remain with parents and neighbors while working. However, industrialization forbade children from executing manual labor. Yet, children could not stay in the home unsupervised. Hence, it was decided that women would remain in the home while the men would leave the home to do paid work. Fiske asserts that:

> This system required the nuclear family to be the 'natural' basic social unit: it required femininity to acquire the natural meanings of 'nurturing', domesticity, sensitivity, of the need for protection, whereas masculinity was given meanings of strength, assertiveness, independence, and the ability to operate in public.[56]

Essentially, the divisions between masculinity/femininity and consequently of rationality/emotion partly evolved of the transition from rural to urban living. Thus, while these divisions have been made to seem natural, in fact, the evolution of these concepts has served the political needs of the economic system to which they belong. The division between masculinity and femininity that came with the emergence of the public sphere

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[56] Fiske, *Communication Studies* 90.

exemplifies Barthes' theory of myth, and it is this division that informs the feminist project as well as the perception of women in the media.

Yet, the politicization of images is a phenomenon as old as the reproduction of images themselves. Berger has shown us that the reproduction of an image at once makes reference to the original image as it itself becomes a reference point for other images. Thus, the meaning of a particular images change depending upon the words that surround it or the images that come immediately before or after it. The representation of women in the age of mechanical reproduction is especially complex. While the presence of men throughout the history of art reveals a relationship between men and power, the appearance of women in works of art express attitudes that woman has to herself. Thus, while the representation of a man in a painting relates to either his great or poor physical, moral, social, economic or sexual power, he is always seen in relation to that which he is capable of doing to or for the viewer. Conversely, the woman presented in works of art represent that which can or cannot be done to her. Hence, Berger explains, that the woman of art is a woman that has been created by and exists strictly for men.[57] Like the image itself whose duality as reference and referent is forever embedded in its own existence, women too are split into both surveyor and surveyed. Continually watching oneself through the eyes of the male viewer, women have been trained to see themselves as the Other. Thus, the relationship that grows from the representation of women in art has not been one of self-representation, emancipation and autobiography, but one that is characterized by an alienation to the self, the internalization of the male gaze by the

[57] Berger 46.

female. As Berger has explained, the female viewer has turned herself into an object of otherness - specifically, "an object to be viewed: a sight".[58]

In illustration of the objectified female of art history we find an entire category of European oil paintings of which women were the primary subject - the nude. The images of Adam and Eve that proliferate through early Renaissance Christian art are the site of the earliest depictions of the modern female nude. It is within paintings such as the *Fall and Expulsion from Paradise* by Pol del Limbourg (appendix 9), early 15th century, and Hugo Van der Goes' s *Adam and Eve* that we locate the sign of the female presented as spectacle. The narrative of Adam and Eve's fall from Grace was quickly reduced to the shameful epiphany of both parties regarding their nakedness and essentially, their difference. Yet, as Berger points out, Eve's humiliation does not exist in relation to Adam but rather, in relation to the spectator. Both the nudity and the shame of the female subject is transformed into a kind of display while the context of the image as an illustration of divinity reinforces the female's position as object - belonging to a trinity composed of God, Adam and the (male) spectator. [59] Thus, even as images of the female nude became secularized, a common factor remained constant throughout - that the female subject is shamefully aware of her nudity and that she is being seen by a spectator.

Men's looking at naked women is often an element that is incorporated into the works themselves. Often appearing in the background, or peeking through windows, the men stare at the subject, while the female stares back at the viewer. Never is her nakedness an expression of her own sexuality. Rather, her nudity, her seductive gaze and

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[58] Berger 47.

[59] Berger 49.

physical position are signs of her submission to her owner's sexual desires. Sir Peter Lely's *Nell Gwynne* (appendix 10), illustrates the manner in which the nude's gaze is used to depict submission, while the configuration of the female's body in *Venus, Cupid, Time and Love* (appendix 11), by Agnolo Bronzino demonstrates how the sexual desires of the female are ignored. The contortion of her body is designed to appeal to the sexual interests of the male viewer/owner. Even when the subject did not appear bare, the accessories with which she was depicted were used to highlight her sensuality. We see in Lucas the Elder Cranach's painting, *Venus* (appendix 12), the subject appears wearing only an elaborately jeweled hairnet, an ornate necklace and is holding a sheer veil. The image is clearly one of an idealized female figure. Thus was the norm of the European nude.

Yet, as the sexuality of the nude remains monopolized by male desire in Renaissance art, the entire category of the nude took on new meaning in Modern art. As with Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (appendix 13), the image of the ideal female is broken. Early avant-garde 20th century painting continues the tradition initiated by Manet to deviate from the classical portrayal of women as sexualized objects. The photographic works of Cindy Sherman such as her *Untitled #96* (appendix 14), in which she both defies and mocks the great works of Baroque and Renaissance art typify a resistance to established conceptions of femininity. Still, the essential way of viewing women as objects - by either male or female viewer - is so embedded within our western culture, that even today, little has changed.[60] Essentially, as men continue to be positioned as the spectator, and women have been conditioned to see themselves through the eyes of the

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[60] Berger 64.

male observer, the image of the female remains idealized, unrealistic, and at the mercy of the ideology to which it belongs.

Thus, we return to the ideological positioning of the sign. French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser proposes in "Ideology and the Ideological State Aparatuses" a theory of ideology that, although highly informed by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, is tangential to Marxist theory of false consciousness. Althusser states that the primary purpose of ideology is for the dominant class to maintain control through non-coercive means.[61] Althusser has contributed significant work to the sociological debate over the functioning of social systems. He has shown us that every social position occupied by individuals serves a large cultural good, yet any individual can be substituted for another in accomplishing their task. Nevertheless, all people experience a sense of personal worth. It is ideology, as Althusser has shown us, that allows individual agents to experience such a sentiment. Moreover, in *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams goes as far as to propose a definition of ideology. He states that ideology is: 1) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group; 2) a system of illusory beliefs; 3) a social process of the production of meaning and ideas.[62] It is the third definition offered by Williams that corresponds to Barthes' connotative meaning of signs and myths. In our analysis of the soap opera genre, the politicization of gender is the myth belonging to the ideology of patriarchy.

Fiske asserts that the ideology of patriarchy is repressive for women for it is women that are deemed the lesser of the two genders in this binarity. He explains.

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[61] Terry Eagelton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 148-9.

however, that the functioning of ideology is not unproblematic for it penetrates the entire populace. Hence, signs of the patriarchal order are used to subordinate women, even as women use these same signs:

> A pair of high-heel shoes, to take an example, does not impose upon women from outside of the ruling gender (men); but wearing them is an ideological practice of patriarchy in which women participate...Wearing them accentuates the parts of the female body that patriarchy has trained us to think of as attractive to men...Wearing them also limits her physical activity and strength -they hobble her and make her move precariously; so wearing them is practicing the subordination of women in patriarchy.[63]

Similarly, by maintaining the virgin/whore, goddess/mother binary image of women, the soap opera genre perpetuates the dominant ideology that promotes masculinity and rationality and devalues femininity and emotion. Although we understand the alignment of the genders with these characteristics to be embedded in a myth originating with the development of urbanization, we nevertheless accept these alliances. Identifying oneself within the sign (the soap opera for our purposes) and responding to it is a practice that Althusser has named 'interpellation'. This process of identifying oneself within the sign renders the addressee an accomplice in their own manipulation and subjugation. By recognizing an element of oneself in the female subjects of the soaps, Althusser argues that the viewers are participating in their own subordination. Hence, we must ask ourselves why women and feminists continue to watch these shows if doing so implicates them in their own subordination. These questions are addressed in the third and fourth chapters. However, in the following chapter, The Power of the Subordinated: The Soap Opera Subculture, the representation of women on the daytime shows is analyzed and

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[62] Fiske, *Communication Studies* 166.

[63] Fiske, *Communication Studies* 174-5.

further questions are posed regarding the paradoxical relationship that women have with daytime television and the female characters therein.

Chapter Three
The Power of the Subordinated: The Soap Opera Subculture

Why do so many people, particularly women, tune in? The widespread viewership can be partially attributed to the realism of the shows. One of the most crucial elements of realism is the soap operas' unending nature. Unlike other forms of popular fiction, which derive meaning from the sense of an ending, soap operas are open-ended. While sitcoms and nightly dramas find meaning in the sense of an ending, soap operas find meaning in the lack of an absolute closure. Another possible reason for the outstanding viewership is the pleasure that women find not only in viewing the shows, but also in discussing the programs with friends and family, and participating within the sub-cultural networks that have evolved out of the shows. The notion of deriving meaning from partaking in the social network that exists separate from the narratives of the shows is an issue that I shall explore in greater depth later in this chapter.

What comes to mind when one thinks of soap operas? Sex? Love? Adultery? The return of the dead? Beautiful people? Perfect make-up? Women staying home watching them and eating bon bons? Well, if you replied yes to any of these possible answers, then you are among the majority. The popular reaction to daytime television is one of mockery, and ridicule. Yet, millions of women continue to tune in. And thousands of women participate within the constructed sub-culture that has grown out of the genre. Why? Why do so many women tune in, and why are they taken so seriously by so many women even as they are denigrated by mass culture?

Tania Modleski shows us in her book, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, that the soap opera genre is met with three basic attitudes:

dismissiveness, hostility and mockery.[64] Manifestations of these attitudes generally present themselves through jokes, and parodic representations of the genre in other media. Academically, the soap opera genre has not been mocked, but it has certainly been neglected as a scholarly discipline until the feminist movement forced the aperture of women's studies and cultural studies into academia within the past few decades. It is through these disciplines that the critical and scholarly analysis of the realm of popular culture, and hence of soap operas, came to fruition. The analysis of soap operas has led to the increasing legitimization of the genre by a variety of scholars.

Although many skeptics dismiss the soap opera genre as meaningless melodrama, Horace Newcomb disagrees. Rather than dismiss soap operas as an unimportant genre within popular fiction, in his book, *TV: The Most Popular Art*, he proposes that the current judgement of the realm of popular fiction should be re-evaluated. Newcomb asserts that popular fiction, including soap operas, is a valid and complex form that demands attention. Modleski agrees with Newcomb. She asserts that the soap opera is a distinct genre designed for the empowerment of women and as such is a valid form meritorious of analysis. Modleski attempts to deal with the neglect of popular feminine narratives by, "...arguing that the longevity and popularity of certain feminine genres evidence their ability to address real problems and tensions in women's' lives". In other words, if soap operas failed to attract a viewing audience, then academia would be correct in neglecting the genre as a discipline worth studying. However, the shows have proven to sustain a vast viewing audience over time, thus indicating that the programs play a significant role in women's lives.

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[64] Modleski 14.

Furthermore, the soap opera format breaks every rule that defines primetime television. The rigid framework that has been created for primetime television due to their strict time constraints has been abandoned by daytime programming. Newcomb compares daytime television with experimental video art. Unimpeded by the typical television format (30-60 minutes), soap operas are given the time and hence, the freedom to explore and develop storylines in depth. Stories and characters are given a space in which they can grow, change, and evolve. The unending nature of the soap opera is a distinctive feature of the genre, and one that establishes it as unique. For Newcomb, the soap opera is the quintessential example of ideal television.

While Newcomb disregards the feminine nature of these narratives in defense of his argument that soaps are akin to video art, other scholars focus upon it. Christine Geraghty proposes in her book, *Women and Soap Opera* that the soap opera is a unique forum for the exploration of women's experiences and emotions due to the manner in which it has been designed. Having been created in direct opposition to the traditional masculine fiction formula, Geraghty insists that the soap opera format creates a feminine space. The soap opera has been created in a manner in which the storylines and the characters exist within a personal sphere. All experiences and events are examined on a personal level. All occurrences with the soap world are felt profoundly by both the characters and the viewers. Unlike masculine programs that take a more superficial stance, the soap opera deals with issues in depth. This manner of dealing with both commonplace and extraordinary situations reflects the manner in which women have been socialized to function within society. Hence, aside from being distinct and contrary to masculine fiction forms, the soap opera functions in a manner unlike any other

television genre. According to Geraghty, it is not the domestic settings, or the exploration of social problems, nor is it the predominance of strong female characters on soaps that distinguish this genre from others. Soaps value the personal emotional relationship in a manner unlike any other program on television. It is within the emotional relationships that the complexity and dynamics are found, and it is primarily women who are deemed responsible for shaping emotional relationships in Western culture. The representations of female sex roles are not denigrated or disrespected, but are depicted with respect and honor.

There has been a social split between action and contemplation, work and leisure, reason and emotion and ultimately between the masculine and the feminine. This split has led to a devaluation of one form and promotion of the other. The social position that has become second nature to most social individuals, regardless of class, race, political stance, is to relate action, and work with progress.[65] Depreciation of the personal or pensive and inflation of the public or active sphere lends to the degradation of the soap opera genre. In the context of the personal as a denigrated mode, it is logical that the soap opera, a genre to which the personal is a staple, would also be belittled. Yet, "[s]oaps overturn the deeply entrenched value structure which is based on the traditional oppositions of masculinity and femininity".[66] In other words, soaps are a tele-visual genre that reflects the split between the masculine form of physicality and the feminine mode of orality. Since the hallmark of soap opera is speech rather than motion, this genre stands in direct opposition to the active mode so preferred by male viewers. Therefore, the soap

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[65] Horace Newcomb, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (New York: Archon Books, 1974) 163.

[66] Modleski 88.

opera acts as a forum for self-development through resistance. I shall explore this concept further when I discuss the role of gossip within the construction and expression of these narratives later in this chapter.

Like gendered media, various narrative forms and discursive formations also fall along high/low lines. The practice of 'gossip' as a feminine discursive mode is an issue that has been analyzed by Patricia Meyer Spacks in her book, *Gossip*. Spacks isolates two basic forms of gossip by way of defining it; the first is malicious talk that plays with reputations of others by circulating truths and half-truths about them, while the second is thoughtless chatter in the Heideggerian sense.[67] These two forms of gossip are differentiated most importantly in terms of intent. While their goals are obscured by the fact that they are unannounced, their purpose remains destructive in the case of the former and competitive and critical in the case of the latter. The unspoken intention of gossip indicates a self-propelled insistence on frivolity. This capriciousness protects the participants by concealing both intention and identity. Gossip, as a discursive practice that is characterized by frivolity is located in the larger distinction between public and private spheres.

Spacks sites Richard Sennet who argues that the differentiation between public and private spheres belongs to a relatively recent moment in history, specifically the late 17th century. The constitution of the public as well as the private was defined both by what was, as well as what it was not. "The line drawn between public and private was essentially one on which the claims of civility - epitomized by cosmopolitan, public

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[67] Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera: A Study in Prime Time Soaps* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 40.

behavior - were balanced against the claims of nature - epitomized by the family".[68] The separation between the public and the private, the rational and the emotional and ultimately the masculine and the feminine is relevant to the discourse of the high culture/low culture debate for it underlines the gendered characterization of high culture as valid, sane and masculine and the low or popular as paltry, silly and feminine. The public sphere quickly became gendered as a masculine space while conversely, the domestic setting, highlighted by emotion rather than rationality became gendered as feminine space during the 19th century. High culture distinctions have traditionally followed the gendered distinctions of masculine vs. feminine spheres. Thus, high culture became characterized by the rational, the prejudiced, and the refined while popular culture came to be represented by the emotional, the frivolous, and the crude.

The distinction between public and private quickly evolved into a division between cosmopolitan and domestic. Spacks locates gossip as a discursive practice that falls under the rubric of the private sphere. By existing as a private modality, oppositional to the rationality of the masculinized public sphere, gossip as a form becomes feminized. Belonging to the realm of the private, Spacks asserts that gossip at once violates claims of civility as it empowers the participants by affecting change within the public sphere by allowing it to seep into public spaces and penetrate public opinion. Essentially, although gossip may serve to empower the subordinated group by subversively affecting social change, it is nevertheless a denigrated mode.

The denigration of the personal sphere falls into a larger discourse of gendered media that promotes the exclusion of women. The soap opera community and women in

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[68] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985) 6.

general have historically been excluded from positions of respect, reputation, wealth and power. We can say that the literary history excluding women begins with the First Testament as Eve is blamed for the evils of all humanity. We can also include Milton's *Paradise Lost* in this lineage, and various Shakespearean plays. Yet, more contemporaneously, we find the works of Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. In their writings these women address the institutionalized exclusion and demeaning characterizations of which we are speaking. With regard to the notion of the 'mad woman', Perkins Stetson Gilman writes, in "The Yellow Wallpaper", of how her retched surroundings, and her captivity combined with the fact that she is scarcely taken seriously when she speaks and is forbidden from written expression drives her to madness:

> There comes John, and I must put this away, - he hates to have me write a word. We have been here for two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day. I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much I please, save lack of strength.[69]

As she hides from her husband, and appropriates the disorder that he has named her as having, our heroine is driven into the walls as it is, and ultimately into madness. The notion of the hysterical woman is not a new one in the discourse of femininity or of literature. Her falling into hysteria is at once her affliction and her cure. In the patriarchal narrative that is driven by rationality, the woman is incapacitated by her emotional excess. Yet, her affliction can be also seen as a resistive act, such as her writing, to the dominant patriarchal epistemology. By not conforming to her pre-designed maternal, and spousal, role she is acting against the controlling masculine forces that have confined her

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[69] Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," *The Norton Book of American Short Stories*, ed. Peter S. Prescott. (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1988) 139.

in her yellow cell. Although she attempts to empower herself, and assert her identity through language, and words, her imprisonment prevents even this outlet for auto-poesis. Hence, her sole retreat is into the depth of madness where she is liberated in a world under herself. Representing the patriarchal voice of western ideology, John considers our heroine to have fallen into an abyss of loss and hysteria at the closing of the story. However, a feminist reading of this text could consider her final actions to be her withdrawal into freedom.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the heroine had attempted to sustain her independence, and her sanity through language, yet her attempts had failed for they were never given the freedom to develop. So many women have been sequestered from writing in history not only because they have not been granted the education to develop skills of literacy, but because the demands of the home were far too great to afford women the time or the space to develop creative thoughts. In her book, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf writes of the absence of females in literature, and the deductive manner in which women today must learn of the lives of women of days past:

> Nor shall we find her in any collection of anecdotes. Aubrey hardly mentions her. She never writes her own life and scarcely keeps a diary; there are only a handful of her letters in existence. She left no plays or poems by which we can judge her. What one wants, I thought - and why does not some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton supply it? Is a mass of information; at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like; had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant? All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books; the life of the average Elizabethan women must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it. ...I continued looking about the bookshelves again, is that nothing is known about women before the 18th century.[79]

[79] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Vintage, 1929) 42.

Woolf is addressing the absence of female fiction writers in the history of English literature. The situation is problematic for Woolf on several levels. The practices of socialization that keep women from reading and hence of writing is a great hindrance, for it becomes increasingly difficult to develop a tradition of women's literature when a prior history is non-existent. Such is the case of Shakespeare's fictitious sister. This woman would not have been afforded the same opportunities as her brother, not for lack of creativity, skill or talent but for her unfamiliarity with scholastics and her exclusion from the social activities that are requisite for circulating one's work. Additionally, having been excluded from the production of writing, women have been represented only peripherally in stories written by and for men. Hence, it is as phantasms in literature that women present themselves. While we might not have access to the diaries or poems of the 19th century woman, we are able to deduce what her life might have been like. Thus, there has evolved a tradition of viewing ourselves from the backdoor, spying on our lives from a darkened window. Years later, as we sit upon the dawn of a new millennium, we have only begun to break away from this tradition of seeing ourselves as Others.

The credit goes to women such as Virginia Woolf who created a room for herself, yet in turn created a room for all women. By having physical, as well as mental, spaces where women are free to explore their thoughts and ideas, we have been able to substantiate a literary tradition by and for women. Simone de Beauvoir addresses the issue of one's privacy and the role of autonomy in *The Prime of Life*. She writes regarding her newly found independence:

> From the moment I opened my eyes every morning I was lost in a transport of delight. When I was about 12 I suffered through not having a private retreat of my own at home. Leafing through *Mon Journal* I had found a story about an English school girl and gazed enviously at the colored illustration portraying her room.

> There was a desk, and a divan, and shelves filled with books. Here, within these gaily painted walls, she read and worked and drank tea, with noone watching her - how envious I felt! For the first time ever I had glimpsed a more fortunate way of life than my own. And now, at long last, *I too had a room to myself.*[71]

This short passage indicates the role that privacy plays in the development of a sense of independence, and identity. Like so many women before her, de Beauvoir is expressing her joy of having a sanctified space to herself. Literature is merely one faculty that embodies the institutional exclusion of women from culture.

In her book, *What does a Woman Want?* Shoshana Felman sites the deconstructionist theory of Jacques Derrida in order to unpack the epistemological foundation of the hierarchical, dichotomous nature of western cultural life. Using the same technique employed by Luce Irigaray in her work, *Speculum de l'autre femme*[72], Felman analyzes the concept of femininity not through autobiographical or testimonial writings by women, but through important theoretical writings of men.[73] While these texts have not been written to address women, they nevertheless represent the role of femininity in philosophy and psychoanalysis:

> Thus, the metaphysical logic of dichotomous oppositions which dominates philosophical thought (Presence/Absence, Being/Nothingness, Truth/Error, Same/Other, Identity/Difference, and so on) is, in fact, a subtle mechanism of hierarchization which assures the unique valorization of the "positive" pole (that is, of a single term) and, consequently, the repressive subordination of all "negativity," the mastery of difference as such.[74]

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[71] Simone de Beauvoir, "The Prime of Life" *The Norton Book of Women's Lives* ed. Phyllis Rose (New York: WW Norton Co., 1993) 53-4

[72] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* trans. Gillian Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987)

[73] Specifically, Freud's lecture entitled, "On Femininity" in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1965)

[74] Shoshana Felman, *What does a Woman Want?* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 22-23.

The binary conception of positive/negative and equally, of masculine and feminine has resulted in the privileging of one term and the subordination of the other. Hence, the theoretical subordination of the feminine to the masculine implicates the feminine as the opposition, the other. Ultimately, femininity functions as the negative to the masculine positive. Furthermore, Irigaray points out that a concealed agenda exists that is designed to exclude women from the production of speech. Irigaray's contention follows that as the 'other', women are philosophically excluded from the principle of identity which is defined as masculine. Thus, the conception of a being that neither comes forth from the masculine nor returns to the masculine is immediately rejected. In response to the historic exclusion of women from all aspects of social life Felman asserts that it is through the feminist address that women shall empower themselves.

Felman holds that there is a wide gap between the true story of women, and the notion of womanhood perceived by others. The questions for Felman are: how can you write truthfully about me if you are fundamentally different from me, and, how can I believe what I read about myself if it is being written by someone radically contrary to myself. The assertion that "...women must no longer live their lives in the houses and stories of men"[75] refers to the notion that even the most pristine of female perspectives is embedded within patriarchy and as such has been influenced by masculinity.

She shows us that the continued labor towards the exorcism of the masculine dimension of the female psyche, the recognition of one's autobiography, and ultimately the testimonial of it is the formula for the reinsertion of power into women's lives. She affirms that the first step to empowerment is reaching the understanding that by virtue of

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[75] Felman 127.

existing within a western culture, all female perspectives are embedded within patriarchy and are thus relegated to a masculine point of view. Regardless of how autonomous one feels, all women have been conditioned to adopt the universal, yet masculinized 'I' when reading. As a result of this infinitely restrictive point of view, a woman's autobiography is relegated to a chauvinistic slant. "Trained to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as the Other, estranged from ourselves, we have a story that by definition cannot be self-present to us, a story that, in other words, is not a story, but must become a story".[76] Thus, realizing one's own story, the stories of all women and ultimately becoming a feminist is a process that occurs over time and through reading, maintains Felman. She contends that until a woman recognizes the masculine dimension within her own psyche, she is unable to truly articulate her autobiography. Furthermore, it is not until the confession of one's own survival that a woman develops an autobiography of her own. Felman's argument follows that a feminist address is not only an act of empowerment by which a woman can speak of her femininity, but it is a tool by which a woman can recognize her natural distinction from men as well.

The importance of speech is a theme that has been explored not only by Virginia Woolf, and her peers, but by Mary Ellen Brown in her discussion of gossip in *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance*. Akin to the aforementioned theories proposed by Spacks that view gossip as a female discursive practice, Brown identifies gossip as the primary form of feminine discourse. She considers it to be a bricollage of women's' lives. Brown addresses the role of gossip in women's' lives, and women's' culture. She contends that like soap operas and popular female narratives in

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[76] Felman 14.

general, gossip and women's' culture in general is badly regarded. The dictionary definition for gossip, as provided by Brown, can be broken down to two main parts. Gossip is defined as, "...a woman friend who comes at birth..." and, "...idle, malicious, scandalous tales...". This definition illustrates the manner in which women's' culture has been institutionally considered. She states that while women's' talk is uniformly characterized as gossip, men that speak publicly are most often preachers, orators, diplomats and politicians.[77] The aforementioned definition is one that contributes to the characterization of women's speech as insignificant and trivial. The two parts of the definition seem to be concurrently entwined and contradictory. While the woman friend that enters one's life is seen as a confidante, and a source of spiritual or emotional support, the meaning ascribed to the activity of gossiping shifts to have a much more malignant capacity in the second half of the definition. Brown proposes that women's talk, especially gossip, has come to be considered superficial, and petty, due to the subject matter with which it is concerned. She suggests that, "...the peripherality of the concerns expressed in women's talk to the important public issues of power, war and commerce led to the characterization of women's' culture as trivial and idle, if not actually evil in its distraction of thought from higher things".[78] Thus, the relationship between women and speech seems to be, if nothing else, problematic.

How, one might ask, do we move from the feminist address and gossip to soap operas? One of the possible answers seems to be in the continuous labeling of women's' culture and discursive forms as vain, idle, trivial, and trashy. Furthermore, both soap

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[77] Mary Ellen Brown, *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance* (California: Sage Publications Ltd., 1994) 184.

operas and gossip are open-ended narratives that resist the patriarchal drive for closure, and resolution. The technical dimensions of the genre heighten the importance of the words. Salem (Days of our Lives), Pine Valley (All My Children), Port Charles (General Hospital) and Bay City (Another World) represent worlds of dialogue, not action. There is no real action on the shows. As Horace Newcomb mentions, "...our concern is with the dialogue, and the camera insists that our attention remain there, offering us a close-up either of the speaker or the listener".[79] Even when the scene is one that calls for numerous people to fill a room at a wedding or a funeral or in a restaurant, the camera quickly focuses upon the characters, and their words. The actors of the programs are forced to learn a methodology of acting that is centered on the face, and the language, unlike primetime actors that employ the body more dynamically. Thus, rather than derive action from bodily motion, the action of the programs originates within the dialogue itself. It is in this way that the soap opera genre creates a space for women that is unique and fundamentally different from their primetime counterparts. Christine Geraghty explains the manner in pleasure is derived through the narrative style of the soap opera:

> For the household drudge, the soap operas, with their slow pace, repetition, dislocated and overlapping story lines and their emphasis on the ordinary rather than the glamorous, provide a narrative which can be understood without the concentration required by prime time television.[80]

Although this explanation implies that soap opera viewers are incompetent, and unable to comprehend the dynamics of nighttime programs, upon closer inspection, this comment does not denote the condescending tone it seems to at first glance. What is meant by this

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[79] Brown 185.

[80] Newcomb 168.

[81] Geraghty 43.

comment, rather, is that as women are occupied within the home with innumerous, overlapping chores, they are not granted the stasis required for primetime television viewing. By being forced to remain mobile throughout the day, either by keeping the dinner from burning, or by keeping the child from choking on her toys, female viewers watch the shows in a fragmented and distracted manner. Thus, by focusing on the dialogue rather than the action, and by repeating and fragmenting the stories, women are able to follow the narratives with ease and pleasure.

Additionally, soap operas are akin to gossip in that the content of both forms are occupied with issues that are relevant to women's' lives. The narratives within the shows themselves are rife with gossip. Mothers are talking about their daughters, women are talking about their husbands, and friends are talking about one another. This stress on orality is representative of the oral nature of television in general but is particularly focused upon in soap operas. Jack Levin and Arnold Arluke point out in their book, *Gossip: The Inside Scoop* that, "...the average soap opera is written in such a way that the audience can scoop on the characters and observe their reactions."[81] In other words, the manner in which the majority of the soap opera narratives are written allows the viewer to spy on the characters in every dimension of their personal lives. During housekeeping, lovemaking, working, and child rearing, the viewer is voyeuristically speculating and moralizing on the action, and behavior of their preferred heroine. Furthermore, the narratives are constructed in such a way that the viewer is often informed of a bit of information or "gossip" long before the characters. The viewer is placed in a position of knowledge and thus of power over the characters. Being in this position of power, the

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[81] Arnold Arluke and Jack Levin, *Gossip: The Inside Scoop* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988) 38.

viewers are invited, and even encouraged, to gossip about the lives of the personalities by corresponding with one another, and with the networks. Modleski comments on the position of the viewer, and affords her the power to forgive all. By being informed of all of the talk on and around the shows, "...the spectator/mother, identifying with each character in turn, is made to see 'the larger picture' and extend her sympathy to both sinner and the victim".[82] Moreover, soap operas provide a resistive pleasure to the dominant patriarchal ideology by allowing the viewers to gossip about the narratives in a manner that defies dominant conceptions of reality. By participating, at least vicariously in the lives of the characters, the viewers are invited to converse about the characters as though they exist in real life.[83] Fans treat the characters and the shows as seriously as they would treat their own family. Fans circulate family trees that assign dates of birth to the characters, and celebrate the anniversaries of both personalities and programs. The notion of gossip, and soap operas serving a resistive purpose is developed later in the chapter as I explore Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'. Hence, the discursive form of gossip is idealized and legitimized by the genre while the gossip networks that have been established reinforce a feminist pleasure contrary to the dominant male ideology.

The role that speech, language and words play in women's lives undermines the perpetual categorization of women as hysterical. The daytime serial drama is one of the few popular narrative forms that create a legitimized space for women to express their concerns and experiences. Furthermore, the rich spoken text that exists beyond the narratives themselves underlines the importance that women place on the creation of

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[82] Modleski 93.

[83] Brown 195.

communities where their voices can and will be heard. Yet, like the genre itself, the soap opera sub-culture and the entire category of fandom is marginalized and even feared.

It is clear that there is a predominance of female viewers of soap operas. Consequently, the majority of the fans are female as well. It is precisely these women that are subjected to the highest degree of attack and mockery by mainstream culture. These troops of women are dedicated to their favorite programs and preferred stars, yet their dedication is persistently regarded as fanatical, excessively emotional, and even pathological. Although fandom is a category that is unilaterally denigrated, the soap opera community is particularly ridiculed.

In her article, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization", Joli Jensen suggests that there are two primary definitions of a 'fan'. She suggests that these two images are socially constructed, and are based less on the actual personalities of the individual fans than on a critique of modern social life.[84] Her argument contains several key factors. First, Jensen identifies the distinction between the fan and the self. She claims that the term fan and the social category of fans is one that is congruent with the 'other'. She makes the distinction between 'us', the professional, the educated, and the reputable and 'them', the fanatics, the overly emotional, the nuts. Furthermore, she asserts that when 'we' admire certain works of art, or sports, we consider ourselves not to be fans, but to be patrons, aficionados, or even collectors and connoisseurs. She explains that this distinction is one that falls on high culture/low culture lines, where low or popular cultural activities are deemed less worthy of praise, and its admirers social deviants, and potentially dangerous. Second, Jensen identifies two basic forms in which

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[84] Joli Jensen, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization" *The Adoring Audience* ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992) 9.

the 'fan' appears; the loner, and the mass crowd. She asserts that both are equally dangerous. She writes, "...there is very little literature that explores fandom as a normal, everyday cultural or social phenomenon. Instead, the fan is characterized as (at least potentially) an obsessed loner, suffering from a disease of isolation, or a frenzied crowd member, suffering from a disease of contagion".[85] She explains that these characterizations are infused with a critique of modern life. Each character becomes emblematic of the 'alienated modern man' that is so easily swayed to madness.

Thus, fandom is quickly linked with fanaticism, deviance, and irrationality. On the opposite end of the continuum, however, we find the connoisseurs and the aficionados. These admirers differ from fans in two respects: the objects of their desire, and their mode of admiration. More often than not, the objects of desire by the aficionado lie within the realm of high culture, while the fan admires the work of popular culture. Hence, excess, and emotional enthusiasm characterize fandom, while connoisseurs display affinity and admiration politely, and calmly. The connoisseur is deemed as rational, and unemotional, and thus, benign. There is a clear implication here that fandom, excess, emotion and danger are intertwined.

However, in attempting to break down this conception of the 'fan' Jensen draws a parallel between the conception of the obsessed fans (either as loner or mob) and scholarly devotion to academia. She claims that professors, coin collectors, and audiophiles follow the same patterns of devotion while they are rarely considered dangerous. Jensen suggests that respectable professionals such as University professors constantly cross the line dividing the rational and the irrational, the normal and the

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[85] Jensen 13.

deviant, and the logical and the emotional without pathological consequences by respectable professionals such as University professors.[86] She points out that scholarly dedication to a body of work or a school of thought demands as much interest, and emotional investment as does being a rock music or soap opera fan. Thus, participation within the academic milieu is shrouded in a language of rationality and sobriety that camouflages the extreme emotional attachments felt by intellectuals to their work. Jensen herself admits that the popular conception of fandom is one that highlights the marginality of the individual rather than their competence and comprehensive knowledge of a subject matter. She confesses that proclaiming herself to be a fan of the subject of her research (country music) would imply that she has become, "...emotionally engaged with unworthy cultural figures and forms".[87] Jensen maintains that the language of fandom is one that is highly condescending, unnecessarily pejorative, and is rooted in the distinction of 'us' the 'rational' and, 'them' the 'emotional'. This distinction is a compelling one, for it returns the analysis to the binary of the reasonable, and the hysterical. This is a gendered distinction, to which women have fallen victim for countless years. The binary of the rational and the emotional as competitive opposites is illustrated through the soap opera sub-culture.

The soap opera sub-culture acts as a forum for the exploration of issues relevant and integral to women's' lives within a space that is sanctified specifically for females. It is an unpolluted space where the exploration of women's' issues is not ridiculed or belittled. Soap operas create a space where women can unite, where they can help each

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[86] Jensen 21.

[87] Jensen 23.

other and learn from one another. While soaps have been doing this for years, the past few decades have seen a increase in mediated sub-networks for soap opera viewers. Magazines[88] (appendix 1.1-4), and newsletters[89] abound (appendix 2.1-2), while the numbers[90] of web sites, and newsgroups continue to grow.

As radio audiences have been analyzed, so too have television viewers. A great deal of television research deals with audience viewing patterns and habits; daytime television is no exception. In the early 1940s, Herta Herzog studied daytime radio listeners resulting in a portrait of the typical soap opera fan that would remain for nearly three decades.[91] Her profile of radio listeners was based upon research found to illustrate the differences between radio listeners and non-listeners. Her characterization included social participation, intellectual range, concern with public affairs and communication habits. She determined that radio listeners were likely to be women who were somewhat isolated from their community. She speculated that these women might have had difficulty establishing or maintaining relationships with other people. She also suggested that the intellectual range of listeners was less broad than that of non-listeners and their interests were narrowly focused on people like themselves rather than the larger community around them. This picture of the serial listener endured even as the genre moved from radio to television. In 1985, a comparable survey procured quite different

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[88] Magazines currently available include: Soap Opera Digest, Soap Opera News, Soap's Greatest Hall of Fame, Soaps in Depth, Soap Opera Update, Soap Opera Magazine and Soap Opera Weekly

[89] All of the fan clubs for both individual actors and shows distribute newsletters.

[90] For example, http://www.spe.sony.com/soapcity/days/ for the Days of our Lives web site. Some Days of our Lives performers have independent sites. See the Allison Sweeney (Sami Brady of Days of our Lives) web site at: http://www.alisonsweeney.com or the Melissa Brennan Reeves (formerly Jennifer Horton of Days of our Lives) web site at: http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood Boulevard/8319/.

[91] Herta Herzog, "What Do We Really Know About Daytime Serial Listeners?" *Radio Research* ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton (New York: Essential Books, 1943) 5.

results. The 1985 survey reflects a widely varied audience composition. The main factors that determined soap opera viewing in the 80s were age and gender, rather than marital status, income, education and career orientation.[92]

The habits of viewers in the 1980s reflect normal viewing habits of television in general. While younger viewers (1-10) would fill their free afternoons with outdoor activities, male and female viewers aged between 11 and 20 would fill their time watching television. However, as teenagers moved into adulthood, males continued to watch the same amounts of daytime television, while women decreased viewing times. Changes in marital status, professional commitment, children, and household commitments contributed to the changes in female viewing habits. Although females continued to watch occasionally between the ages of 21 and 40, they did so by videotaping and viewing them at more convenient times. Viewers between the ages of 21 and 40, both male and female, chose soap operas as their preferred form of daytime television.

Daytime television programmers have a vested interest in their audience and are genuinely concerned with the preferences of their viewers. The statistical research that has been done in attempt to define the daytime viewing audience is conducted for very specific reasons. While a detailed audience profile assists the writers in better targeting their audiences, it also affords network officials with the necessary information on how to best manipulate the audience in order to procure the greatest possible revenues. Hence, in nearly every soap opera related publication, readers are invited to write to the programs.

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[92] Marilyn Matelski, *The Soap Opera Evolution: America's Enduring Romance with Daytime Drama* (London: McFarlan Co. Publishers, 1988) 40.

comment on their likes and dislikes, inquire about fan clubs,[93] and so on (appendix 3). For example, *Soap Opera Digest* provides the addresses for the three main networks in every issue (appendix 4). The April 1997 edition of *Soap Opera Update* reserved an entire page for the letters and messages sent in by fans. The caption for the column, Soap Forum encapsulates its raison d'être. It reads, "It's your turn to comment on what makes you crazy!". Soap Opera Digest sets aside several pages per issue to print the comments of the fans in the feature "Sound Off" (appendix 5). Every issue of *Soap Opera Digest* includes a two-page feature dedicated solely to viewer responses. The caption for the feature article entitled, "Love it, Hate it" read, "Our readers are a vocal bunch. When something is on their minds, they let us know. In this feature, *Soap Opera Digest* gives viewers the chance to sing the praises of their favorite soap storylines - or blow off steam. From the responses, it's clear that daytime fans agree...to disagree" (appendix 6). Even the editors of the magazines are unable to resist the temptation of voicing their opinions. The editors of *Soap Opera Digest* speak freely of their preferences in the column, "Thumbs Up & Down!" (appendix 7). This system of feedback has opened up the door to a reciprocal exchange of ideas, information, and reactions between fans outside of the networks' auspices. Fans are encouraged to correspond between one another. Fan club newsletters include the names and addresses of women that seek pen pals who wish to gossip about their favorite soap. The soap publications have also begun to follow this trend by including the names and addresses of fans seeking other fans. *Soap Opera Digest* has begun featuring this type of mailing list. The editorial comments under the title, "Pen Pals" reads as follows (appendix 8):

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[93] "Club Corner!" *Inside Days of our Lives* July 1997: 62.

> Want to dish daytime's storylines and stars with new friends? Each month, we'll print selected names and addresses of readers who are looking for pen pals from all over. If you want to be a pen pal, send your name, address, or post office box and a list of shows you watch to: Pen Pals, c/o Soap Opera Digest, 45 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.[94]

From these types of invitations, the networks receive thousands of letters weekly from concerned fans. Individual actors receive uncountable numbers of letters each week depending upon their exposure and their popularity. Actors are rated on both the quantity of mail they receive, as well as the quality of the letters. Each actor strives for an equal balance between positive and negative letters, for this balance indicates a strong interest for the character. The daytime audience is fully aware of their power to contribute to and manipulate the narratives, and are among the most vocal of all television viewers. In 1977, when a Days of our Lives story called for Deidre Hall's character of Dr. Marlena Evans to be killed, fans overloaded the NBC switchboard with phone calls complaining about the decision. Thus, rather than kill off the beloved character of Marlena, the writers decided to kill off Marlena's twin sister Samantha instead. The fans succeeded in accomplishing their mission. Deidre Hall and Marlena Evan can still be found in Salem on Days of our Lives today. Beyond their concern for the actors, viewers are especially attentive to the ways in which issues that have a particular relevance to women's' lives are dealt with on the shows. Moreover, as aforementioned, since the network decision-makers are preoccupied with developing viewer identification with the characters in order to increase profits, they make an effort to listen to the interests of the viewing audience and reflect those preferences within the narratives. Consequently, when a large enough number of viewers arrive at a consensus that a certain character or story is not being dealt

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[94] "Pen Pals" *Soap Opera Digest* March 1996: 53.

with properly, they make their opinions known, and move to have the problem repaired. This type of audience/network relationship is exclusive to daytime television. Even prime time soap operas cannot boast of the same type of reciprocal feedback network that marks daytime.

In this sense, women are united as they fight for their voices to be heard, and often times, they are successful. Interestingly, the soap opera subculture unites women that would otherwise have very little in common. The soaps speak to women across racial lines, class divisions, educational differences, and age groups. Thus, the implication is that the soap opera addresses issues that women feel they can identify as belonging to them, and not to men. Although the different characters are appealing to different people, the trend nevertheless remains that the characters of the narratives, and not the plots impact all viewers. This type of relationship that is nurtured between viewer and character is fundamental to the soap opera genre, which is based on traditional women's' culture that values individuals, emotions, and empathy. The primacy of the character over plot is fundamental to genre not only in fostering viewer identification, but in heightening the emotional relationships between viewer and audience. Even as the characters and stories change to meet the changing interests of the viewers, emotional identification remains the primary form of the narratives. The common denominator among all of the daytime programs is that they operate on an emotional, super discursive level that serves as a textual entry-point by women regardless of social position. The reader responses by viewers in magazines reflect the perceived sense of reality within the stories on an emotional level. With regard to All My Children's Kelsey and Anita, a concerned fan from Phoenix, Arizona writes:

> It's unbelievable that All My Children's Kelsey could keep the truth about Bobby from Anita. The star-crossed teen needs to know that Bobby fathered Kelsey's baby, and that he refuses to face facts. Unfortunately, Anita is excited about her relationship with the arrogant Bobby and is being fooled into thinking that his proclamations of love are true. Someone needs to get the record straight for Anita before it's too late.[95]

The tone of this short letter is clearly one of concern for the characters. She expresses her interest in them at a similar level that one would speak of intimate friends or family members. In the April 23 1996 issue of *Soap Opera Digest* another devoted fan writes of both characters and the actors on her favorite show:

> Days of our Lives should be commended for its February sweeps effort. I loved the fact that Lexie is Stefano's daughter, even though I suspected it all along. Tanya Boyd (Lexie) played out their scenes effectively. Peter's reaction to the discovery of Tony's diary was sincere. John's scenes with Marlena and the children tugged on the heartstrings. As for Marlena and Stefano; Marlena beat him at his own game. It's nice to see a heroine - instead of a hero - for a change.[96]

While the tone of this letter is one that depicts a viewer's concern for the show, it is clearly a letter of praise. This viewer, however, speaks of the program with greater transparency between the characters and the actors that did the Phoenix, Arizona resident. This letter also reflects the viewer's level of expertise, and knowledge of the show. While this reader has a firm grasp of the familial relations within their context, this viewer is also able to read the narrative in order to suspect, and even predict the outcomes of the stories. Nevertheless, the two aforementioned letters are character based. A fan from Cliffside Park, New Jersey writes to *Soap Opera Digest* of her impression of the storyline involving homosexuality:

> I am a heterosexual female, and it astounds me that All My Children viewers are sharply divided about whether the Michael homosexuality storyline is suitable for daytime. Homosexuality is a part of life, whether we like it or not. Some of my

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[95] "Sound Off!" *Soap Opera Digest* March 1996: 141.

[96] "Sound Off!" *Soap Opera Digest* April 1996: 140.

> co-workers are gay men, and even though I don't agree with their lifestyle, I do believe that AMC's storyline is realistic and sensitive - and definitely not sensationalism. This is life in the '90s, and some people need to get their heads out of the sand.[97]

In all three letters it is evident that the role of emotional realism is of primary importance in developing and maintaining the viewers' relationships with the characters. More than any other television text, the soap opera narratives foster strong bonds between the viewers and the characters by manipulating time, and heightening emotional credibility. By providing viewers with a venue for their responses to plot developments, and character/actor changes, the magazines reinforce the viewer/soap relationship.

Participation in the sub-culture heightens the enjoyment of shows by serving as a forum for the practice of empathetic identification, and moral and emotional problem solving. By focusing on this kind of narrative mode, the shows simultaneously reinforce and inspire traditional women's culture. For many viewers, watching the shows is merely the beginning of the soap opera experience. For vast numbers of women, the actual serials are merely entry points into a world of soaps, and glorified women's traditions. Myriads of women take the content of the shows, and speak of them with friends, relatives and neighbors. By talking about the shows, and reliving the plot developments, the viewers heighten their involvement with the programs and the characters thus increasing their enjoyment of the genre.

All of these letters, magazine columns and invitations by networks for viewer responses culminate to the sum of what John Fiske identifies as the 'tertiary text'. In his book, *Television Culture* he introduces the concept of the 'tertiary text' as a legitimate source of participatory pleasure that television viewers, soap opera viewers in particular,

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[97] "Sound Off!" *Soap Opera Digest* April 1996: 140.

engage in. The tertiary text is an element of his theory espousing the virtues of the intertextuality of television that reinforces the blurring of the lines between fiction and reality to heightening viewer identification with the characters. "These are the texts that the viewers make themselves out of their responses, which circulate orally or in letters to the press, and which work to form a collective rather than an individual response".[98] Even the language employed by Fiske in describing the nature of the 'tertiary text' underlines the importance of the viewer, and the creation of community. The verbal nature of the dramas spills over from the narratives themselves into the sub-cultural networks that exist beyond the shows. Additionally, the sense of community and the empowerment that is provided by participation within the sub-culture is reinforced by the cultural capital that is acquired over long periods of involvement.

Legions of women worldwide write letters, partake in online chats, and subscribe to fan clubs. Such activities constitute a friendship network based on the soap operas. These outlets provide women in a space in which they may experience and share the pleasure of soap opera viewing. The friendships made plug women into a social network where their knowledge and expertise is not only valued but is revered. The soap opera subculture functions as all subcultures do – they unite people and validate their experiences. In the following chapter, I look at the ways in which the soap opera is an entry point for thousands of women into a world of meaning and pleasure.

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[98] Fiske, *Television* 124.

Chapter Four
Contradictions and Misunderstandings: The Politics of Pleasure

In the preceding three chapters I have speculated upon the discursive placement of the soap opera within the schism between high culture and low culture, the representation of women on daytime television and the subculture that has grown out of these shows. Regardless of the competing discourses revolving around the genre - in the press, in advertising, among media critics, journalists and intellectuals - soap operas have managed to pierce the experiential worlds of millions of viewers worldwide. There is no doubt that these shows generate a certain fascination. However, this fascination, as with most pleasurable experiences, is difficult to describe. While Nielsen ratings clearly indicate that millions of women watch the shows, recording the motivations for their continuous viewing in a meaningful way is not unproblematic. From the theories put forth in the first chapters we can be sure of at least one thing - that the soap opera represents a pleasurable experience for women. The question of pleasure is a crucial one for it takes us beyond the analysis of the genre and brings us to the relationship that women have with both the shows and the characters therein.

People watch television soap operas because they find them to be entertaining. While advertising can introduce an individual to a certain program and possibly encourage an individual to watch, nobody is forced to watch television. I am asking what brings women to watch these shows and keep them dedicated through the years? By asking this question, I am actually trying to determine the elements that constitute the pleasureableness of watching soap operas. I have indicated throughout the first three chapters of this work that women enjoy a positive relationship with the daytime soap opera. Here, I explore the discourse of pleasure in the context of the soap opera genre and

demonstrate that the soap opera and its subcultural community can be presented and taken seriously within the framework of issues concerning pleasures of the text and its relationship to ideology and cultural politics.

The pleasure associated with watching soap operas is complex and the value of this pleasure, as with the value of all leisurely activity, is widely debated. Although the pleasure associated with most such activities including theatre-going or learning to play a musical instrument is socially acceptable, the pleasures associated with popular culture are usually suspect. This is especially true of women's genres and the pleasure associated with them. Although women watch soaps much in the same way that men watch and talk about sports, in dominant discourse soap operas are still often spoken of as trash. Like men that watch sports in groups and share the experience together, women often share the experience of watching soap operas with other women. The activity of watching television, for many women, becomes a communally shared experience. They identify with favorite characters (as men pick favorite athletes) and women also predict the future of the stories based on past behavior as men predict the outcome of a game or a series.

Yet, criticism of soap opera pleasure dates back to the early days of the radio soaps when attacks stemmed from sources as varied as the medical community and the popular press (Arnheim 1944). More recently, however, researchers have managed to locate and explain the pleasure derived from watching soap operas. However, the theories that have been made available are quite distinctive from one another - so distinctive that they seem almost contradictory. Both Ien Ang (1985) and Mary Ellen Brown (1987) locate viewers' pleasure in a negotiation of identification with and fantasy about the characters and the narratives. Janice Radway (1984) and Tania Modleski (1983) have

both argued that the consumption of traditional feminine texts provides a means of resisting patriarchal discourse. In this chapter, let us look more closely at these theories.

Pleasures of the Text

Viewer pleasure can be found in the narrative structure of the daytime serial. The implicit characteristics of the soap opera form are congruent with the interests and patterns of women's lifestyles. All of the elements of the soap opera have been designed to elicit a certain familiarity and pleasure from its predominantly female audience. The characteristics of the soap opera genre have been summarized by Mary Ellen Brown as including: 1) the centrality of female characters, 2) the characterization of the female characters as powerful, 3) multiple characters and plots as well as multiple point of view, 4) the portrayal of many of the male characters as 'sensitive' men, 5) an emphasis on problem solving, 6) a stress placed on the intimacy of conversation that propel the narrative rather than on action, 7) plots that hinge on relationships between people, 8) the home as the central location of the show, 9) concerns for non-dominant groups being taken seriously, 10) use of time that parallels actual time, 11) serial form that resists narrative closure and 12) the abrupt segmentation between parts without a cause-and-effect relationship between segments.[99] All of these characteristics mark the soap opera genre as different from other forms of television fiction. These characteristics also serve to generate a profound psychological relationship between the viewer and the program. As the aforementioned elements characterize the genre, they also represent the mainstream idea of femininity in dominant culture and as such are tenets of the hegemonic order. They are nevertheless familiar to female soap opera viewers, and this

familiarity engenders a certain level of understanding among viewers in which women take pleasure. Later in this chapter I explain how women use the characteristics of the shows to attain a resistive pleasure.

While the structure and style of the shows resonate with viewers in terms of familiarity, there is also the question of pleasure that is implicit in the text. In the narratives of dominant culture, pleasure lies in its resolution. In soap operas, the pleasure of the text lies less in the telling of that truth than in the hope of seeing the truth unveiled. Traditional stories adhere to the formula of having a clear beginning, middle and end. The aim of most traditional narratives is the revelation of a truth or a return to order. The soap opera, however, breaks from tradition and provides viewers with an endless middle, resolution constantly being thwarted by additional intrigue, mystery and drama. The daily seriality of the form force dramatic conventions that overtly postpone resolution. This style is a metaphoric representation, according to Modleski, of women's lives. In their roles as caregivers and homemakers, women are painfully aware that even in fiction, the revelation of the truth is not inevitable or uninterrupted. Thus, women find pleasure in drama that reflects this reality. In soap operas, closure is an impossibility. Instead, viewers are offered temporary resolutions, momentary reprieves, pseudo-endings which at once provide relief (albeit temporary) and further elaboration of the text. It is the negotiation between that which is shown and that which is not shown, that which is resolved and that which is not, that generates pleasure. This understanding of the implicit pleasure of the soap opera structure breaks with that provided by Roland Bathers in *Pleasures of the Text*. He asserts that:

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[7] Mary Ellen Brown, "Motley Moments: Soap Opera, Carnival, Gossip and the Power of the Utterance" *Television and Women's Culture*. (London: Sage, 1990).

> The pleasure of the text is not the pleasure of the corporeal striptease or of narrative suspense. In these cases, there is no tear, no edges: a gradual unveiling: the entire excitation takes refuge in the hope of seeing the sexual organ (schoolboy's dream) or in knowing the end of the story (novelistic satisfaction). Paradoxically (since it is mass-consumed), this is a far more intellectual pleasure than the other: an Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end), if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father - which would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structure, and of prohibitions of nudity, all collected in our culture in the myth of Noah's sons covering his nakedness.[100]

According to Barthes, the pleasure of the text is the resolution, the return to order, the revelation of truth. However, in the case of the soap opera, there is no end, no resolution and no return to order. Rather, the viewers, and the characters, are frozen in a timeless middle. Truth for women, according to Modleski, "...is seen to lie not at the end of expectation but in expectation, not in the return to order but in (familial) disorder."[101] The narrative striptease of the soap opera leaves gaps in the story lines where viewers are able and even encouraged to insert their own talk of what they feel should and will happen. Delays in the resolution of the stories encourage viewers to second-guess the story lines. And they do – with enthusiasm. Fan magazines further encourage this behavior by printing letters written by readers in the magazines and by www fan sites creating online chat rooms where viewers can speak to one another and so forth. Thus, the soap opera, with its infinite structure and repetitive format reveal layers upon layers of pleasure for its increasingly adoring audience. The gossip networks conflict with and effectively disable dominant discourse as it simultaneously validates traditional feminine forms of storytelling.

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[100] Roland Barthes, "Pleasures of the Text," *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. Anthony Easthope and Kate McGowan. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994) 96.

[101] Modleski 88.

The validation of this identity is further ratified by the implicit structure of the genre, according to Modleski, and the focus on the mother that reassures the viewer that her own role as mother is invaluable. The family and their role within the family is, for many women, an important element of their identity. The soap opera presents the viewer with a picture of the family that, while constantly in the throws of turbulence, always stays together in large part because of the efforts of the mother. Thus, at least according to Modleski, both the narrative structure and thematic content of the soap opera reinforce a sense of importance, dependence and power upon the mother (both character and viewer). Pleasure is found in the knowledge that misery is not the sign of a family breaking down, as is the case with the 19th century women's novel, but a sign of its normalcy, and its perseverance. Modleski points out that, "...as long as children are unhappy, as long as things don't come to a satisfying conclusion, the mother will be needed as confidant and adviser, and her function will never end."[102] Ultimately, this is a utilitarian pleasure for viewers that find a validation of their identity in the narrative style of the soap opera.

Pleasure of Identification & Fantasy

Theorists have put forth that a possible explanation for the pleasure found in watching soap operas is generated from a sense of psychological identification that takes place between the viewers and the characters. This identification, however, is an element of fantasy - fantasy that is embedded in an understanding that a story is a work of fiction. Such scholars as Radway (1984) and Ang (1985) have suggested that viewers take pleasure in a process of fantasy through which they identify with some aspect of the

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[102] Modleski 90.

narrative. It may be the heroine, the romance, or the lifestyle, but readers fantasize to identify with an element of the story.

In her analysis of soap opera fascination, Ien Ang enters the soap opera subcultural community through letters that were written to her by a random sampling of viewers. These letters serve as the backbone of her analysis. Through this sample audience Ang is able to address the mainstream attitudes displayed towards soap operas and soap opera viewers that is so deeply embedded in the Marxist philosophy of high culture, as seen earlier in chapter one. Ang notes that the letters taken from her sample audience indicate that although viewers do not mistake fictive characters' for real people, the fantasy of the characters existence is so real that the characters are spoken of as real people:

> Being able to imagine the characters as real people thus forms a necessary precondition for the involvement of viewers and is an anchor for the pleasure of Dallas...When the letter-writers comment on the characters, it is almost always in the same way as we talk about people in daily life: in terms of character traits. The characters are not so much judged for their position in the Dallas narrative, as for how they are.[103]

Imagining the characters as real allows for a psychological identification on the part of the viewer. Always understanding that the world of the soap opera is entirely fictive, the viewer is nevertheless able to imagine and fantasize about the romance, glamour, intrigue and danger associated with individual characters. Radway asserts that while women identify relaxation as the primary function of reading romance novels she also insists that a measure of escapism is associated to the enjoyment of these novels. She speaks of fantasy and the process of identification in terms of escape, asserting that mass produced

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[103] Ang, *Watching Dallas* 30.

fiction such as Harlequin Romance novels and soap operas succeed because they fulfill the psychological need of female viewers looking for fantasy and escape from their everyday lives. Radway confirms this with the results of a direct-response questionnaire answered by her sample audience of Smithton romance readers. In it, Radway asks the readers to rank their reasons for reading romance fiction. Out of a list of eight possible reasons, the majority of Smithton women ranked relaxation as the number one reason for reading romance novels. The poll also indicates that reading as constitutive of "private time" is the second most important reason, while learning about faraway places ranks third and escape from daily problems is the fourth reason. These answers reveal that reading motivations are closely tied with the level of pleasure experienced from the activity:

> On the basis of these schematic answers alone I think it logical to conclude that romance reading is valued by the Smithton women because the experience itself is different from ordinary existence. Not only is it a relaxing release from the tension produced by daily problems and responsibilities, but it creates a time or space within which a woman can be entirely on her own, preoccupied with her personal needs, desires, and pleasure. It is also a means of transportation or escape to the exotic or, again, to that which is different.[104]

Viewer identification extends beyond an identification with the characters to an almost transcendent emotional one. Like many other forms of melodrama, the main project of soap opera is to exaggerate the emotional meaning of everyday life to evoke an emotional reaction from its viewers. Watching soap operas, like reading, allows viewers to experience intense emotions without shame, thus granting a temporary release from the emotional limits of everyday life (Harrington & Biebly 123). Soap operas, although

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[104] Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 61.

marginalized in mainstream culture, give women access to a private space where their emotions and fantasies may be explored legitimately and freely.

The value of this space is not unfamiliar to women. It is the space of which Virginia Woolf speaks in *A Room of One's Own*. Not only should the value of this space be noted but also the value of reading - either text or television. It is through reading - about oneself and other women - that women exist. When I say this I mean that women understand what it means to be a woman by reading about other women. Simone de Beauvoir has shown us that one is not born a woman but *becomes* a woman. It is a discovery that is made through reading and by extension, through talking. When speaking of Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*, Shoshana Felman says:

> Feminism comes to be defined here almost inadvertently, as a bond of reading: a bond of reading that engenders, in some ways, the writer - leads to her full assumption of sexual difference; a bond of reading and of writing which, however, paradoxically precedes knowing what it means to "read as a woman", since this very bond, this very reading, is precisely constituted by the recognition that the question "what is a woman" has not yet been answered and defies, in fact, all given answers.[105]

Knowledge of what it means to be a woman, then, is not inherent in having been born female. It is, as Simone de Beauvoir has indicated, something that one learns. She herself had not known what it meant to be a woman until she tried to answer precisely that question. Moreover, in trying to resolve this enigma, she looked at what it meant to be a woman in the eyes of others. Her research then carried her to disciplines as varied as physiology, history and the evolution of the female condition. Still, it was not until she had written *The Second Sex* and that she had become identified as a woman by other

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[105] Felman 12.

women that she recognized herself as both a woman and a feminist. This journey, illustrative of the discovery of womanhood, also exemplifies the value of reading and the pleasure women take from such an activity. It is the pleasure of knowing, the pleasure of seeing and the pleasure of being.

Pleasure of Resistance

This time and space of solitude where leisure activity is experienced free of guilt is, for many women, filled with hours of watching and talking about soap operas. This talk, like gossip, is open ended, and such openness challenges the cultural dominance of systems that are designed to close off, limit and contain meaning for women. In such a case, resistance is revealed at least in part by women's decision to re-claim time for themselves - for reading a romance novel or for watching a soap opera rather than cooking, cleaning or taking care of others. It is by taking back this time that women are able to use these seemingly oppressive narratives resistively (Radway 1984). Women often refer to their leisure activities as something they have earned and are unapologetic in their decision to relax and pamper themselves. In this way, reading romance novels or watching a favorite soap opera is a form of silent protest against the demands of everyday life under patriarchy.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that women find pleasure in conservative and potentially disempowering texts by reading these texts in a manner that emphasizes a feminist subtext. In this manner, a diverse group of women can interact with texts and narratives that would on the surface seem to be unappealing. Although soap opera fans do not rewrite the text of the soap opera, through fan clubs and the tertiary text, they do reconceptualize it and relate it to their own lives. Soap operas provide a cultural space for

women that fuel oral rather than written networks. The primary vehicle that drives these networks is gossip. These gossip networks allow for the politicization of the narrative content. This talk generates an enjoyment of and engagement with the shows that serve as wedges in the dominant culture. Soap operas, for Brown, create and support a social network in which talk becomes a form of resistive pleasure that can be associated with notions of empowerment. Hence, the pleasure that women experience while watching the shows (most often alone) has to do with the enjoyment of all leisurely activity and specifically to do with the resistive pleasure that women experience when talking about soap operas. Brown points out that:

> What soap opera provides, in the context of discussion networks, is the imaginative-emotional material out of which, in the process of the construction of meaning that constitutes the spoken text, women reimagine their roles and feel again what it is to be a woman, particularly in the family context.[106]

This passage refers us back to the notion of a learned sense of womanhood - a knowledge that is attained through reading, watching and talking. Women use soap operas and the social networks affiliated with the shows to identify boundaries for themselves in terms of their social and familial roles, to discuss cultural concerns, and resist aesthetic hierarchies of knowledge, cultural capital and patriarchal discourse. Moreover, Brown contends that the full contextual meaning of soap opera is not realized until it is discussed among women. Again, we are reminded of Simone de Beauvoir's concept of womanhood - one that is not fully realized until it is recognized by others. It is through talk that women negotiate identity and, by extension, generate pleasure.

It is true that women could commune to talk about the politics of their lives under virtually any pretext and that the soap opera does not necessitate such activity. However,

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[106] Brown 112.

research of female audiences indicates that such gossip networks have indeed evolved from these daytime dramas. It is likely that this is due to the content and context of these narratives from which women already take pleasure. The soap opera subculture generates a certain level of resistive pleasure partly because of the way that women watch the shows (by taking back leisure time) and partly because soap operas, as a form, inherently defy hierarchies of cultural dominance.

In public situations and spaces, women may speak of the dominant culture in a contrary way. However, in doing so, they are speaking illegitimately. Within social situations and sanctified spaces, such talk is legitimized and the process of communal awareness can begin. In women's gossip networks, many women experience a type of illegitimate pleasure based on the knowledge that one's own interests are at odds with those of the dominant group. This is the pleasure of the subordinated - a subcultural pleasure of resistance. Within the soap opera subculture, women are given the space to speak freely and openly of their experienced and perceived conflict with patriarchy. Thus, women internalize elements of the hegemonic ideology having to do with their dependence and inferiority in such a manner that allows them to understand their social roles but at the same time use this knowledge to establish boundaries where fanship networks are created for the experiencing of legitimate pleasure. Within these subcultural spaces, women develop their own cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, Fiske 1987) and their own kind of strategic knowledge (Foucault 1980).

Use-Value vs. Entertainment-Value

Like the theories high culture explored in chapter one of this work, Brown explains that hegemonic theory implies the formation of dominant culture by a shifting

coalition of elite who make use of complex cultural elements to maintain a power base.[107] The dominant culture first incorporates elements of the subordinated culture into a form of popular culture. The subordinated group then recognizes elements of their own identity within this form of popular culture thus generating use-value and pleasure from the very form that helps to exploit them. Fiske states that through this type of manipulation, subordinated groups participate in their own oppression. The example of the fetishized female body is looked at closely in chapter three in the context of the objectification of the female in art. It is what Marx considers to be capitalism's manipulation of the masses. Ien Ang point out that:

> people have a positive relationship with Dallas - a hedonistic attitude which is at odds with the doctrine that mass culture primarily manipulates the masses. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, for example, the experience of pleasure in mass culture is a false kind of pleasure, even part of the trick of manipulating the masses more effectively in order to lock them in the eternal status quo of exploitation and oppression.[108]

This passage refers to the Marxist structure of a capitalist economy and the complex relationship between the exchange-value and the use-value of a cultural artifact. Marxist logic suggests that the production of culture is subject to the laws of the capitalist economy and as such degrades cultural products to commodities designed to generate as much profit as possible for the market. The capitalist market economy is only interested in the exchange-value of the goods and is indifferent to their specific characteristics and marks of distinction. Mass culture, therefore, becomes the extreme embodiment of the submission of culture to the economy. Stuart Hall explains that, "...the project of the left is directed at the future, at the socialism that has still to come, and that is at odds with the

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[107] Brown, *Women's Talk* 94.

[108] Ang, *Watching Dallas* 17.

direct experience of pleasure here and now."[109] So deeply couched in Marxist economic cultural theory is the popular opinion of soap operas as trash and soap opera viewers as lazy that an analysis of this community becomes in itself an ambitious project.

However, the use-value theory offered by Marxist philosophy is insufficient in explaining the entertainment-value of the soap opera. Marx himself concedes that an object could only bear an exchange-value if it also has a use-value. Therefore, an object ceases to have exchange-value if it no longer has use-value - the contradiction being that the Marxist dogma can not be at once indifferent to the specific characteristics of an object while evaluating its exchange/use value relationship. "The way in which a cultural product is consumed can therefore not be directly deduced from the way in which it is produced; it is also dependent on all sorts of socio-cultural and psychological conditions."[110] Simply put, the use-value of an object and the exchange-value of an object are not equal or the same in all cases. The utility of a television program, for instance, is not determined by the program producer but by the viewing audience and their pleasurable experience of the program as entertainment. The use-value of a television program is wrapped in a complex relationship between the producer and consumer. As quoted in Ang's *Watching Dallas*, Terry Lovell explains that:

> the utility of a television program for a producer who buys advertising time is the ability of that program to enhance the sale of the advertised product, by giving the producer access to the audience which is watching the program. But the viewer will be watching the program for its entertainment value and there is some evidence that these two interests may conflict.[111]

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[109] Ang, *Watching Dallas* 18.

[110] Ang, *Watching Dallas* 18.

[111] Ang, *Watching Dallas* 19.

As programmers struggle to maintain a viewing audience, advertisers must determine which audiences are most likely to be influenced by commercial advertising. But, the entertainment-value of a program is unpredictable and difficult to measure.

Entertainment-value is in itself a complex question. It cannot be measured or understood uniformly across generations, cultures or even therein. While common sense associates entertainment with simple, uncomplicated, almost automatic pleasure, there must be a more precise way of understanding or explaining it. Soap operas, like Harlequin Romance novels, have been explicitly advertised and offered to the public as objects for pleasurable consumption. Ang asserts that the promise of pleasure is the use value by which the industry tries to seduce viewers to watch Dallas. But to achieve this goal, the producers must have a definite idea of what the audience will find pleasurable: they must have a certain self-confidence that their own definition of pleasure will coincide with that of (large sections of) the public. Therefore, soap opera writers and producers will use that which they already know about popular pleasure to write and produce the shows. However, since writers and producers are building on past experiences it is unlikely that the current offering will be revolutionary, experimental or provocative in nature.

Pierre Bourdieu has contributed to the project of resolving the enigma of pleasure and addresses the issue in "The Aristocracy of Culture". He explains that popular pleasure is characterized by an immediate emotional or sensual involvement with the object of pleasure. The importance, according to Bourdieu, is involvement, identification and integration of the object into everyday life. What could better describe the soap opera? Popular pleasure is a pleasure of recognition - recognizing one's involvement

with, identification within, and integration of the object. The narrative structure of the shows as daily, repetitive and ongoing generates profound involvement with the characters on the part of the viewers. Therefore, we can say that the shows are entertaining, but we must also be careful to say that it is entertaining because it allows viewers to become involved with the stories and the characters of the narrative in a personal and profound way.

The Politics of Pleasure

Despite the popular conception of soap operas as 'trash television' many women incorporate them into their daily lives. The shows have proven to be massively appealing to women both because of the pleasure they bring to women and because women value the space that the social, sub-cultural gossip networks provide for the experiencing of that pleasure. However, the notion of pleasure and pleasurable texts must be negotiated outside of the traditional psychoanalytic framework for theorizing cinematic pleasure as suggested by Laura Mulvey. According to the theories proposed by Mulvey, cinematic pleasure is structured around masculine desire and the voyeuristic gaze. However, such a theory affords the female viewer little power. The soap opera form functions in a manner that contradicts Mulvey's hypothesis. While psychoanalytic film criticism assumes that the viewer identifies with a singular male protagonist the soap opera form defies such a claim by having the viewer identify with a number of female rather than male characters. Thus, the pleasure that women extract from viewing these narratives is an illegal pleasure. By taking pleasure in a format that breaks the patriarchal narrative model, women resist the cultural boundaries that help contribute to the role they play in society. Furthermore, the social networks that have been constructed outside of the actual

narratives generate solidarity among women. The gossip networks foster emotional alliances between women viewers. The groups that have developed resist hegemonic control both by functioning outside of and often unacknowledged by the dominant culture and by defying the hierarchical structure that characterize mainstream organizations. These groups are informal and friendship based. While Fiske has explained that issues of cultural capital generate a sense of competition between the participants of the group, it is never an aggressive contest. On the contrary, those with greater cultural capital are revered and respected. Again, the soap opera subcultural construction defies the patriarchal dogma.

While the narratives themselves might seem to offer little to women in the way of personal or collective empowerment by populating fictitious worlds with characters that resemble the stereotypical images of women from years past, this is not actually the case. Although the matriarch, victim, villainess and heroine resemble the stereotypical images of women that have been made available by patriarchy, the genre has proven to empower rather than disempower its viewers. As we have seen throughout this work, soap opera viewers do more than simply watch the shows. They become involved with the characters of the shows and the actors that portray them. Their devotion is akin to that of wine connoisseurs and sports enthusiasts. And it is a devotion that is becoming increasingly respected within academic spheres. Moreover, soap opera viewers become emotionally invested in the shows and carry that investment into a subcultural community that thrives beyond the boundaries of the narratives. This community, which is still misunderstood and mocked by the general public, serves to empower its participants. Solidarity is

created in a space that is sanctified and reserved for the exploration and development of feminine, if not feminist, experiences.

How does participation within the soap opera subculture differ from other communities such as the participation within Internet chat groups? The word empowerment in the context of the soap opera community is itself a loaded term. What does it mean to be empowered and what does it mean here, specifically. How are women empowered by watching soap operas when the instinctive reaction is to assume that soap operas are successful at isolating women in their homes rather than bring them together? How is television viewing empowering? This is an interesting question, particularly in the context of the soap opera.

What does it mean to have been empowered by an experience? What is an empowering moment or act? The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1982) defines empowerment as a verb meaning authorize, license, (person to do); give power to, make able. To begin, this word is a verb - an action word. It is a word that implies change and movement. The root of the word - power - also implies movement. It implicates strength and courage. This word is loaded with meaning. Empower also means to authorize, to give authorization. Authorize what? It is context-dependent. Authorization must be given for an act to be carried out, for a move to be made or for a word to be spoken. The second meaning to the word empower provided by the Concise Oxford Dictionary is to license - to permit. Again, this definition is context-dependent. The last definition provided is to give power. This final definition clearly implies the transference of strength and authority between individuals. However, we know from etymological and semiotic studies that words have meanings beyond that which the dictionary states. We understand from

cultural studies and women's studies that the word 'empower' means all of this and more. It implies action. It implies change. This inference of motion is the site wherein the word becomes problematic when used in the context of the soap opera subculture. Shoshana Felman tells us in *What Does a Woman Want?* that the feminist address is an act of empowerment. Mary Ellen Brown tells us in *Soap Opera and Women's Talk* that it is with the utterance that women find power. However, the soap opera, and engagement within the soap opera subculture does not empower women to act. Like the soap opera itself that is primarily concerned with talk - the soap opera empowers women to talk, gossip, chat, discuss, share. That is what this is all about. It is about talking. Talking brings about understanding. Understanding heals. Health strengthens. And strength empowers. Talk is the power of the soap opera.

This chapter is entitled Contradictions and Misunderstandings for a number of reasons. The primary reason being that it deals with the question of pleasure. It implicates fantasy, community, talk and even tragedy and horror. Pleasure is generated by a plethora of variables. Each factor interconnected with the others in a complex web of emotion and thought. Talk is as crucial an element of soap opera as are romance and love. Talk is a necessary element of the soap opera both within the narrative and outside of it. The thoughts, impressions and ideas of individual viewers are shared throughout the world by fans that communicate through letters, fan clubs and now Internet chat lines. Each voice is important in the discourse of soap opera. Each opinion counts. It is for this reason that Ien Ang's work in Watching Dallas, although based on the letters of only 40 respondents is still considered a serious, and valid work of ethnographic research.

Conclusion

The soap opera is a form that is marked by a number of unique features including a highly devoted and predominantly female audience, a vast network of actors and characters and a structure that is highly repetitive and lacks closure. These features distinguish the genre from other mainstream, mass produced fiction forms. Unlike war movies, westerns and gangster programs and films, the soap opera has been designed for and has maintained a female audience. The structures of the shows are made to follow the rhythms of women's lives along with women's patterns of conversation. Constant interruption and emotionally charged talk is the action of the soap opera. However, the structure of the soap opera does not sufficiently explain its popularity over time, especially since lifestyles and patterns of domesticity have dramatically changed since the soap opera genre was created nearly 60 years ago. In concluding and completing this work I use these last pages to revisit some of the issues that have been explored in the first four chapters and summarize the reasons for the enduring popularity of the soap opera genre.

One of the reasons has to do with the viewer's ability to get to know a community of characters over a long period of time. The interest and concern of the viewer is secured and diffused among the entire community rather than concentrated in the fate of any single character. The longer a viewer watches, the more they become a part of the history of the characters and the more intricate and personal does the fabric of the show appear. The seriality of the shows binds these narratives together as a distinctive type of television form wherever they are produced and shown around the world.

Soap operas also share important connections between the distinctive ways they engage their audiences and the kinds of things they tend to be about. They are about the lives of the characters - their relationships with friends, neighbors, co-workers and family. The themes of soaps are so compelling that they resonate with audiences worldwide: romance, family, love and happiness and so forth. These relationships are verbally explored on an emotional level. Rarely are the characters of the shows shown in full motion action. It is dialogue, not physical action that propels the narratives. This is part of what helps bring the audience closer to the characters. Viewers develop an expertise at reading the faces and the music of each scene giving them access to a rich subtext. The conversations between characters activate, expand, reinforce and alter the network of interpersonal relationships so important to the characters' lives. Moreover, the patterns of conversation in soap operas are replicated in innumerous chats and letters exchanged between viewers. The gaps between episodes, which often end by raising more plot questions than they answer, provokes viewers to fill in (with talk) what they feel has, will and should happen. This dialogue, both on the show and off, is so important to the experience of watching and enjoying soap operas.

The soap opera, in its serialized structure and focus on dialogue, is a form that is particularly suited for the exploration of relevant social issues. Soaps have included story lines that deal with AIDS (All My Children 1989, General Hospital 1995), homosexuality (One Life to Live 1993), race relations (Generations 1987), mental illness (One Life to Live, 1989), domestic violence (All My Children, 1981), religious conflict (Days of our Lives 1986) and breast cancer (General Hospital 1994). Story lines like these demonstrate the soap opera's ability to integrate viewers' real-life concerns into the fictional dramas.

Although the shows have been criticized for not developing deeper political insight into the social issues and for often times remaining quite conservative in its treatment of the issue, they have nevertheless become more directly connected to the larger social world than many other forms of televised fiction. Also, by focusing on the emotional and the personal, the soap opera is able to keep the intensity of the experience real for viewers over time and have thus proven to be bolder in their willingness to tackle controversial issues and more realistic in their depiction of complex social problems.

These features distinguish the soap opera genre from other form of mass-produced televised fiction. This genre, having been created for women and by highlighting women's concerns has given women a space to explore issues in a meaningful way (Modleski 1982, Brown 1994). Throughout history, mainstream media have marginalized female-centered literature. The English literary canon has effectively excluded women. An easy example to illustrate this exclusion is that of George Elliot. Her attempt to break in to the literary elite is well known. As seen in the first chapter of this work, the emergence of the public sphere secured not only the exclusion of female-centered and female-written literature but all cultural activities appealing to women. As the public sphere of the 19th century emerged, it came to be gendered as male and characterized by rationality, mobility, empiricism and power (Habermas 1991). The private sphere, on the other hand, became gendered as female, marked by emotion, frivolity, domesticity and subservience. Illustrated in both the art and literature of modernity, women in capitalist society have been depicted as objects rather than as subjects – to be consumed rather than consumers (Doane 1987, Felski 1995). The 19th century courtesan and the urban prostitute showcase the metaphor of the

commodification of women. Implicating themselves in their own subservience, women wear high-heeled shoes, make-up and bear other fetishistic marks designed to attract the male gaze (Fiske 1987, Mulvey 1977). As seen in chapter two, this view of women is equally reinforced and reflected in the artwork of modernity including but not exclusive to the entire category of nude oil paintings.

Soap operas have been criticized for perpetuating this dichotomy by offering stereotypical and often unrealistic images of women including those analyzed in chapter two - the matriarch, the heroine, the villainess and the victim. These images, along with other traditionally feminine activities such as wearing high-heels and make-up were considered by the early feminists of the 1970s to be programs and activities that confirm our subordination in a patriarchal order. "Key texts of second-wave western feminism such as Betty Friedan's 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, Germaine Greer's 1971 *The Female Eunuch* or Sheila Rowbotham's 1973 *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* all have central concerns with the available repertoire of images of femininity, with the way in which women are represented."[112] It is for this reason that the early feminist criticism of the 1970s was particularly aggressive towards soap operas. This fierce rejection of soap operas, which, although couched in different terms, is, in effect, almost identical to the traditional high cultural, masculine and dominant contempt for soap operas. However, as more and more women publicly (in fanzines and through fan club newsletters) admit their fascination with soap operas as well as the pleasure they take from other traditionally feminine activities such as dressing up, embroidery and talk, feminists began the revaluation of soap operas. Noting that soap operas have such a low cultural status not

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[112] Charlotte Brunsdon, *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 30

because it is trashier than sports programs or westerns but because the people who watch them have less cultural capital than do those that watch sports and westerns, feminists began to look at the possible value of soap operas. Fanship quickly emerged as one of the primary elements contributing to the value and pleasure of the genre. As seen in chapters three and four, communities of devoted soap opera viewers develop to keep women talking, sharing and learning from one another.

However, the picture of the typical fan painted by contemporary media is not pretty. The image presented depicts fans as fanatics, individuals and groups that are unable to distinguish between reality and fiction, whose lives are consumed by with the minute details of make-believe worlds. Fans are portrayed in the popular press as either lunatics or losers - individuals that stalk and pose a serious threat to celebrities or lonely housewives. These representations are so widely shared and so rarely questioned that all fan communities are socially marginalized and virtually all fan behavior draws public ridicule and suspicion. Note the number of tabloid magazines that regularly feature stories showcasing fanatical behavior by celebrities' fans. Criticism by fan behavior is no less respected in academic circles. Fan communities are studied and inspected in disciplines ranging from sociology to psychology to cultural studies. This criticism has grown increasingly harsh in recent years. While media coverage of fanship during the 1970s primarily appeared in teen magazines and focused on advising teens on how to start and join fan clubs, over the past 15 years popular media coverage has shifted to focus on the extreme and violent behavior of fans.[113] This shift in the representation of

[113] C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby. *Soap Fans. Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life.* (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1995) 2. Harrington and Bielby note that this shift is marked by the publication of an article in 1981 by People magazine titled "Desperate to Fill an Emotional Void, Some Fans Become Dangerous to Their Idols". Since the publication of this article *People*

fans in the popular media coincided with a growing market for news and gossip about celebrities. In many ways tabloid and popular magazines have served to narrow the gap between the famous and the un-famous, making the famous more accessible to the un-famous. The popular media invite readers to invade the private lives of celebrities by creating a network of pseudo-intimate information about the celebrities thus embedding the reader in an enormous web of publicly available gossip. The popular press not only invite fans to read about the private lives of celebrities but also to seek information or capture photos of them in a manipulative, deceitful fashion. Ultimately, the popular press create a world where readers learn to expect a certain measure of private information about celebrities, incite them to pursue the celebrities and then report on their extreme behavior. Pierre Bourdieu has explained that fans are stigmatized and marginalized because they cross culturally defined boundaries of taste and rationality. Until recently, the academic community has cooperated with the popular press and the general public by validating the representation of fans as lunatics with scientific proof of this as true. However, as seen in chapter two of this work, Patricia Meyer Spacks points to the academic model itself to illustrate that fan behavior is not only normal but is displayed with pride and fervor by socially respected individuals including cinephiles, stamp collectors, wine connoisseurs and scholars. By partaking in activities deemed acceptable by high culture, these individuals are not feared or marginalized in the press as are their low culture counterparts. On the other hand, the stigma attached to television viewing is so severe that people are often so embarrassed by their television viewing habits that they lie about which television shows they watch and how much television they watch.

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magazine has increased its coverage of extreme fan behavior. Other popular and tabloid publications have also followed this lead.

Charlotte Brunsdon explains that television and media fans are especially stigmatized because as a culture, we define television not just as fiction but as bad fiction. Therefore, fans of television are not regarded in the same manner as are the fans of which Spacks speaks. As soap operas are considered to be at the absolute bottom of the television hierarchy in terms of their moral worth, so too are soap opera fans considered immature (as with adolescent viewers) or lonely and bored with their real lives (as with housewives). These are the primary stereotypes of the soap opera fan, which, like most negative stereotypes are based largely on ignorance. Little is written in the popular press about what fans actually do, why they do it and how they take pleasure from it. Yet, within the marginalized soap opera subculture, thousands of women from all walks of life find pleasure.

At the core of soap opera fandom lies the alternative texts created and produced by the fans themselves. These texts - fanzines, letters, poetry and artwork - all represent an alternative culture. Within the organized structure of the subculture, viewers share thoughts and ideas about the narratives and the characters of the dramas. However, there is much more going on here that sharing. Fans engage in negotiations over the meaning and relevance of being a fan and these struggles influence the degree to which they participate within the subculture. Fanship is not only about partaking in activity but also managing identity.

The negotiation of identity in the context of fandom is particularly important in the case of soap opera fanship and women. As seen in the second chapter of this work in the discussion of radio soap operas and the transition to television, soap operas were created for women, and despite demographic changes, the audience remains largely

female. This remains true because today the soap opera format continues to appeal to a female demographic in terms of story content, narrative structure and the gendered outlets for the communal experience of soap opera viewing pleasure. Furthermore, as seen in chapter four, the concept of pleasure is wrapped up in a number of different meanings. Women enjoy soap operas on a number of levels. They take pleasure from the implicit structure of the genre, from the fantasizing that accompanies the narratives, from the relaxation that is enjoyed while watching and from the social networks that form by talking about these shows. The talking and gossiping brings women together and functions as a tool for the resistive reading of this seemingly disempowering genre. When one speaks of empowerment what is often implied is a sense of strength or courage to action. This is not the case for the soap opera community. Female soap opera fans are not moved to action. Participation within this community does not engender action. Instead, like the genre itself that is propelled by words rather than motion, these women are moved to speak. It is in the power of the utterance that the strength of the community lies. It is through speech, autobiography and testimony that millions of women are empowered by watching soap operas and by participating in the subculture that has grown out of it.

By tracing a set of interconnected histories - radio, television, art - I have presented the importance of the soap opera and indicated that which is most significant about the feminist encounter with the genre. The study of the daytime serial drama either in cultural studies, women's studies or mass communications marks a specific entry point by which the academy may investigate the female subject as well as the female viewer. The female reader/viewer/spectator had been a point of recurring interest by feminist scholars. Soap opera provides a complex and compelling site for the analysis of the

female subject, whether she is theorized as a textual construct or investigated as a sociological fact.

This analysis can be further developed to consider the other issues in critical and cultural theory that relates directly to the soap opera genre. For instance, although the soap opera for is an American creation with a marked American style and aesthetic many of the original programs have been exported to countries as varied as Italy, France and Japan. Speculation upon the dynamic between women of these cultures and the shows would be quite interesting, particularly in direct comparison with the manner in which American women integrate the shows into their lives. These countries, however, have done more than import the shows. Many of these countries have gone as far as adopting the format of the genre and have created national soap operas. This is of particular interest in countries such as Brazil where commercial television is not as accessible or as mainstream as it is in North America. Yet, critical analysis of the soap opera may extend further without venturing overseas. Although this work focuses primarily on the relationship between works of art belonging to the realm of high and low culture as well as women's relationships with the shows, it would be interesting to note the role that men play in the development of the soap opera subculture, if at all. An investigation of the relationship between male viewers and the dramas could contribute to the larger faculties of critical thinking and communication studies. Furthermore, regardless of the direction in which this research is advanced, one thing is certain: the soap opera and women's issues have proven to be worthy of scholarly analysis.

Appendix 1.1
Soap Opera Digest

Appendix 1.2
Soap Opera Update

Appendix 1.3
Soap Opera Magazine

Appendix 1.4
Soap Opera Weekly

Appendix 2.1
National Days Fan Club Newsletter

National DAYS Fan Club NEWSLETTER

Volume 10 No. 1
July/August 1993

10th ANNIVERSARY

MEMORIES OF SALEM FROM NDFC'S FIRST YEAR

The year of the Salem Slasher/Roman is accused. A pregnant Marlena has a mock wedding with Eugene to cover for Roman, who has faked his own death and goes undercover.
Hope, in love with Bo, is coerced into marrying Larry Welch, to save Bo from being barred.
Neil found out that he, and not Tony was the father of Noel, Liz's baby.
And this is just the tip of the Iceberg!!!

Appendix 2.2
National Days Fan Club Newsletter

National DAYS Fan Club NEWSLETTER

Volume 11 No. 9
June/July 1995

(415) 332-1819
424A Johnson St.
Sausalito, CA 94965

WHAT HAPPENED!!!

* *

Viewers of DAYS OF OUR LIVES were completely caught by surprise when it was announced on June 19 that Peter Reckell would be replacing Robert Kelker-Kelly as Bo Brady. The official explanation was "creative differences". Rumors started circulating that Robert was led off the set "kicking and screaming", which is not true. He was told by phone, while he was on vacation, that there were "artistic differences and his option was not being picked up.
Obviously this wasn't a spur of the moment decision, there must have been many meetings, and discussions. Timing was also important as Peter had to be available to take over, literally overnight. Rumers have been ongoing about friction between Robert and Ken Corday, alleged accusations of sexual harrassment, and concern about Kelker-Kelly's involvement with Miriam Parish (Jamie).

THE NATIONAL DAYS FAN CLUB IS RUN BY FANS FOR FANS

Appendix 3
Club Corner

CLUB CORNER! Get Up-Close And Personal With *Days*' Best And Brightest!

It has been quite an eventful thirty one years for the cast of *Days of Our Lives* and their fans! People always want to know more about the great characters and the actors who portray them. Well, here's the best chance for you! Joining a *Days* fan club is the only way to get up close and personal with your favorite *Days* stars! The clubs keep you informed of what is going on in the actors' lives, and what their future on the show holds. Most of these clubs send out a quarterly newsletter, along with special and personal photos, and discounts on great merchandise. The best part of participating in a fan club is that many of them hold luncheons or dinners once or twice a year to honor their favorites. But, if your fave doesn't have a fan club, don't fret! You can sent them letters in care of the show, and they'll be sure to get them! ★

Joe Mascolo Fan Club
11684 Ventura Boulevard
Suite 5026
Studio City, CA 91604

Days of Our Lives Fan Club
NBC-TV
3000 West Alameda Avenue
Burbank, CA 91523-0001

Deidre Hall Fan Club
P.O. Box 6025-109
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413

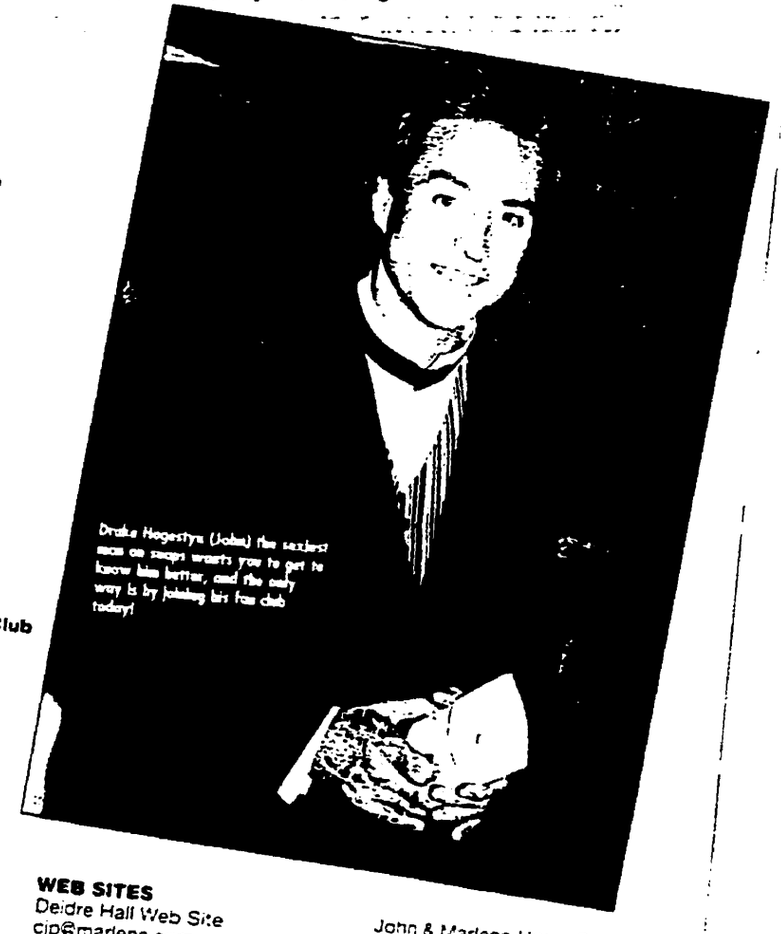
Drake Hogestyn Fan Club
c/o NBC-TV
Days Of Our Lives
3000 West Alameda Avenue
Burbank, CA 91523-0001

James Reynolds Fan Club
c/o NBC-TV
Days of Our Lives
3000 West Alameda Avenue
Burbank, CA 91523-0001

Louise Sorel International Fan Club
c/o Franklin Drake Jr.
11507 N. Poema Place #204
Chatsworth, CA 91311

Alison Sweeney Fan Club
c/o NBC-TV
Days of Our Lives
3000 West Alameda Avenue
Burbank, CA 91523-0001

Pat Delaney Fan Club
Rica Woodside—President
P.O. Box 273
Tamworth, NH 03886



WEB SITES
Deidre Hall Web Site
cjp@marlena.com

John & Marlena Home Page
http://www.marlena.com

Appendix 4
Network Addresses

NETWORK ADDRESSES

GENERAL HOSPITAL
c/o ABC-TV
4151 Prospect Ave.
Hollywood, CA 90027

AS THE WORLD TURNS
GUIDING LIGHT
c/o CBS-TV
51 West 52nd St.
New York, NY 10019

ALL MY CHILDREN
THE CITY
ONE LIFE TO LIVE
c/o ABC-TV
Audience Information
77 West 66th St.
New York, NY 10023

BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL
YOUNG AND RESTLESS
c/o CBS-TV
7800 Beverly Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90036

ANOTHER WORLD
c/o NBC-TV
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112

DAYS OF OUR LIVES
c/o NBC-TV
3000 West Alameda Ave.
Burbank, CA 91523

How To Order Back Issues!

If you wish to purchase a back issue, send a check or money order for $5.00 for each issue requested to: Soap Opera Digest, Back Issues/NRMS, P.O. Box 387, Somerset, WI 54025. Be sure and include issue date.

HOW MUCH DOES IT REALLY COST?

On THE CITY, chess is the name of the game for Sydney Chase. Whether she's playing in the park, at Jacob's Ladder, over the Internet or in her penthouse, winning is everything for the clever media mogul. Bill Maher, who handles props for THE CITY, makes sure that Syd's chess sets are just as stylish as she is. Her wooden Staunton set, with four-inch classic figures and a double-weighted board, were purchased at Your Move Chess in Huntington, NY. The store allows shoppers to create their own custom sets by mixing and matching boards and pieces. Sydney's board is $125; the pieces were $95.

ANSWERS FROM LAST ISSUE

■	J	A	K	E	■	■	M	A	G	G	I	E
S	A	L	A	D	■	M	A	T	E	O	■	D
O	I	L	Y	■	H	A	R	T	■	T	A	W
F	L	Y	■	J	A	C	K	■	C	■	M	A
A	■	■	B	U	S	Y	■	■	A	J	A	R
S	O	D	■	L	■	■	■	T	R	E	N	D
■	B	■	M	I	C	H	A	E	L	■	D	■
G	E	N	O	A	■	■	■	P	■	H	A	L
R	Y	A	N	■	■	J	O	E	Y	■	■	E
A	E	■	A	■	T	E	L	E	■	M	A	X
C	D	S	■	J	O	S	E	■	S	A	M	I
E	■	I	R	O	N	S	■	A	R	T	I	E
S	Y	D	N	E	Y	■	■	J	O	H	N	■

Appendix 5
Sound Off

SOUND OFF

What's On Your Mind?

GET REAL!

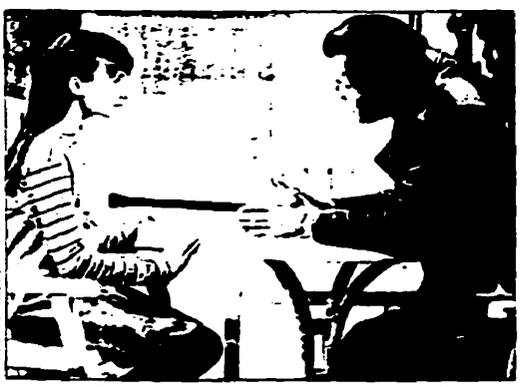
If ALL MY CHILDREN doesn't realize that society has changed in the last 20 years, they are going to see more and more of a decline in ratings. The powers-that-be need to start focusing on real issues. A few far-fetched storylines once in a while don't hurt and do keep things lively, but we need to see some solid, substantial material, too. In just the past eight months or so, AMC has shown us Mateo in a coma, having visions of Hayley's death; Ryan and Gillian on the brink of bankruptcy, yet clothed in designer wardrobes; and Erica's former lover back from the dead. How can the public relate to this? Earlier this year, AMC had the chance to really shine with Bianca's battle with anorexia, but they didn't make it last. The only characters who have some great potential for reality-based plots are the Dillons. Janet and Trevor are the one reason I'm holding on. Although their recent stepfamilies story fizzled out, I am still hoping to see them front-and-center — and dealing with their new life as real families do.

A.P., El Cajon, CA

ON A ROLL

I am so happy with the way things have been going on AS THE WORLD TURNS lately. For example, the Hal/Carly/Jack triangle expanding to include more Oakdale residents is fabulous. Elizabeth Hubbard [Lucinda] and Marie Masters [Susan] have finally been taken off the shelf and pushed to the forefront, where they belong. And I've seen more of Kathleen Widdoes [Emma] in the past two months than I have in the last two years — she is truly part of the backbone of the show. When Martha Byrne [Lily] went on maternity leave, I thought it would be a long summer, but I was pleasantly surprised at the way things turned out. Holden can indeed have a life without Lily. Jon Hensley [Holden] has had a chance to branch out and be a part of other plots. Camille's breast cancer has been a wake-up call to me and all the other young women who think themselves immune to his disease. ATWT has always been known for its great actors, but now it's finally getting its due for some good storytelling. Great job!

M.T., Ocean, NJ



ANN CHRONGELLO/ABC TV

"AMC had the chance to really shine with Bianca's [Nathalie Paulding] battle with anorexia, but they didn't make it last." Also shown: Michael Nader as Dimitri

Love it

Our readers are a vocal bunch. When something is on their minds, they chance to sing the praises of their favorite soap storyline — or blow off

Lovin' Lily

I am excited that the tide has turned in favor of Sonny and Lily on GENERAL HOSPITAL. She is perfect for him. Brenda is obnoxious, and Sonny has had enough aggravation in his life. I hope the new writers see how hot Sonny and Lily are together. Maybe he could fall in love with her, like Robert did with Holly many years ago [*after* they married].

N.N. VIA THE INTERNET

Lily and Sonny make sense. I would like Brenda to start another storyline. Lily is like Karen, somewhat pure and idealistic. [Lily and Sonny] don't have the dysfunctional and destructive relationship that Sonny and Brenda have.

TRISH @ PIXI.COM

I've wanted Sonny and Lily together for the longest time. Don't get me wrong, I like Brenda, but loyalty is very important to Sonny, and she has proven to him that she can't be trusted. It's time for Brenda to grow up.

NAME WITHHELD, AURORA, CO

I am so sick of Brenda throwing herself at Sonny. He is with Lily now, and that's where he should stay. I hope GENERAL HOSPITAL doesn't backtrack and put Sonny with Brenda — that would be a big mistake.

D.F., TOLEDO, OH

CATHY BLAIVAS

"I am excited that the tide has turned in favor of Sonny and Lily [Maurice Benard and Lilly Melgar]."

I'm glad that other viewers are realizing that Sonny and Lily are meant for one another. Lily and Sonny have similar backgrounds; she understands Sonny's lifestyle and is not trying to change him. Brenda, on the other hand, wants Sonny, but only on her terms. In the long run, Lily is the one who is going to stick by him.

B.D., WASHINGTON, D.C.

Hate it

let us know. In this feature, Soap Opera Digest *gives viewers the steam. From the responses, it's clear that daytime fans agree ... to disagree.*

Brenda's (A) Star

I could not believe what was printed in the Mailbag of your 1/16/96 issue — that several GH loyalists are now warming to the idea of Sonny and Lily. Anyone watching this show can see the magnetism between Sonny and Brenda. When I watch Lily and Sonny together, it makes my stomach turn — they are so boring. Let's hope Sonny and Brenda reconcile soon.

A.S., PITTSBURGH, PA

Now that GENERAL HOSPITAL's Stone is gone, what better couple to carry on his legendary love than Brenda and Sonny? GH has made a grave mistake by preventing a reunion between them. Not only will the show lose a substantial amount of viewers, they will lose the very heart of their otherwise irresistible soap opera.

A.S., MARIETTA, GA

Maybe Lily is madly in love with Sonny, but he does not love her. Lily is more like his mother than an equal partner. She said Brenda wasn't safe with Sonny. Lily is willing to settle for *safe*? This is the '90s, Lily, wake up. GH needs to quit fooling around and get Sonny and Brenda back on the road to reconciliation. Stone was right — they belong together.

K.C., PORTLAND, OR

CRAIG SJODIN

"Let's hope Sonny and Brenda [Vanessa Marcil] reconcile soon."

When GENERAL HOSPITAL's Sonny and Brenda were together, they were an exciting, hot, passionate and charismatic couple — they burned up my TV screen. Now, Sonny is with Lily and he's as boring as she is. There is no love or fire between this couple; there is nothing. How long will we have to wait until he finds out that this paragon of virtue and perfection is a liar and manipulator?

F.M., LOS ANGELES, CA

Thumbs Up! and Down!

Best Of Show Or Worse For Wear? Digest Hands Out Blue Ribbons And Booby Prizes

▲THUMBS UP! DAYS OF OUR LIVES Reinventing Sami

Austin, Austin, Austin. That's all we ever heard from DAYS OF OUR LIVES's Sami. She had it bad for the guy and wouldn't let go, not even after Austin tied the knot with Carrie. Eventually, the writers realized that one-note Sami needed to move on, and she has. And as a result, Ms. Brady has become a far more interesting character.

Sami's romance with Franco has revealed her vulnerable side. Always insecure about her looks (remember that bout with bulimia?), Sami was flattered when Italian model Franco began courting her. The fact that Franco is using her to avoid deportation actually has us feeling sorry for Sami, who desperately wants to be loved. This time, perennial victimizer *Sami* is the pawn in a cruel game — a game with such high stakes that she was shot by a hit man gunning for Franco.

On the other hand, the battle with Lucas over their son, Will, has been vintage Sami. Realizing that Lucas had a drinking problem, Sami feared for Will's safety. Unable to get Lucas to face up to his addiction (or get anyone to believe her), Sami resorted to drastic measures to keep the boy away from his dad: She accused Lucas of child abuse. Low blow!

These DAYS, when Sami is on-screen, you're as likely to get the urge to give her a supportive hug as you are to want to shake some sense into her. And that is a good thing, indeed.

JOHN BESCHALUSKI

On DAYS, Sami (Alison Sweeney) is a more complicated character these days, thanks to Franco (Victor Alfieri, c.) and Lucas (Bryan R. Dattilo).

▼THUMBS DOWN! GUIDING LIGHT Just Shoot Them

GUIDING LIGHT's Blake is a flawed character who makes mistakes, which is part of what makes her entertaining, endearing and occasionally maddening. We understood why she cheated on Ross a few years back. Blake mistakenly thought her hubby was being unfaithful, got drunk and had a one-night stand with Rick. But she repented, and the Marlers rebuilt their marriage. It was strong; there was trust — or so we thought — until Blake developed a sudden, inexplicable sexual obsession with her brother-in-law, Ben.

JIM ANTONUCCI

GL's Ross (Jerry ver Dorn, l.) whipped out his gun when he saw Blake (Elizabeth Keifer) and Ben (Hunt Block) together.

Then, Ross (who happened to be carrying a gun), walked in and saw his half-naked wife and his shirtless brother together. Did he ask what the heck was going on? No. Ross assumed a rape was in progress, pointed the pistol at Ben — and accidentally shot Blake. The result? Blake developed emotional paralysis.

This story *might* have worked if the right groundwork had been laid (no pun intended). But it wasn't. We don't care about Blake's feelings for Ben or vice versa. The result: There's no rooting interest, and Blake, Ben and Ross look like fools.

▲ THUMBS UP! YOUNG AND RESTLESS Neil And Victoria Find Love — And Controversy

Together, they've overcome more hurdles than Olympic track stars, but that hasn't stopped Neil and Victoria on the course of true love — albeit one bumpy road — on YOUNG AND RESTLESS. He's still married. She's pregnant by her ex. And he works for her father. You want *drama?* These two have drama.

And, oh yeah: He happens to be black and she's white. Our mail indicates it's a controversial pairing for some viewers. Interracial relationships on daytime are still rare (mobsters, amnesiacs and evil twins are more common), but when white/black stories are tackled, invariably, it's a white man and a black woman. Y&R knew it was tapping a hot-button with Neil and Victoria, yet didn't shy away as so many shows would and have done. Bravo.

We applaud Y&R for how they are trying, however subtly, to change soaps. The audience is never served by clichéd stories, and all over daytime, predictable stories abound. *Zzzz.* Whatever your feelings about Neil and Victoria, one thing is clear: This tale is *not* typical.

We hope Y&R is paving the way for all soap writers to test future couples based on background, social standing, compatibility, attractiveness and chemistry — things that have nothing to do with race.

APPLAUSE, APPLAUSE

It was nice to see ANOTHER WORLD's Felicia and Paulina chatting (about Remy, Felicia's new assistant). Although they're popular characters, the ladies don't get to share many scenes.

PICKY, PICKY

On GENERAL HOSPITAL, Taggert paid Monica a visit to discuss Alan. He sat down and put his feet up on her desk. Come on! This cop may be a maverick, but his crude behavior was outta line. ☐

Appendix 8
Pen Pals

PEN PALS FAN MAIL!

Want to dish daytime's storylines and stars with new friends? Each month, we'll print selected names and addresses of readers who are looking for pen pals from all over. If you want to be a pen pal, send your name, address or post office box and a list of shows you watch to: Pen Pals, c/o *Soap Opera Digest*, 45 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.

KEEP YOUR MAILBOX FILLED WITH LETTERS FROM DIGEST READERS

DIANE JOHNSON
17813 74th Street E.
Bonney Lake, WA 98390
I WATCH: AMC, OLTL, GH, MP
ABOUT ME: "I'm 25, a mother of 3 boys and would really enjoy having a pen pal because I love people and I love to talk about *Soap Opera Digest* and soaps."

JOYLIN BUCHANAN
2028 Julius Street
Cross Plains, WI 53528
I WATCH: ATWT
ABOUT ME: "I am a die-hard fan and don't miss a day. I am 27 years old and a childcare provider with two daughters."

MELINDA SUE KAFTON
3902 W. Chicago
Rapid City, SD 57702
I WATCH: AMC, OLTL, GH
ABOUT ME: "I am a 34-year-old working mom. I work nights and my husband watches my boys (ages 5 and 9) while I'm at work."

DIANE DONNELLY
62 1/2 Lincoln Way
Valparaiso, IN 46383
I WATCH: AW, 90210, MP, PARTY OF FIVE
ABOUT ME: "I'm 27 years old and married. I sell candles and I love to write letters."

DENNIS AND DONNA HICKS
8458 Blankenship
Houston, TX 77080-3604
WE WATCH: DAYS, Y&R, GH
ABOUT US: "We enjoy our church, crafts, soaps and doing things together."

JUDY WARD
320 Cobham Park Road
Warren, PA 16365
I WATCH: Y&R, ATWT
ABOUT ME: "I am a single mother of two boys and have watched these soaps for many years."

SHELLI KERR
P.O. Box 770854
Lakewood, OH 44107
I WATCH: DAYS, OLTL, GH, MP, 90210, ER
ABOUT ME: "I am a 27-year-old, married, full-time nursing student. I love the soaps, shopping and my career. I need someone to keep me up-to-date on the soaps I miss while at school."

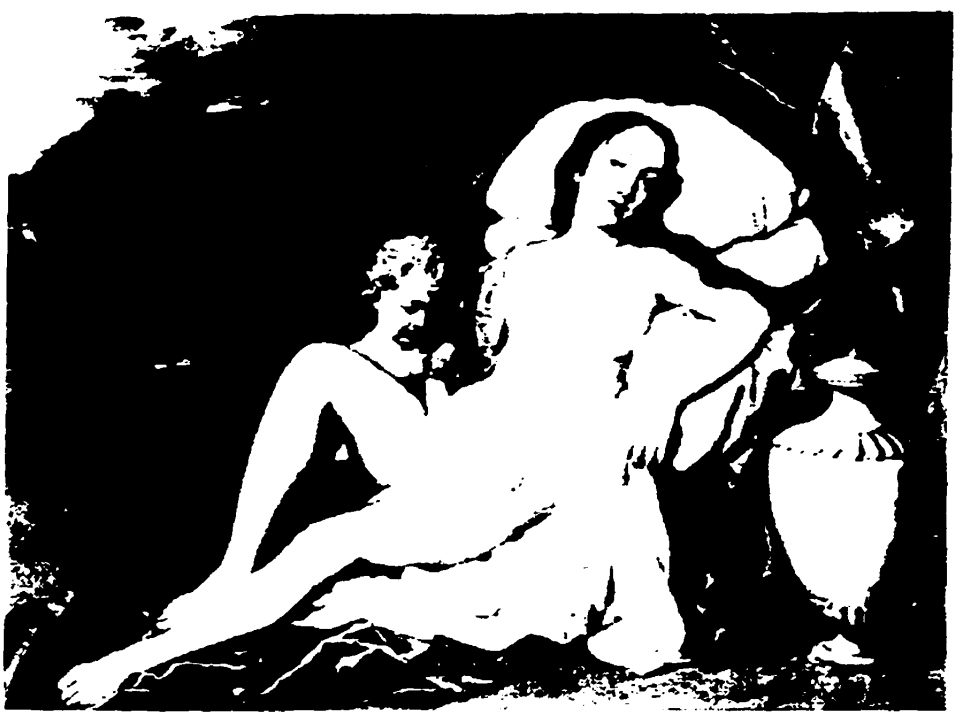
DEBORAH HORTON
903 15th Street
Kenova, WV 25530
I WATCH: AMC, DAYS, AW, OLTL, Y&R, GH, MP, 90210
ABOUT ME: "I am a married, 32-year-old, stay-at-home mom with three boys under age 5. I'm a great letter writer and I love soaps."

FRANK HOLMES
402 Belgravia Court
Louisville, KY 40208
I WATCH: THE CITY, B&B
ABOUT ME: "I am 31 years old and a major Morgan Fairchild (Sydney, THE CITY) fan. CITY fans, please write."

SHERRY LEFEVRE
9465 Rendalia Street
Bellflower, CA 90706
I WATCH: Y&R, DAYS, GH, MP, 90210
ABOUT ME: "I am a 33-year-old wife and mother of two boys. I've been watching AMC since I was a girl." □

Appendix 9
Fall and Expulsion from Paradise, Pol del Limbourgh

Appendix 10
Nell Gwynne, Sir Peter Lely



Appendix 11
Venus, Cupid, Time and Love, Angolo Bronzino

Appendix 12
Venus, Lucas the Elder Cranach

Appendix 13
***Olympia*, Edouard Manet**

Appendix 14
Untitled #96, Cindy Sherman

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