The Single Woman Author on Film
Screening Postfeminism

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Abstract

This thesis theorises the single woman author as a recurrent and distinctive character in Anglo-American film in the period 1994-2018. Tracking the figure across genres and industrial provenances through detailed textual analysis, I uncover the shared meanings and feeling rules embedded within, produced by, and circulating through, this figure. In doing so, I identify four key interrelated representational tropes. Firstly, authorship and singleness signify as mutually constitutive identities indicative of postfeminist agency. Secondly, authorship functions as an autobiographical outlet enabling the expression of the heroine's innate femininity, partly defusing anxieties about women's professional labour. Thirdly, authorship facilitates the performance of relational labour promising to remedy the single woman's disordered unmarried subjectivity. And, finally, the single woman author's success is authorised by a male mentor in ways which authenticate or naturalise patriarchal authority.

Through these tropes and their repetition, authoriality is imagined as an ideal form of labour for the single woman subject. Though both female singleness and female authorship are mobilised as signifiers of female agency with the potential to upend the traditionally gendered distribution of power, this thesis reveals how the single woman author has become a desirable postfeminist subjectivity precisely because she leaves undisturbed hierarchies of gender and power. This figure is therefore a site of contradiction, ambiguity, and ambivalence. As such, she is an ideal prism through which to chart shifts within postfeminism itself. The evolution of the above tropes in recent films accordingly suggests that the postfeminist sensibility has lately undergone an affective shift. Recent texts, this thesis concludes, demonstrate the filtering of feminist critiques of patriarchal structures into popular culture. However, at the same time, they are also suggestive of the continued resilience of postfeminism, and its ongoing ability to take feminism into account.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Does the gender or marital status of an author matter? Admirers of lifelong single woman Jane Austen certainly seem to think so. On 29 October 2014, *Woman's Hour* presenter Jane Garvey expressed her relief that Austen had never married. Discussing Austen's notorious one-day engagement, she concluded, "I'm quite glad that she didn't settle for life as Jane Bigg-Wither because we would have been deprived of some of the greatest books ever written" (Garvey 2014). Garvey's use of the verb "settling" is telling here. That Austen did not "settle for" Harris Bigg-Wither is construed as a positive, empowered, and productive choice: one which forcefully reframes the narrative of single women as examples of "abject" (Negra 2009, 62) or "failed" femininities (Barak 2014, Budgeon 2016). Countering the commonly held view that "unwed, childless women's lives are somehow lacking and/or not yet underway" (Berridge 2015, 118), Garvey implicitly links Austen's unmarried state to her production of canonical literature.

Echoing this sentiment, filmmaker Jane Campion says of poet Janet Frame, whose life she chronicled in the biopic *An Angel at my Table* (1990): "I see now that she was not, as I sometimes thought, lonely, but lived in a rare state of freedom, removed from the demands and conventions of a husband, children and a narrow social world" (cited in Haiduc 2013, 60). In her memoir *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own* (2015), journalist Kate Bolick reprises precisely this linkage of female authorship with female singleness. On the subject of Neith Boyce, author of *Vogue*'s 1898 "Bachelor Girl" column, Bolick for example argues that: "Neith's status as a single woman, far from being a detriment, expressly facilitated her career. Unencumbered by the demands of a husband and children, she was free to devote all her time and energy to doing exactly what she wanted, which was to work as much as possible" (102). In her view, Boyce's singleness made her authorship possible, and, by the same token, authorship made her "single life both possible and worthwhile" (102). Bolick's reflection on the "unencumbered" single life furthermore extends to her own decision to opt out of marriage and motherhood, speculating that if she were to have children, she would be "erased by pregnancy, sleep deprivation, teething rings,

diapers; sippy cups, car seats, strollers, day care, other kids' birthday parties,
pumpkin farms, bouncy houses; ballet recitals, soccer practice, summer camp,
temper tantrums; all-consuming love and eternal worry" (221). She finally concludes
that, "The knowing was visceral: if I became a mother, I'd lose myself […] I
wouldn't become a 'real' writer" (221).[1]

Underpinning Garvey, Campion and Bolick's comments is an understanding of
women's authorship as intrinsically connected to their marital status. Interrogating
the assumption that the identities "single woman" and "woman author" are
inextricably linked, and perhaps even mutually constitutive, this thesis explores the
hitherto untheorised figure of the single woman author. Despite her absence from the
critical literature, the single woman protagonist engaged in acts of creative
authorship is a conspicuous staple of contemporary culture. She recurs in "chick lit"
such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Fielding 1996), *The Secret Dreamworld of a
Shopaholic* (Kinsella 2000), *Diary of a Working Girl* (Brodsky 2004), and *The
Brontë Project* (Vandever 2006); in middlebrow fiction such as *Possession* (Byatt
1990), *How to Make an American Quilt* (Otto 1991), *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya
Sisterhood* (Wells 2004), *The Jane Austen Book Club* (Fowler 2004), *The Guernsey
Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (Shaffer and Barrows 2008), *Their Finest Hour
and a Half* (Evans 2009), or *The Help* (Stocket 2009); and as well as in memoirs
such as *Girl, Interrupted* (Kaysen 1993), *Prozac Nation: Young & Depressed in
America, A Memoir* (Wurtzel 1994), *Eat, Pray, Love* (Gilbert 2006), *The Worst Date
Ever: War Crimes, Hollywood Heart-Throbs and Other Abominations* (Bussmann
2009), and *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (Strayed 2012). She
features on television in series such as *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of
Superman* (1993-1997), *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007),
30 Rock (2006-2013), *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* (2007-2011), *The Crimson Petal*

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[1] Implicit in these accounts of marriage is a male partner who stands for patriarchy's
demands on women. This is, of course, a particularly limited view of both singleness
and marriage, revealing the extent to which the term "single woman" really reads as
"single *heterosexual* woman". Like Suzanne Leonard, I see this kind of discourse as
"myopically heterosexist" (2018, 12). Although this heteronormative understanding
has, to an extent, been troubled by the recent redefinition of marriage to incorporate
same-sex couples, this issue is largely absent from the films in my sample.

and the White (2011), *Awkward* (2011-2016), *Girls* (2012–2017), *My Mad Fat Diary* (2013-2015), *House of Cards* (2013-), *Jane the Virgin* (2014-), and *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* (2016). She also exists online, in the anonymous blogs penned by "Belle de Jour" and "Girl with one track mind", or in the web series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2014) and *Emma Approved* (2013-2014).

The single woman author character is perhaps most prominent in contemporary cinema, where she features in over 100 films between 1994 and 2018.[2] She is depicted not only in the screen adaptations of the books listed above, but also in a variety of genres such as the adventure thriller, in films such as *The Life of David Gale* (2003), *Blood Diamond* (2006), *State of Play* (2009), *Man of Steel* (2013), or *Passengers* (2017); the costume drama, as in *Little Women* (1994), *Mansfield Park* (1999), *Crimson Peak* (2015); the biopic, for example in *Miss Potter* (2006), *Becoming Jane* (2007), *Brain on Fire* (2016), *A Quiet Passion* (2016), *Mary Shelley* (2017); the romantic comedy, including *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), *Never Been Kissed* (1999), *Down with Love* (2003), *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (2003), *Music and Lyrics* (2006), *Letters to Juliet* (2010), *Begin Again* (2013), *Trainwreck* (2014), *La La Land* (2016), *Set it Up* (2018); as well as indie comedies like *Young Adult* (2011), *Girl Most Likely* (2012), *Lola Versus* (2012), *Welcome to Me* (2013), *Adult World* (2013), *In A World… (2013)*, *Obvious Child* (2014), *Authors Anonymous* (2014), *The Girl in the Book* (2015), *One More Time* (2015), *The Incredible Jessica James* (2017), or *Please Stand By* (2017). This thesis is specifically concerned with the single woman author's representation in contemporary Anglo-American film from the period 1994-2018,[3] and how such representations, themselves embedded in a proliferation of off-screen female authorial identities, have shaped our understanding of female authorship. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which this figure has emerged as an ideal subject of postfeminist agency, so that even Austen's refusal of marriage in 1802 can retrospectively be figured as a moment of agentic "girl power" choice. This thesis therefore answers the question:

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[2] This thesis counts a total of 116 Anglo-American films featuring a single woman author protagonist during this period. See filmography included in the appendix for a comprehensive list.
[3] I explain the rationale for the boundaries of the film sample in detail in my methodology section.

how is the single woman author figured in contemporary film, and what does she signify?

This thesis theorises the single woman author as a recurrent and distinctive character in contemporary film. Tracking the figure across genres, I uncover the "shared meanings" (Hall 1997, xvii) embedded within, produced by, and circulating through, this figure. The representational tropes I explore in subsequent chapters, for example, reveal the extent to which contemporary cinema has idealised authorship as an occupation for the postfeminist single woman subject. As a form of labour which is creative, immaterial, feminised, relational, but also entrepreneurial, writing is indeed recurrently figured as an appropriate vehicle for the enacting of neoliberal—yet feminist-inflected—agency. Though the single woman author often signifies as unruly, her agency is curtailed in important ways, and in the end, texts in which she features prioritise those forms of agency which leave patriarchal authority undisturbed. The filmic representation of the single woman author is therefore a site of contradiction, ambiguity and ambivalence. As such, I argue, she is an ideal prism through which to study not only the tensions and ambiguities constitutive of postfeminism, but indeed the history of postfeminism itself.

Literature Review

In this section, I outline the various bodies of literature that this thesis both draws on and contributes to, including the study of women in film, single women in popular culture, female authorship in literature, female authorship in film, postfeminism, neoliberalism and, finally, affect theory.

Women in film

In its interest in representation of women in popular culture, this thesis is located first and foremost in the field of feminist media studies. Anxieties about the representation of women, and especially the problem of "'unrealistic' and 'misleading' images of women" in media were key to second-wave feminism (Waters 2011, 6) with the issue being taken up in important feminist texts such as *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir 1949), *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1963), and *Sexual Politics* (Millett 1970). Since the publication of early works such as *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (Rosen 1973), and *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Haskell 1974), feminist film criticism has likewise been interested in questions of representation. Shifting the debate away from a sociological focus on the accuracy (or lack thereof) of the images of women circulating in film, Claire Johnston's ground-breaking essay, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" (1973) crucially contends that the stereotyping of women in cinema reflects not women's lived reality, but rather illustrates the working of pervasive patriarchal ideology.

In cultural studies, Stuart Hall's work similarly emphasises the role of culture as a vehicle for producing and communicating "shared meanings" (1997, viii). While representations do not reflect reality, they nonetheless give us insight into how meaning is created in relation to particular ideas, objects, or issues: "We give things meaning by how we represent them - the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the way we classify and conceptualise them, the values we place upon them"

(Hall 1997, xix). The study of representation highlights the fact that although meaning is always constructed, it is nonetheless naturalised through repetition and reproduction: "The meaning is not in the object or person or thing, nor is it in the world. It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable" (Hall 2013, 7). As such, Christine Gledhill and Vicky Ball argue, "media forms and representations constitute major sites for conflict and negotiation," in particular "the struggle to name and win support for certain kinds of cultural value and identity over others" (2013, 345). In feminist media studies specifically, "the field of representation matters politically, in terms of shaping our understanding of gender as well as feminism itself" (Taylor 2016, 3)

Like Johnston, I am less interested in determining the "accuracy" of the representation of women in film, than in thinking through the "myths" which underpin them. While I periodically invoke "real world" examples, they are intended as intertexts to my cinematic case studies: they illuminate how "shared meanings" around the figure of the screened single woman author shape the perception of the "real world" woman author. Indeed, as Hall puts it, shared cultural meanings "organise and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have, real, practical effects" (1997, xix). Likewise, this thesis is not concerned with identifying "good" or "bad", "positive" or "negative", "progressive" or "retrograde" representations of the single woman author. Indeed, Karen Hollinger's assessment of female friendship films applies also to this thesis' film sample:

> Like other woman's films before them, they represent a highly negotiated cinematic form that offers neither a progressive challenge to the patriarchal status quo nor reactionary support for the dominant ideology; instead, the films are complex instances of the intricate process of negotiation that exists between the competing ideological frameworks of their creators and their audience. (Hollinger 2012, 45)

In addition, since postfeminist media texts are, by definition, characterised by contradiction, ambivalence, and by the simultaneous entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist rhetoric, this is an impossible task. Or, as Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra note, "Postfeminist culture does not allow us to make straightforward

distinctions between progressive and regressive texts" (2007, 22). The sophistication and ambivalence of postfeminist media culture, Tasker and Negra contend, requires "new reading strategies to counteract the popularized feminism, figurations of female agency, and canny neutralization of feminist critiques in its texts" (2007, 22). In this thesis, then, I disentangle the myths and representational patterns which coalesce around the single woman author, and the ways in which these depictions naturalise and valorise certain regimes of femininity over others. I also offer an account of what the evolution of these representational tropes reveals about the postfeminist culture that shapes this common imaginary. In short, I do not ask: "Is the lifestyle of columnist Andie Anderson (Kate Hudson) in *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* plausible?" or "Does *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* offer a 'progressive' text?" but rather "what kind of 'good life fantasies' does *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* engage? What role do commercial authorship and New York City respectively play in actualising these good life fantasies? Or, to take another example, what is the significance of the gulf between Andie's living conditions and those of Imogene (Kristen Wiig) in *Girl Most Likely*, in which the latter loses both her job at a New York magazine and her Manhattan apartment?"

Cultural studies scholarship has also developed the theorising of the spectator away from early psychoanalytical models such as Laura Mulvey's (1975). Christine Gledhill (1988) for examples uses the concept of "negotiation" as a means of recognising the agency of the spectator, as well as their cultural context, in creating meaning. With the interpretation of a text being a site of struggle, "texts could never be entirely progressive or reactionary", as they are fundamentally polysemic, that is, "open to various types of readings depending on the sociohistorical situation of the spectator" (Hollinger 2012, 18). With the advent of this model, "spectators are no longer products of the text; instead, the text is a product of the struggle and resulting negotiation among various different components, including active viewers as shaped by their socio-historical context" (Hollinger 2012, 18). Cultural studies thus emphasises the significance of production and reception contexts, meaning films can no longer be conceptualised as "inoculating meaning into passive hypothetical spectators, but rather meaning should be seen as emerging from the way real viewers interact with texts" (Hollinger 2012, 18). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct a reception or audience study, my analysis does not discount the agency

of the (frequently female) audience, nor the polysemous nature of my case studies. In fact, much of my close reading is concerned with the polysemic character of postfeminist ambivalence which spectators potentially negotiate in a myriad of ways. Through detailed textual analysis, this thesis uncovers the frequently ambiguous and contradictory "shared meanings" associated with the character of the single woman author, the ways in such meanings are constructed around, and refracted through, this figure.

Of central importance to this thesis is Kathleen Rowe Karlyn's foundational work on the representation of the "unruly woman" (1990, 1998, 2011). First conceptualised in relation to the TV programme *Roseanne* (1988-1997) and its titular character played by Roseanne Barr, Karlyn defines female unruliness as "a cluster of attributes that challenge patriarchal power by defying norms of femininity intended to keep a woman in her place"; because of this disruption of "patriarchal norms" Karlyn sees the unruly woman as "implicitly feminist" (2011, 10). These attributes relate in particular to the "excessive" female body or female speech acts, through which "the unruly woman violates the unspoken feminine sanction against 'making a spectacle' of herself" (Karlyn 1990, 410). In Karlyn's view, the unruly woman is the prototypical "woman as subject - transgressive above all when she lays claim to her own desire" (1990, 410). Importantly, female agency and desire fundamentally read as forms of female transgression. As Karlyn makes clear, Roseanne's disruptiveness relates to her ability to exercise control over her own representation on screen:

> Perhaps her greatest unruliness lies in the presentation of herself as <u>author</u> rather than actor and, indeed, as <u>author</u> of a self over which she claims <u>control</u>. Her insistence on her "<u>authority</u>" to <u>create</u> and <u>control</u> the meaning of *Roseanne* is an unruly act par excellence, triggering derision or dismissal much like Jane Fonda's earlier attempts to "<u>write</u>" her self (but in the genre of melodrama rather than comedy). (1990, 409-410, emphasis added)

Highlighting Karlyn's use of words relating to authorship ("author", "authority", "control", "write") in the above extract is suggestive of the myriad ways in which female unruliness signifies as female authorship, and vice versa. This thesis therefore engages with the conceptual framework of the "unruly woman" to interrogate the

varied ways in which the figure of the single woman author mobilises signifiers of unruliness. As I show later in this literature review and throughout this thesis, the woman's quest for "authority" (over her body, body of work, or textual representation) is one which is almost synonymous with the quest for female authorship. Indeed, both the identities of "single woman" and "woman author" are laden with cultural connotations of autonomy, independence, and self-determination and thus both signify subjectivities in some way inflected by feminism. Drawing on Karlyn, the first contention of this thesis is that in possessing precisely the kinds of "attributes that challenge patriarchal power" (2011, 10), the single woman author doubly signifies as an "unruly woman".

Alongside these largely textual analyses of women in cinema, some scholars have sought to quantify the unequal representation of women in film. In a report entitled "It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the 100 Top Films of 2017" (2018) Martha Lauzen reveals that "Females comprised 24% of protagonists" and "34% of all speaking characters" featured in the 100 top US grossing films of 2017 (1). What's more, "while only 32% of films featured 10 or more female characters in speaking roles, 79% had 10 or more male characters in speaking roles" (Lauzen 2018, "Portrayals", 1). This study moreover provides an evidence base for certain trends relating to the gendering of particular film genres instinctively apprehended by audiences: "Female protagonists were most likely to appear in comedies (30%) and dramas (30%), followed by action films (17%), horror films (13%), animated features (4%), and science fiction films (4%)" (2018, *Portrayals*, 2-3). That comedies and dramas are statistically more likely to feature female protagonists goes some way toward explaining this thesis' generic bias, with the majority of case studies belonging to the romantic comedy and costume drama genres. Lauzen's work furthermore reveals significant imbalances in terms of other modalities of difference, with white women comprising "68% of all female characters with speaking roles" (Lauzen 2018, "Portrayals", 4). With few notable exceptions such as *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* (2005), *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007), and *The Help* (2011), the majority of the single woman authors considered in this thesis are indeed white. This tallies with Tasker and Negra's assessment of the subject of postfeminism being "white and middle class by default" (2007, 1). Adopting an intersectional approach, this thesis uncovers the ways in

which postfeminist culture normalises the white, middle-class, cis-gendered, heterosexual female subject.

Figure 1: Proportion of film dialogue spoken by male characters in 2,000 screenplays
Source: https://pudding.cool/2017/03/film-dialogue/
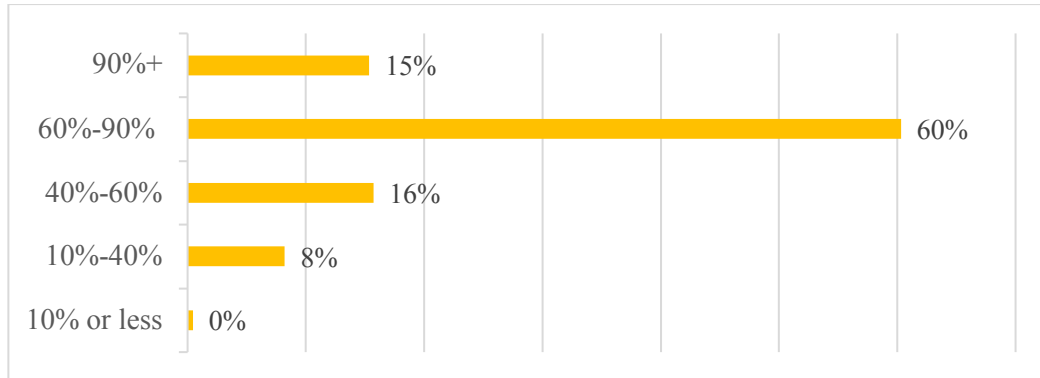
Figure 2: The original Bechdel Test comic strip (1985)

Lauzen's findings on the proportion of female speaking roles are usefully complemented by Hannah Anderson and Matt Daniels' 2016 survey of 2,000 film screenplays. Anderson and Daniels matched dialogue to characters to determine the proportion of male vs. female dialogue, revealing that in 75% of cases, male characters dominate the dialogue. As illustrated in the graph above [See Fig. 1] gender inequalities are entrenched in the distribution of dialogue. It is worth noting that Anderson and Daniels' study was published on *The Pudding,* a weekly non-

academic online journal of visual essays, with an emphasis on innovative data visualisation. Their work indeed emerges in a moment of huge interest in popular online feminist media criticism, much of which has focussed on the so-called Bechdel Test, a basic barometer of female representation.

Originating in Alison Bechdel's 1985 *Dykes to Watch Out For* comic strip [See Fig. 2], the Bechdel Test was popularised in the 2010s on the *Feminist Frequency* website, and poses the following two basic questions of an individual film: Are there two named female characters, and do they talk to each other about something other than men? Films which do not fulfil this criteria are deemed to have "failed" the test. The fact that countless websites, blogs, and articles are now devoted to the Bechdel Test,[1] and a number of "spin off" quantitative measures of female representation and female authorship have also emerged, such as the Swedish "A-List" or British "F-Rating",[2] suggests an ongoing appetite for discussions of gender inequality and cinema outside of traditional academic feminist film criticism. This kind of work— conducted both within, and outside of academia—has proved invaluable to substantiating arguments such as "white male characters dominate films", while also discounting claims that female characters are in some way "taking over" popular film.[3] Nonetheless, these studies are no substitute for in depth textual work. Indeed, as critics of the Bechdel Test have suggested, such measures are limited in scope,[4]

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[1] See for example http://bechdeltest.com/ a database listing whether films pass or fail the Bechdel Test, the The US-based Bechdel Film Festival, and its UK equivalent The Bechdel Test Fest.
[2] For details, see http://a-rate.com/ and http://f-rated.org/.
[3] I'm thinking here specifically of the sexist backlash against the all-female reboot of *Ghostbusters* (2016) as well as the criticism surrounding the proportion of female characters in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) (see: Sims 2016, Chichizola 2018). In both cases, female characters were perceived by some avid (male) fans as retrospectively "ruining" their childhoods by compromising beloved films. Read in the context of work on gender and the perceived apportionment of talk revealing "listener bias" (Cutler and Scott 1990), the vitriol targeted at female-led franchises belies a reluctance to cede any representational territory to characters who are neither white nor male.
[4] See for example, *Politics with Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter* (Marso 2017), "What the Bechdel test doesn't tell us about women on film" (Solomon 2013), "Why the Bechdel Test has failed women in film" (Minamore 2017), or "Beyond the Bechdel test: here's how films can really make us love female characters" (Robinson et al 2017).

and a film passing the test is no indication of the *kinds* of representations being offered. This thesis therefore takes a qualitative, textual approach to the analysis of the single woman author figure, while also making some gestures to quantitative studies through its filmography.[5]

Single women

As Simone de Beauvoir memorably put it in *The Second Sex* (1953), "women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being" (475). As this statement suggests, the gendering and subordination of women occurs through, or in relation to, the institution of marriage in ways unique to women. Despite important cultural and historical disjunctures in the treatment of single women throughout Western history, there are notable continuities: "Whatever the society or period in question, meanings attached to marital status were always deeply implicated in gender systems and structures" (Holden, Froide and Hannam 2008, 318). "Being married or not married has conferred different rights, duties, privileges, restrictions and imagery on men than on women" in such a way that "the married/not married dichotomy has structured relations of power and subordination between women in complex and often contradictory ways" (Holden, Froide and Hannam 2008, 318).

With "wifehood keyed into womanhood" (Chandler 1991, 2), unmarried women have long been socially stigmatised as models of "failed femininity" (Barak 2014, 6). For example, the derogatory terms "old maid", "spinster", and "cat lady" point to the ways in which single women are "devalued and socially marginalized" (Lahad and Hazan 2014). The deployment of these terms serves to stereotype the unmarried woman as "lonely, miserable and with no alternative but to fill her empty life with cats" (Lahad and Hazan 2014). Single men, meanwhile "have been considered less of a problem than single women; the term "bachelor" does not have evocations similar to 'spinster' or 'old maid'" (Gordon 1994, 180); as these terms suggest, then, singleness "sticks" to women in particularly gendered ways. Importantly, such stigmatisation is strategic, serving as "a tool for social maintenance, reinforcing

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[5] See Appendix.

heteronormative gender roles and containing alternative versions of womanhood"
(Barak 2014, iv). Governing the ways in which they are "defined and categorised",
marriage inevitably "casts a long shadow" on women (Chandler 1991, 2). A key
aspect of this "long shadow" is the ways in which heterosexual marriage has been
used as a means of enforcing gender roles. As Rebecca Traister notes in *All the
Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation* (2016),
marriage has historically functioned to strip women of their "autonomy, legal rights,
and the capacity for public achievement" (38). As such, marriage was a key area of
feminist contestation during the so-called "second wave", with Marlene Dixon for
example claiming that "The institution of marriage is the chief vehicle for the
perpetuation of the oppression of women" ([1969] 2000, 76). Likewise, Kate Millet's
Sexual Politics ([1970], 1977) argued that "[wives'] chattel status continues in their
loss of name, their obligation to adopt the husband's domicile and the general legal
assumption that marriage involves an exchange of the female's domestic service and
[sexual] consortium in return for financial support" (34-35).

In such a context, it is no surprise that the single woman has often been cast as
transgressive. As Anthea Taylor argues, "The single woman is a figure around whom
broader cultural fears about feminism and about women's power and independence
have always coalesced" (Taylor 2012, 2). As far back as the early modern period,
women's decision not to marry, and/or to forego motherhood was viewed as having
the potential to "upset the patriarchal model of heterosexual marriage and
reproduction" (Froide 2005, 180). The subtext of this ongoing anxiety, Tuula Gordon
suggests, "is a fear of autonomous women who, by their existence, threaten notions
of sexual difference and complementarity […] they, like the Amazons, pose a threat
of […] disrupting gender relations and challenging the subordination of women"
(1994, 17). Female singleness thus variously reads as a queer subjectivity threatening
heterosexuality, and/or as an expression of female autonomy challenging patriarchal
authority. Either way, female singleness risks threatening "patriarchy at the most
fundamental levels of participation" (Barak 2014, 7). Through its implicit threat to
the heteropatriarchal social order, female singleness has the potential to be claimed
as an unruly, oppositional subjectivity. However, as Zsuzsa Berend's work on
nineteenth century American middle class spinsters shows (2000), not all single
women can be straightforwardly read as rebelling against patriarchy and

heteronormativity: such claims must be contextualised. As Berend's work intuits, not all single women are the same. "Though there is little diversity in their representation in popular culture," Taylor notes, "single women cannot and should not be viewed as a monolithic group" (2012, 30). This highly heterogeneous category comprises of "those never married, widows, and divorcees (as well as those legally considered single though in a couple)" (Taylor 2012, 2). In addition, there are

> young singles and old singles; rich singles and poor singles; singles who have children and singles who do not; singles who live in the city and singles who lives in the suburbs or the country side; […] and singles of different races, ethnicities and religions, to name just a few. (DePaulo 2006, 5)

As both Taylor and Bella DePaulo's enumerations make clear, singleness is an intersectional identity. As a result, "the claiming of an identity as a single woman signifies in different ways according to how it intersects with other forms of difference" (Taylor 2012, 30). Despite this rich diversity, the term "single woman" nonetheless most often refers to uncoupled, never-married, young, heterosexual, white, middle class, able-bodied women.

I now turn to the ways in which the single woman has been represented in popular culture, and her recurrent linkage with work, the city, and consumerism. Crystallised in Helen Gurley Brown's bestseller *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), in the pages of Brown's *Cosmopolitan,* as well as in contemporary film and television, the "single girl" as urban professional emerged in the 1960s as an icon of successful—but, to an extent, timebound—femininity. As Brown makes clear, work is central to the construction of the "single girl" who constructs her identity outside of marriage and is therefore "known by what she does rather than by who she belongs to" (1963, 89). As Melanie Waters and Rebecca Munford argue, "The single girl's professional status, then, is explicitly identified as grounding her sense of agency and the possibility of assuming a civic identity" (2014, 32). On television, programmes such as *The Mary Taylor Moore Show* (1970-1977) asserted "that work was not just a prelude to marriage, or a substitute for it, but could form the centre of a satisfying life for woman the way it presumably did for men" (Dow 1996, 14). In turn, Bonnie Dow argues (1996), the single working-woman sitcom became the primary site for

representing feminism in 1970s television. As both *Sex and the Single Girl* and *Mary Taylor Moore* make clear, the space of the city is "a vital site for the liberated woman's realisation of her freedoms" (Waters and Munford 2014. 45). The powerful imaginative linkage between the single girl and the city—and New York City especially—was further cemented at the *fin-de-siècle* through HBO's *Sex and the City*. In the programme, New York appears as a "singles ghetto" and married women are frequently "transported to the exclusive suburbs of Connecticut or the Hamptons once their ceremonies are over" (Richards 2003, 148).[6] Moreover, Deborah Jermyn argues, New York City plays a pivotal role in the series as both its fifth central character and as Carrie's "boyfriend" (2009, *Sex and the City,* 77). Since then, "New York (and Manhattan more specifically) has evolved as the preeminent and most memorable location adopted by the Hollywood romcom" in particular through the "quintessential establishing shot" of the iconic Manhattan skyline (Jermyn 2009, "I Love NY", 10, 15). Through its generic connection with the romcom, New York has therefore emerged as a particularly privileged site for the fulfilment of the single woman heroine. Wielding the financial independence she has secured through work outside the home, the single girl moreover defines herself through her agentic relationship to consumer culture, "in particular, her capacity to function as a knowledgeable acolyte of feminine consumer culture" (Radner 2011, 11). Once again, *Sex and the City* is particularly illustrative of this trend (see Arthurs 2003).

Importantly, the ideological linkage of the girl subject with discourses of agency, and that agency's ideal enactment in the sphere of consumption intensified with the

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[6] Helen Richards goes on to argue that through both her singleness and her relationship with New York, Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker) enacts a postmodern, female form of "flânerie" (2003, 149). The flâneur, as articulated by Baudelaire in "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), detachedly and invisibly roams the streets of nineteenth century Paris, watching the city and its inhabitants. As the privileged possessor of the gaze, Baudelaire's flâneur has also been understood as a "journalist or social commentator, or at the very least, a forerunner of these professions" (Richards 2003, 149). *Sex and the City*'s Carrie, on the other hand, commodifies her relationship with the city and its inhabitants through her weekly column. With its potential for commodified flânerie, the city is imaginatively constructed as the site "where the aspiration toward creativity can manifest itself" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 111). As a result the urban space of the city is facilitative not just of the single girl's lifestyle aspirations, but also to creative or authorial aspirations.

advent of "girl power". Indeed, since the 1990s, young (white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied) women have increasingly been "constructed as a vanguard of new subjectivity" (Harris 2004, 1). Under girl power, young women are constructed as the privileged bearers of agency and choice. Benefiting from the significant gains of second-wave feminism, the agentic figure par excellence is the "can do girl", a youthful, female subject who is "optimistic, self-inventing, and success-oriented" (Harris 2004, 25). Although girl power rhetoric does not interpellate *single* women specifically, I argue that there are important implicit synergies between the single girl and the girl power subject.

Defining the "girl" is a notoriously slippery exercise. In *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2004), Anita Harris notes that any work "that focuses age and gender-based category as its subject of inquiry immediately runs into the problem of implying a natural, fixed state of being for that category" (185). Moreover,

> girlhood is not a fixed period of time but is subject to historical and social specificities. Currently, it seems that membership in the girl category is extending out at both ends: female children are becoming aware of a feminine identity at a younger age (hence the "tweenie" phenomenon), and women into their thirties and forties cheerfully describe themselves and their peers as girls. This suggests that the category of girl is constantly shifting and cannot be linked to a fixed age or developmental stage in life. (Harris 2004, 185)

Just as temporality plays a complex role in the formation of girlhood, so it does with singlehood (See Negra 2009, Taylor 2012, Lahad 2012 and 2017). As Taylor, Negra, and Kinneret Lahad note, singleness is understood as a transient, liminal state, and incomprehensible as a long-term subjectivity: "By and large, being single, although acceptable within certain temporal limits […], appears to remain a socially interstitial subjectivity for women." (Taylor 2012, 1). Rather than define the girl as a subjectivity connected to chronological age, girlhood might productively be viewed as a similarly "socially interstitial subjectivity for women", a kind of affective feminine temporality bound by life events such as marriage and motherhood, and

characterised by conspicuous participation in consumer culture. With this in mind, the single, childless, girl emerges as girl power's ideal subject.

However, not all representations of the single woman have been celebratory. The flip side of the single girl as symbol of liberated womanhood is the "career woman" whose singleness belies a disordered prioritising of career over family. As Imelda Whelehan suggests, the very term "career woman" relies on a "clear tension between the two words—after all, one doesn't talk about career men", so that "Women with careers would continue to be seen as oddities, and by the late 1980s, they were often portrayed as selfishly putting their own needs before that of their family" (2005, 141). Crucially, then, such representations implicitly connect the ills of the "career woman" with the ills of feminism itself. The 1987 film *Fatal Attraction,* in which the unmarried career woman is depicted as "paranoid or breaking down due to alienation from the familial" (Jermyn 1996, 256) epitomises such "backlash" narratives (see Faludi 1990). In the logic of backlash, feminism is blamed for "women's apparent lack of control over their lives", and women are encouraged "to abandon an overly ambitious and ultimately destructive project of 'having it all'" (Genz 2010, 2014). Such narratives thus suggest that "in their search for professional success on male terms, they [working women] are bound to end up single, unloved, and fraught with neuroses" (Genz 2010, 104). As the phrase "single, unloved, and fraught with neuroses" makes clear, female singleness is signified in terms of in terms of both "lacks" (of love, husband, children) and excesses (of neuroses).

Postfeminist media culture indeed recurrently portrays single women as "aberrant", "abject", somehow "off-script", their lives as "empty, deficient, or not fully underway" (Negra 2009, 8-9 and 61). These narratives, Negra contends, "direct an increasingly diagnostic gaze toward single women" (Negra 2009, 61). This "diagnostic gaze" is evident in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), for example, in which Bridget (Renée Zellweger) is haunted by the spectre of *Fatal Attraction*'s Alex Forrest (Glenn Close). In an early scene, Bridget is heard declaring in voiceover, "That was the moment I suddenly realised that unless something changed soon, I was going to live a life where my major relationship was with a bottle of wine and I'd finally die fat and alone and be found three weeks later half eaten by Alsatians. Or I was about to turn into Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*." Bridget's shame at being

single is comically reinforced through her fear "that she is in danger of becoming socially worthless, a body whose abjection is so complete that upon her death it will go unnoticed and her corpse will be eaten by dogs" (Negra 2009, 62). As Negra goes on to argue, "This hysterical sense of accelerated time that leads a woman in her 30s to fixate on her death expresses both the imminent social death for which the single woman is at risk and a sense of the centrality of her abject selfhood" (2009, 62). This sentiment is echoed in *The Sex and the City* episode "Splat" (season 6, episode 18, first broadcast in 2004), in which Carrie's (Sarah Jessica Parker) over-40 single friend Lexi (Kristen Johnston) is defenestrated at a party: the abject single body too unsightly to behold must disappear from view. Both scenes are illustrative of the ways in which postfeminist media culture figures the single woman as an aberrant subject in need of "self-work" to "fix" her singleness. Taylor in fact shows how "the single woman investing in becoming otherwise is encouraged, and often congratulated, in her efforts to remedy her singleness and ensure the hegemony of hetero-patriarchy" (2012, 1). Likewise, this thesis argues in Chapter 3 that the single woman author is encouraged to use her authoriality as a "relational gateway" remedying the relational "lacks" associated with singleness.

While Hilary Radner conceptualises the single girl as central to "neo-feminism" (2011, 6-25), this thesis aligns the figure with the complexities and contradictions of postfeminism. The paradoxical nature of the single woman's signification is evident in *Bridget Jones's Diary* in which Bridget attempts "to negotiate the tensions between heterosexual courtship and unwed freedom, between female emancipation and self-abnegation, between feminism and femininity" (Genz 2010, 99-100). Like Taylor, I see contemporary representations of the single woman as characterised by competing, contradictory discourses which "suture" feminism and antifeminism: "The contemporary single woman is allowed, endorsed, even celebrated; yet simultaneously disavowed as that which must be pitied, scorned, and emptied of her oppositional potential" (2012, 13). "In being both permissible […] and repudiated" the single woman "experiences the same discursive fate as feminism itself in contemporary media culture" (2012, 3). In fact, Taylor contends, "the contradictions and tensions" coalescing around "the figure of the single woman are indicative of the contradictions and tensions that are constitutive of postfeminism itself" (2012,12). Moreover, the ambivalence of this figure "reveals not just cultural anxieties about the

woman without a man but about feminism itself" (Taylor 2012, 34). Building on Taylor, as well as on scholarship on female authorship, this thesis makes the further claim that the single woman author is a particularly privileged, intersectional site for exploring both the "contradictions and tensions that are constitutive of postfeminism" and the "discursive fate" of feminism. As I show throughout this thesis, the single woman author is a particularly ambiguous and ambivalent figure whose evolving representation since the mid-1990s is suggestive of the evolution of postfeminism itself.

Female authorship

As Seán Burke notes in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern* (1995), feminism and female authorship have long been mutually entangled (45). From Mary Wollstonecraft to Charlotte Brontë, from Virginia Woolf to Judith Butler, the history of feminist thought is almost indistinguishable from the history of women writers, so that female authorship has emerged as a feminist-inflected subjectivity. A landmark of "gynocriticism", Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* ([1979] 2000), for example argues that,

> Male sexuality […] is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power […] literary text is not only speech quite literally embodied, but also power mysteriously made manifest, made flesh. In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis's power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim. (4-6)

In practice, the embodied claim to authorship goes in hand-in-hand with the authority to define reality: "precisely because a writer 'fathers' his text," Gilbert and Gubar suggest, "his literary creations […] are his possession, his property. Having defined them in language and thus generated them, he owns them, controls them, and encloses them on the printed page" (12). Enclosed in the printed page, imprisoned in male texts, women contend with the "coercive power not only of cultural constraints

but of the literary texts which incarnate them" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 11). This echoes the rhetoric of Hélène Cixous' contemporaneous landmark essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976), which argues that (male) writing is "a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction" (879). As Gilbert and Gubar make clear, such a reliance on metaphors of literary paternity moreover functions to exclude women from embodying literary authority:

> Where does such an implicitly or explicitly patriarchal theory of literature leave literary women? If the pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can females generate texts? […] It cannot be, the metaphor of literary paternity implies, because it is physiologically as well as sociologically impossible. Male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power. (2000, 7-8)

In short, woman's "proper" business is to birth babies—not texts. Given this systematic exclusion from authority and authorship, the female author is by definition "anomalous, indefinable, alienated, a freakish outsider" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 48). Lacking a literary tradition or "precursor" with which to identify furthermore results in women writers suffering from what Gilbert and Gubar term "the anxiety of authorship" (2000, 48).

In "attempting the pen" the woman writer enters in an intimate "battle for self-creation" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 49). In order "to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization" and struggle "against [the male precursor author's] reading of her" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 49). Cixous similarly evokes the subversive, revisionary thrill of "écriture feminine", in particular its power to disrupt the "phallocentric tradition": "writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (Cixous 1976, 879, emphasis original). Precisely because writing is a locus of women's repression, it contains within it the "very possibility of change".

For Cixous, when a woman "put[s] herself into the text" (1976, 875), it is an act of resistance which poses a terrifying threat to patriarchy:

> A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the "truth" with laughter. (1976, 888)

In breaking from phallologocentricity, female authorship is understood here as a disruptive project to rewrite woman's place in society. Defined as a criticism concerned "with developing a specifically female framework for dealing with works by women, in all aspects of their production, motivation, analysis and interpretation, and in all literary forms, including journals and letters" (Abrams 2005, 95), gynocriticism's aim was clearly to create a female literary tradition; a tradition decidedly at odds with the androcentrism that had hitherto dominated literary studies (Plain and Sellers 2007, 102).

It is crucial to note, moreover, that the gynocritical model of female authorship has—rightly—been critiqued for its universalising and essentialist assumptions about women and women's writing. In her introduction to the collection *Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic After Thirty Years* (2009), Annette Frederico for example notes that *The Madwoman in the Attic* has come to be "reflexively repudiated as retrograde, biologically reductive, and exclusionary" (9). In particular, Gilbert and Gubar's emphasis on "biological difference" has come under fire for its reiteration of "patriarchal Western culture's persistent conflation of femininity with the corporeal" (Han 2015, 121). The essentialist insistence on female-authored texts as somehow marked by the experiences of femininity similarly underpins *A Literature of their Own* all the while ignoring other modalities of difference such as race or class. What's more, Mary Eagleton argues,

> gynocriticism never could square the circle because its position was inherently contradictory. It critiqued literary history and canonical thinking

but wanted to be part of it; it looked for a commonality among women but was wary of imposing uniformity; it doubted traditional aesthetic values but used them to valorise women writers; it wanted to speak for all women yet invested in a particular raced and classed group, at a particular historical moment (2007, 110).

Such blind spots and contradictions unfortunately erode feminist solidarity and sisterhood. The wish "to speak for all women" while ignoring the specifics of one's positionality as belonging to a "particular raced and classed group, at a particular historical moment" (Eagleton 2007, 110), smacks of what bell hooks warns of as the fallacy of "common oppression" (1984, 43). Primarily championed by "bourgeois white women," the idea of common oppression ignores the unique intersections of "sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices" affecting the lives of non-white, non-bourgeois women (hooks 1984, 43-44). In short, the "universalist" focus on the kinds of gendered oppression shared by *all* women centralises the experience of the "default" female subject (the white, middle class, cis-gendered, heterosexual woman) at the expense of other narratives of difference and oppression.

For all its shortcomings gynocriticism nonetheless exposed the "link between aesthetics and politics" (Eagleton 2007, 111). In the act of asking the "basic questions—where were the women writers, what did they write, how did they come to write", these influential texts "produced a mass of new material, complicated our understanding of literary history, impressed on critics the significance of gender in the production of writing and revitalised interest in more private literary forms such as letters, diaries and journals" (Eagleton 2007, 108). In showing that "there was a whole other way - in fact lots of other ways - to tell our literary history" (Eagleton 2007, 111), the gynocritics ushered in a new era of literary history. The problematic limitations of gynocritical models notwithstanding, Gilbert and Gubar's conceptualisation of female authorship as a feminist inflected identity continues to have currency in popular culture. In Shelley Cobb's view,

No matter the academic debates since, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's argument that women authors of the nineteenth century (including Austen)

wrote in defiance of patriarchal injunctions that writing was not women's work and that by implication nineteenth-century women writers were at least proto-feminists, structures popular understandings and representations of those authors and their works. (2015, 123)

Like Cobb, I see a clear lineage between Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic*'s conceptualisation of nineteenth century female authorship as a protofeminist subjectivity and representations of the woman author in contemporary culture. I explore the implications of this lineage in greater depth in Chapter 1, arguing that the agentic single woman author character has become a staple of postfeminist media culture. As I recount below, when she is represented in contemporary fiction and film, the woman author recurrently problematises questions of female agency and female autonomy. What's more, this thesis finds the *single* woman author as a particularly acute representation of the agency of the woman author.

Of central importance to feminist theory's account of female authorship, is the woman author's struggle to occupy the, by default male, role of author. This question is notably taken up in the December 2017 special issue of the journal *Interférence Littéraires* entitled "Gendered authorial corpographies". This collection of essays demonstrates how gendered, classed, or raced embodiments of authorship complicate the normative positionality of the "author" along various axes of difference. As Aina Pèrez Fontdevila and Meri Torres Francès note in their introduction, there is an underlying

incompatibility between the normative representations of authorship and the normative representations of the female gender; the implicit identification of the author's body with the white, masculine body, regarded as *unmarked* or *neuter*; or the assumption that the *author* – unlike "the woman" – is defined by his *inner being*. (2017, 8, emphasis original)

The pseudonymous and anonymous publications of Jane Austen, Emily, Charlotte and Anne Brontë, Mary Ann Evans, and Louisa May Alcott's stories and novels certainly suggest that being both a woman and an author has historically been difficult (See Woolf 1929, Gilbert and Gubar 1990, Fergus 2010). In her

"Biographical notice of Ellis and Acton Bell", originally printed in 1850, Charlotte Brontë thus justifies her and her sisters' recourse to male pseudonyms as follows: "We did not like to declare ourselves women, because […] we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice" (2000, 743). Of course, the theoretical availability of the subjectivity of "author" is not the only factor constraining women's authorship. As Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) makes clear, material circumstances such as income and workspace also play a crucial role. Other historical impediments to female authorship have moreover included marital status. Not only might marriage be a potential impediment to the woman author by requiring her to see to domestic or childrearing obligations, but, in Austen's day, "A woman might also face legal obstacles to authorship if she were married. Married women had no legal existence. They could not own property or sign contracts" (Fergus 2010, 3). While it is tempting to assume that none of these issues persist in the twenty-first century, recent statistics nonetheless suggest that women still shoulder much of the responsibility for unpaid domestic labour. As the Office for National Statistics reveals, "On average men do 16 hours a week of unpaid work, which includes adult care and child care, laundry and cleaning, to the 26 hours of unpaid work done by women a week" ("Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work'", 2016). Both anecdotal and empirical evidence moreover point to the continued existence of significant pressures on female authors to disguise their gender. Examples include Joanne Rowling's well-documented decision to publish the Harry Potter series as "J.K. Rowling" as a ploy to attract male readers, and her subsequent use of the pseudonym "Robert Galbraith" for her Cormoran Strike detective novels.[7] Anecdotal accounts also suggest that writers with male-sounding names are more likely to receive interest from literary agents.[8] Elsewhere, in technology journalism, Catherine Adams tracks how online abuse known as "trolling", and in particular the events surrounding "gamergate", have led a number of female technology journalists to publish pseudonymously or anonymously. Some 89 years after the publication of *A Room of her Own*, it seems equally plausible to

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[7] See for example "What J.K. Rowling Using a Male Pseudonym Says About Sexism in Publishing" (Cueto 2014)
[8] See Catherine Nichols's personal account, "Homme de Plume: What I Learned Sending My Novel Out Under a Male Name" (2015).

"venture to guess that Anon, who write so many poems without signing them, was often a woman" (Woolf [1929] 2008, 63).

Running parallel to feminist literary critics' struggle to theorise the woman author was feminist art historians' search for the woman artist. Countering the insidious view that "'There are no great women artists because women are incapable of greatness'" (147), Linda Nochlin's influential essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971) contested the very concept of "great artist". Arguing that ideas of "genius" and "greatnesss" were gendered masculine, Nochlin saw the need to call into question "the ideal of the autonomous, self-determining artist as genius and the notion of the autonomy of art as free from all social and historical determinations" (Pollock 2013, xviii). Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* ([1981] 1991) furthermore highlighted the ways in which feminine art forms have long been culturally denigrated. For example, while "the arts of painting and sculpture enjoy an elevated status", others, in particular "arts that adorn people, homes or utensils are relegated to a lesser cultural sphere under such terms as 'applied', 'decorative', or 'lesser' arts" (Parker and Pollock 1991, 50). That "the sex of the artist matter[s]" is evident since,

> What in fact distinguishes art from craft in the hierarchy is not so much different methods, practices and objects but also where these things are made, often in the home, and for whom these things are made, often for the family. The fine arts are a public, professional activity. What women make, which is usually defined as "craft", could in fact be defined as "domestic art". […] It is out of these different conditions [of production] that the hierarchical division between art and crafts has been constructed. (Parker and Pollock 1991, 70)

Underlying this gendering is the phenomenon described by Andreas Huyssen in his essay "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other" (1986) whereby "mass culture is somehow associated with woman while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men" (196). Crucially, as high art is coded as masculine and forms of mass culture are coded as feminine, Huyssen argues, so the feminine becomes that which is persistently devalued (196). While this thesis focuses on the figure of the

woman *author*, rather than the woman *artist*, these interventions illuminate the ways in which the work of the woman author has likewise been, and indeed continues to be, culturally denigrated because of its perception as "feminised". That romances and chick lit novels are "popular" mass culture works usually authored and read by women has thus contributed to their low cultural capital.

Even as she was first theorised, the woman author was already a site of debate and ambivalence. In what Mary Eagleton terms "a curious contradiction in intellectual history", the theorising of the woman author was taking place just as the figure of the author more broadly was being challenged. That the publication of landmark feminist literary theory such as "The Laugh of the Medusa' (Cixous 1976), "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (Smith 1977), *This Sex Which is Not One* (Irigaray 1977), *A Literature of their Own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (Showalter 1977), and *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Gilbert and Gubar 1979) occurred alongside that of the first English translation of "The Death of the Author" (Barthes 1967) in *Image-Music-Text* (Barthes 1977) manifests this "twin impulse both to give birth to the woman author and to bury her" (Eagleton 2005, 2). As Eagleton recounts, "one group of academics was declaring the 'death' of the author as a figure of origin, meaning and power at precisely the same moment as another group, from varying feminist positions, was looking for the 'birth' of the author in terms of a reclamation of women's literary history and an exhortation to women to claim a voice" (2005, 3). As I argue throughout this thesis, the woman author's status as the locus of such "curious contradictions" extends into the contemporary moment. In 1990, the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* brought the term "woman" itself into question. By this point, the situation of the woman author became even more fraught, resulting in what Toril Moi terms "a kind of intellectual schizophrenia" whereby "one half of the brain continues to read women writers while the other continues to think that the author is dead, and that the very word 'woman' is theoretically dodgy" (2008, 264).[9] And yet, just as the "question of the woman writer disappear[ed] from

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[9] Moi's use of the term "schizophrenia" here is problematic. As *The Guardian* note in their style guide, "**schizophrenia, schizophrenic** should be used only in a medical context, never to mean in two minds, contradictory, or erratic, which is wrong, as well as offensive to people diagnosed with this illness" https://www.theguardian.com/guardian-observer-style-guide-s

the feminist theoretical agenda around 1990" (Moi 2008, 259), so the woman author became hypervisible in popular culture following the publication of Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* in 1996 and the arrival of *Sex and the City's* Carrie Bradshaw on HBO in 1998.

Recently, feminist scholars have returned the question of female authorship's relationship to feminism through the lens of the "feminist bestseller" (Whelehan 2005) and the "feminist blockbuster" (Taylor 2016). Whelehan's *Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (2005) traces a lineage between 1970s consciousness-novels and contemporary so-called "chick lit". Whelehan's central contention is that "both feminist bestsellers of the 1970s and the bestselling genre loosely known as 'chick lit' are in dialogue with feminism" (5). Analysing the reception of texts such as *Sex and the Single Girl* (Brown 1962), *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1963), *The Female Eunuch* (Greer 1970), *The Beauty Myth* (Wolf 1990), *Lean In* (Sandberg 2013), *Bad Feminist* (Gay 2014), *Yes Please* (Poehler 2014), and *Not That Kind of Girl* (Dunham 2014), Taylor similarly shows how these "blockbuster" feminist authors have "actively worked to shape our understanding of Western feminism" (2016, 2). Importantly, Taylor contends that the woman-authored "feminist blockbuster" has long been, and remains to this day, central to the popular dissemination of feminist ideas and rhetoric (2016, 18). In sum, both Whelehan and Taylor demonstrate a connection between female authorship and feminism. And yet, that is not to say that all female-authored works are necessarily "feminist". Negra's work on recessionary advice literature, for example, shows how feminism is mobilised as a signifier by celebrity authors "for whom it often functions as a credential of entrepreneurial self-branding" (2014, 275). Despite "claiming" of feminism then, texts such as Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) "espouse an ever-expanding program of self-discipline rather than structural reform" (2014, 284). Likewise, women readers' engagement with female-authored texts is often ambivalent and contradictory. Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1987) thus reveals the complexities of women's reading of romance novels. Popular romance "has neither intrinsically conservative nor radical implications but always immanently contains both sites of resistance and of valorization of the structures of female disempowerment" (Berlant 1987, 347). In much the same way, Trysh Travis' (2003)

study of women's reading of Rebecca Wells' novels is suggestive of ambivalent interpretative practices.

While this section has made the argument that the woman author has recurrently (and problematically) been claimed by feminist critics as a feminist-inflected subjectivity, the previous section suggested that the single woman is often seen as an intrinsically transgressive figure. As an intersectional identity combining both forms of disruption, the single woman author, this thesis argues, signifies as a particularly "unruly"—and yet ambiguous—female subject.

Women's Film Authorship

Just as feminist literature scholars challenged the masculine conceptualisation of literary authorship, feminist film critics have challenged masculinist constructions of film authorship. Echoing the rhetoric of Gilbert and Gubar, Johnston for example saw in women's film authorship the potential for a "counter cinema" inhering a disruption of "the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema" ([1973] 2008, 124; see also Martin 2003). In film criticism, few concepts loom as large as that of the "auteur", a school of thought pioneered in France in the 1940s and 1950s. Some have critiqued auteur theory for its reproduction of masculine bias, which in "only recognizing the work of male auteurs" works to deny "women recognition among the directorial greats" (Hollinger 2012, 5). Others, on the contrary, have appropriated the term "auteur" for feminist ends, as a means of drawing attention to the work of female directors such as Dorothy Azner, Agnes Varda, Kathryn Bigelow, Sofia Coppola, or Jane Campion. According to Karen Hollinger, such approaches have "been useful in promoting the study of contemporary women directors and advocating their elevation to the status of auteurs by showing how their films contain distinctly artistic qualities" (2012, 5). In the context of filmmaking as collaborative practice, auteur theory's focus on the film director as sole and stable originator of meaning is, however, problematic. Not only does such an approach risk obscuring the contributions of screenwriters, actors, producers, cinematographers, editors, actors as well as set and costume designers, but it also neglects social and historical production and reception contexts, generic structures and concerns, and the role of the spectators as negotiator of meaning. Taking into account the collaborative nature

of filmmaking as process crucially makes room for the (re)discovery of women's contributions to all aspects of film history, including those areas traditionally dominated by women—such as makeup, wardrobe, and costuming—which, like many other forms of female authorship before them, have conventionally been relegated to the level of "craft" rather than "art."

Common to all these approaches, however, is the continuation of the second wave literary project of retrieving, and making visible, women's authorship. Lizzie Francke's *Script Girls* (1994) is a key text enacting this retrieval within the context of Hollywood screenwriting. Importantly, Francke demonstrates that "For those determined young women who wanted to play a role behind the camera, screenwriting has been one profession open to them throughout the history of Hollywood" (Francke 1994, 1). Nonetheless as screenwriter Eleanor Perry suggests, women face unique obstacles in the filmmaking process that (ostensibly) do not exist in the writing of novels: "women can be prolific in the field of literature because it is a monastic effort, but the collaborative nature of filmmaking allows for the exclusion of women as undesirable members of the team, or relegation to assignments dealing only with female subjects" (cited in Francke 1994, 89). Alongside qualitative studies such as *Script Girls*, recent empirical projects suggest a growing appetite for building a quantitative evidence base with which to substantiate claims of gender inequality and sexism in the film industry. For the last 20 years, the Center for the Study of Women in Film and Television at San Diego State University has produced annual reports on the number of women employed as directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors on the top 250 grossing US films. Headline statistics from the most recent report reveal that "In 2017, women comprised 18% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 250 domestic grossing films" (Lauzen 2018, "Celluloid Ceiling", 1). Women made up only 11% of directors. In comparison, there are slightly more women employed in the making of independent narrative features with women making up 26% of those working as directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers (Lauzen 2017, 7). For multiply burdened groups such as women of colour or trans women, the statistics are even poorer, if they are even available.

Lauzen's study furthermore demonstrates that gender inequalities correlate with film genre. In narrative film, "the largest percentage of women, relative to men," worked in "comedies (23%), dramas (22%), sci-fi features (20%), animated features (19%), horror features (18%), and action features (13%)" (Lauzen 2018, "Celluloid Ceiling", 5). Tellingly, this order of proportion is largely consistent with that of the proportion of female protagonists by genre, with "Female protagonists most likely to appear in comedies (30%) and dramas (30%), followed by action films (17%), horror films (13%), animated features (4%), and science fiction films (4%)" (Lauzen 2018, "Portrayals", 2-3). These two studies therefore suggest a relationship exists between female authorship and female representation. Indeed, "In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 45% of protagonists. In films with exclusively male directors and/or writers, females accounted for 20% of protagonists" (Lauzen 2018, "Portrayals", 5). Similarly, a 2016 study of 200 top-grossing films suggests that "When writing teams are entirely male, about 50% of films fail the Bechdel test. Add a woman to the mix and only a third of films fail. The seven films written entirely by women all pass the Bechdel test" (Friedman, Daniels, Blinderman 2016). These correlations of female authorship with female representation echo Francke's assertion in *Script Girls* that "In the boys' club milieu [of filmmaking], the question of opportunities for women on screen runs tangentially to that of opportunities for the woman screenwriter" (1994, 99) and that, likewise, "To be a woman writer, it was implied, was to have a responsibility regarding the depiction of women in films" (1994, 86).

Contributing to this growing body of empirical evidence, the Calling the Shots project counts the number of women employed in these same roles in the British film industry. Out of 203 UK films in production in 2015, "women constituted just 20% of all directors, writers, producers, exec-producers, cinematographers and editors", with women making up 13% of directors (Cobb, Williams, Wreyford 2016). Crucially, the Calling the Shots project has adopted an intersectional methodology, highlighting the lack of ethnic diversity among those employed in the UK film industry so that "only 7% were of Black, Asian, or Ethnic Minority identity, making BAME women less than 1.5% of all personnel working in these 6 key roles last year" (Cobb, Williams, Wreyford 2016). As shown in Figure 3, the proportion of women working in the key "authorial" roles of directors, writers, producers, exec-producers,

cinematographers and editors is comparable in the UK and US film industries. Despite feminism's impressive gains to date, these studies suggest that the glass ceiling of women's filmic authorship remains to be shattered.

Figure 3: Proportion of women working in 6 key roles in the US and UK film industries

Role	Percentage of women in top 250 grossing US films of 2017 (Lauzen 2018)	Percentage of women in 203 UK films in production in 2015 (Cobb, Williams, Wreyford 2016).
Directors	11%	13%
Screenwriters	11%	20%
Editors	16%	17%
Cinematographers	4%	7%
Producers	25%	27%
Executive producers	19%	18%
Overall percentage	**18%**	**20%**

Although this thesis is primarily concerned with analysing the ways in which single woman authors are represented onscreen, inspired by these landmark empirical projects, my filmography works to retrieve women's *off*screen contribution to this thesis' film sample. My filmography therefore highlights traces of female authorship in the "authorial" roles of director, screenwriter, and, where relevant, as author of adapted texts (See Appendix). Notable woman screenwriters in my corpus include Jane Campion (*In the Cut* [2003]), Diablo Cody (*Young Adult* [2011]*, Ricki and the Flash* [2015]), Sofia Coppola (*The Virgin Suicides* [1999]), Lena Dunham (*Tiny Furniture* [2010]), Delia Ephron (*You've Got Mail* [1998], *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* [2005]), Nora Ephron (*You've Got Mail, Julie and Julia* [2009]), Callie Khouri (*Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* [2002]), Aline Brosh McKenna (*The Devil Wears Prada* [2006]), Nancy Meyers (*I Love Trouble* [1994]*, Something's Gotta Give* [2003]), Lynne Ramsay (*Morvern Callar* [2002]), Amy Schumer (*Trainwreck* [2015]), and Robin Swicord (*Little Women* [1994]*, The Jane Austen Book Club* [2007]). In addition, a few films in this thesis are adapted from eighteenth and nineteenth century works by woman authors: Louisa May Alcott (*Little Women* [1868]) and Jane Austen (*Mansfield Park* [1814]). Numerous films in this thesis are

moreover adapted from works by contemporary women authors: Annie Barrows and Mary Ann Shaffer (*The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* [2008]), Ann Brashares (*The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* [2001]), Candace Bushnell (*Sex and the City* [1996]), A.S. Byatt (*Possession* [1990]), Lissa Evans (*Their Finest Hour and a Half* [2009]), Helen Fielding (*Bridget Jones's Diary* [1996]), Karen Joy Fowler (*The Jane Austen Book Club* [2004]), Shannon Hale (*Austenland* [2007]), Kody Keplinger (*The Duff* [2011]), Sue Monk Kidd (*The Secret Life of Bees* [2001]), Sophie Kinsella (*The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* [2000]), Deborah Moggach (*These Foolish Things* [2004]), Susanna Moore (*In the Cut* [1995]*),* Alice Munro *(Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* [2001]), Whitney Otto (*How to Make an American Quilt* [1991]), Kathryn Stockett (*The Help* [2009]), Lauren Weisberger (*The Devil Wears Prada* [2003]), and Rebecca Wells *(Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* [1996]). Other texts are adaptations of memoirs by Lynn Barber (*An Education* [2009]), Kim Barker (*The Taliban Shuffle: Strange Days In Afghanistan And Pakistan* [2011]), Vera Brittain (*Testament of Youth* [1933]), Susannah Cahalan (*Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness* [2012]), Beverly Donofrio (*Riding in Cars with Boys* [1990]), Elizabeth Gilbert (*Eat, Pray, Love* [2006]), Susanna Kaysen (*Girl, Interrupted* [1993]), Frances Mayes (*Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy* [1996]), Cheryl Strayed (*Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* [2012]), and Elizabeth Wurtzel (*Prozac Nation* [1994]). Two films are adaptations of comic strips by female authors Posy Simmonds (*Tamara Drewe* [2005-2007]) and Phoebe Gloekner (*Diary of a Teenage Girl: An Account in Words and Pictures* [2002]). As Francke's *Script Girls* notes, and the source material for many of the texts in my corpus similarly indicate, "Hollywood has ravenously consumed women's ideas" (1994, 1).

The Woman Author in Contemporary Culture

Whether or not the writing process is, by definition, "uncinematic" is a recurring preoccupation of scholarship on the representation of the author on film (Arthurs 2005, Buchanan 2013, Haiduc 2013). In *Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film* (2000), Andrew Klevan cites *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1950) as a notable example of a film organised "around a range of life experiences unavailable to the melodramatic mode" (1). In particular, Klevan

suggests that in repeatedly returning to the everyday act of diary-writing the film avoids melodramatic expression. Klevan's argument poses, in turn, important questions relating to whether authorial work such as diary-writing is conventionally deemed "dramatic". Paul Arthur for example notes that "On the surface, it is hard to imagine an activity less given to cinematic representation than a writer's struggle to transform observations or ideas into a finished manuscript. Writing is mostly solitary, static labour performed in dull locations over excruciating stretches of time" (2005, 331). Echoing this sentiment, Judith Buchanan opens her introduction to the edited collection *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship* (2013), by stating that "A writer might seem unpromising subject matter for a film" (3); in the same collection, Sonia Haiduc likewise contends that "the act of writing itself can be dishearteningly unexciting to watch" (51, see also Haiduc 2013, 74). Central to the "problem" of depicting authorial labour in film is the writer's need for "reflection, observation, composition and self-abstracting *literariness*" which "does not self-evidently offer the sort of cinematic dynamism and narrative pulls usually considered the staple fare of the movies", especially when the writer's imagination is precisely that which is "unseen and inaccessible" (Buchanan 2013, 3, emphasis original).

Regardless of their potentially "uncinematic" nature, author characters have become a staple of Anglo-American film, as suggested by the extent of this thesis's own film sample comprising over 100 films. Returning again and again to the figure of the author and to the scene of authorial production, certain elements of the "writing process have become cinematically iconized and even iconically conventionalized" (Buchanan 2013, 4). Geoffrey Wall, for example, considers the use of "curious signs of creativity": the "wonderfully improbable green leather jacket" testifying to the poet's genius in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), Virginia Woolf's smoking of "roll-ups with passionate intensity" in *The Hours* (2002), or indeed *Barton Fink*'s (1991) "gleaming Underwood portable typewriter" (2013, 125). These signifiers, Wall argues, "tell us, with persuasive immediacy, 'This is how writers do what they do. This is the intimate truth of all the asocial labour of literary composition'" (2013, 126). To Wall's list, I would add the following iconic signifiers of creative authorship: the writing desk, portable or otherwise (see Murray-Pepper 2013); objects associated with the materiality of writing, in particular quills, ink, parchment; the finished manuscript or published piece; as well as the ways in which writers

themselves are "marked" by their creativity through their ink-stained fingers in texts like *Little Women* (1994)*, Shakespeare in Love, Mansfield Park* (1999)*,* and *Becoming Jane* (2007). In texts with contemporary settings, the quill and typewriter are replaced by the laptop—usually a MacBook—as in *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), *Never Been Kissed* (1999), *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), *Something's Gotta Give* (2003), *Blood Diamond* (2006), *Albatross* (2011)*, Girls* (2012-2017), or *The Incredible Jessica James* (2017). The accompanying cup of coffee is also a key prop serving to link the modern woman author to spaces such as coffee shops in which immaterial labour such as authorship is recurrently conducted.[10]

Reframing the issue of the (un)representability of creative authorship, this thesis takes up the question of the recurrent elision of certain aspects of authorial labour such as planning, research, editing, collaboration, or proofreading. An important context to acknowledge here, is the tedium of representing any kind of work on screen, and the common recourse to montage, dissolves, or voiceovers as a means of representing the passage of time and the progress achieved. While films may indeed choose gloss over certain "tedious" aspects of the writing process, their absence in the diegesis—deliberate or not—contributes to the creation of a particular kind of fantasy of authorial labour. Indeed, as I show throughout this thesis, certain configurations of the scene of authorship—such as the single woman author effortlessly writing through the night—have become iconic. Just as Klevan's charting of "patterns of visual content through which the everyday is disclosed", shows how "apparently unnecessary or repetitive instances, are, in fact, meaningfully patterned, developed and adjusted" (2000, 3), so this thesis' tracking of the single woman author's scene of authorship reveals how the repetition of this scene is "meaningfully patterned, developed and adjusted". The conspicuous absence of potentially "tedious" aspects of authorship is for example underpinned by assumptions and value judgements naturalised through their screened repetition. As I go on to argue in

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[10] Most notably, J.K. Rowling wrote *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) in Edinburgh cafés. Likewise, the freelance pledge site "Ko-Fi" enables individuals to virtually buy coffees for "creators" (See: https://ko-fi.com/home/about2). As I go on to explore below, the single woman author's linkage to spaces of leisure is key to her being figured as an appropriately feminised entrepreneurial subject.

Chapter 2, one such assumption is that of the effortlessness of the single woman author's labour, a gendered convention contributing to the re-signification of female authorial labour as "pleasure" rather than "work". The anxieties caused by women's visibility in the workplace have often resulted in women's work being figured as non-work. Running parallel to this refiguration of women's work is the disparaging of what has historically been deemed "women's work": in particular domestic or emotional labour. Feminised work is thus made invisible, or if visible deemed less valuable than men's contributions in the public sphere. More specifically, in a postfeminist context, Tasker and Negra contend that the financial realities governing women's presence in the workplace are often elided (2007, 2). Negra furthermore suggests that "the ambivalence with which postfeminist culture treats women in the workforce […] dissipates when such work is seen to be expressive of women's essential femininity" (2009, 87). This observation is one to which this thesis repeatedly returns: as I show in the subsequent chapters, authorship is deemed a particularly appropriate, feminine profession for the (single) woman subject.

I now turn to criticism specifically concerned with the figure of the *woman* author as she is represented across contemporary culture. Though there are some notable differences in the portrayal of the woman author in literature, film, and television, owing to medium specificity or generic convention, as well as certain distinctions to be drawn between the depiction of the "real-world" woman author compared to her fictional counterpart, in grouping criticism together in this way I emphasise the cross-media continuities in the figuring of the woman author. Firstly, I show how scholarship on literary biographies and biopics has been instrumental in uncovering the role of gender in representations of the "real world" woman author. Next, I take a broader view of the woman author in contemporary culture to demonstrate how she is recurrently read as a signifier of female agency.

Discussing literary biographies such as *The Blue Hour* (Pizzichini 2009) and novelisations of literary lives such as *Sylvia and Ted: A Novel* (Tennant 2001), *Wintering: A Novel of Sylvia Plath* (Moses 2003), *The White Garden: A Novel of Virginia Woolf* (Barron 2009), and *Vanessa and Virginia* (Sellers 2009), Emma Short (2012) laments the often tragic accounts of women writers' lives. She argues that these texts' tendencies to depict women authors as "passive victims reveals an

implicit fear of female authorship and creativity within contemporary culture" (2012, 41-42). Short sees this trend as having "gathered momentum in recent years, most notably through the repeated revisionings of the lives of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath" (2012, 42). Short's account tallies with Dennis Bingham's own interpretation of the female biopic in *Whose Lives are they Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (2010). Bingham views the majority of biopics of women as examples of "victimology-fetish" which repeat scenarios of female victimisation, suffering, and madness (2010, 217). Bronwyn Polaschek's *Postfeminist Biopic* (2013), however, disputes this, arguing instead for the existence of a "postfeminist biopic" subgenre.[11] These disagreements suggest that whether or not the female author is positioned as a "victim" within the diegesis is ultimately ambiguous and ripe for potentially contradictory interpretations. Such polysemy is of interest to this thesis: indeed these texts' ambiguities betray important anxieties relating to the female subject's ability to occupy or embody the normatively male subjectivity of "author".

As critics have noted, in biopics, the gendering of the author often operates at the level of the film's title. For example, while *Shakespeare in Love* tracks the transformation of "Will" into "Shakespeare", *Becoming Jane* removes its source material's "Austen" so that the biography *Becoming Jane Austen* (Spence 2003) is adapted into the film *Becoming Jane*. This is in line with the treatment of other prominent female authors such as Enid Blyton, Iris Murdoch, and Sylvia Plath and their respective biopics *Enid* (2009), *Iris* (2001), and *Sylvia* (2003), and in stark contrast with male author biopics such as *Capote* (2005), *Hitchcock* (2012) and *Trumbo* (2015). Buchanan reads this "chummy, even presumptuous, intimacy of dropping the last name" as betraying both a "desire to be on familiar terms with the life" and a self-conscious rejection of "a 'lit crit' approach with its well-established convention for discussing authors by last name" (2013, 15-16). As Sonia Haiduc observes, this penchant for familiarity is rooted in a history of separate spheres in which "female experience [is] more firmly tied to the private and intimate" (2013,

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[11] It is worth remarking here that a number of Bingham and Polaschek's case studies are excluded from this thesis due to their depictions of already married subjects, e.g. *The Hours* (2002), or due to the heroine's status as a visual artist e.g. *Frida* (2002).

53). Such an understanding connects, in turn, to "the intimate, personal relationship (female?) readers develop with their [woman authors'] work, and, indirectly, with their persona" (Haiduc 2013, 53). Although texts like *Becoming Jane* "purport to celebrate female literary achievement in the public sphere", Haiduc suggests that "their titles, on the other hand, temper that engagement" (2013, 53). In the end, she concludes, the "privatisation" of female authorship problematically works "to undermine the cultural authority" of the woman author so that she "sometimes seems to be defined more by her (ordinary) first name than by her (extraordinary) place in literary history" (Haiduc 2013, 53). Building on Haiduc's insightful analysis, this thesis extends our understanding of the pernicious gendering of the woman author. As I argue in Chapter 3, the recurrent emphasis on intimacy with the (single) woman author is entangled with feminised middlebrow approaches to literature.[12] These approaches' fostering of intimate readerly communities furthermore lend themselves to analysis through the lens of what Lauren Berlant terms "intimate publics" (2011). Such an approach reveals how the labour of authoriality is repeatedly envisaged as a "relational gateway" for the (single) woman subject. This thesis's intersectional slant furthermore uncovers another facet of this tendency toward "familiarity" with the female author. In the context of women conventionally changing their names upon marriage, unless she remains unmarried throughout her life, the woman author's first name is the only fixed point of her named identity. As this thesis demonstrates, then, marital status is a significant, but hitherto unacknowledged force at work in the figuring of the woman author in contemporary film.

That the woman author—"real-world" or fictional—has been recognised as an important site for the representation of female agency and autonomy is of crucial importance to this thesis. Discussing the phenomenon of "chick lit", both Stephanie Harzewski (2011) and Suzanne Ferriss (2014) for example note the frequency with which the female author recurs as a protagonist in popular novels such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* or *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic*. However, both stop short of analysing the significance of this trend beyond an observation that professional contexts such as publishing reflect "the occupational history (or professional

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[12] See particularly Beth Driscoll's taxonomy of the literary middlebrow (2014).

aspirations) of their authors" (Ferriss 2014, 207). Significantly, both critics also gloss over the heroines' single status. Whelehan, on the other hand, traces a lineage between consciousness-raising novels such as *Fear of Flying* (Jong 1973) and chick lit novels such as *Bridget Jones.* Noting that the heroines of her case study texts are "quite often frustrated artists, writers, of would-be intellectuals", she goes on to make the point that such "creative energies become symbolic of the power of self-determination" (Whelehan 2005, 8). Echoing this observation, Eagleton's *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction* (2005) sees representations of the woman author as problematising questions of authority:

> From both theoretical and political viewpoints, the woman author is
> frequently seen as the key figure for exploring problems of authorial power.
> A recurrent theme in the texts we shall be considering is how the loss of a
> woman's authority over her work, in terms of content, form and legal
> ownership, results not in a dispersal of power and a liberating deposing of
> "The Author" but in a redistribution of power which confirms existing
> hierarchies of gender, class and race. Conversely, an equally favoured theme
> is the resistance of the woman author and the subversive undermining of
> male authorial power. (5)

As Eagleton demonstrates, in contemporary fiction, "Every woman writer, artist or narrator […] has some issue with authorising and authority" (2); so much so, that "Finding, owning and controlling the texts are, it seems, intrinsic to establishing one's position as 'Author'" (8). Eagleton's central preoccupation with questions of authority likewise reverberates throughout this thesis: as I go on to discuss in Chapter 4, the single woman author's access to authority is often already compromised by her gender, with films frequently staging the loss of authority as a key narrative device.

Echoing the above, Haiduc (2013), Catherine Han (2015) and Shelley Cobb (2015) see the woman author on film as problematising questions of female authority, autonomy and agency, but they pay considerable attention to the texts' postfeminist contexts. In particular, these critics are interested in the complex ways in which postfeminist media culture simultaneously celebrates and constrains acts of female

agency. Han's study of the representation of feminine creative genius in postfeminist and middlebrow adaptation thus identifies female creativity as "a problematic signifier of women's agency and empowerment within a postfeminist context" (2015, 185).[13] Highlighting the contradictions at work in texts such as *Mansfield Park, Miss Potter* (2006), *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008), and *Becoming Jane*, Haiduc similarly argues that "the construction of the woman writer on the screen feeds on often contradictory cultural readings of female autonomy, as her quest for self-definition is predominantly set against the background of romance" (2013, 52). Haiduc's reading here has echoes of Antje Ascheid's work on the "woman's heritage film", which recurrently depicts "fantasies of romantic emancipation" which both "activate[s] and seemingly reconcile[s] often contradictory narrative trajectories" (2006). In *Adaptation, Authorship, and Contemporary Women Filmmakers* (2015) Cobb moreover makes the point that "The difficulty of authorizing oneself for women is made more difficult in a postfeminist culture that often constructs successful subjectivity for women as either neotraditional femininity or empowered sexualization" (15). Cobb shows how the narratives of danger running through texts such as *Weight of Water* (2000), *Morven Callar* (2002), and *In the Cut* (2003) express anxieties about the potential threat which female authorship poses to the "continued dominance of the ideal figure of the masculine author" (2015, 77). Likewise, the violence of these texts suggests the potential backlash awaiting those women who risk challenging masculine dominance. With reference to *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007) and *Austenland* (2013), Cobb goes on to identify Jane Austen as an especially important manifestation of the female author playing a dual role as both "an outlet for contemporary women's desire for agency and as a symbol of women's sublimated

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[13] There are also important synergies between middlebrow culture and postfeminism. As Han observes, contemporary middlebrow texts exemplify the contradictions and ambivalences constitutive of postfeminism. For example, these texts enjoy an "established association with feminine producers and consumers" whilst also functioning as a "forum for the exploration of feminist issues" (Han 2015, 8). Han moreover detects a typically postfeminist narrative tension between "the status of the individual and the collective" (2015, 1), as well as between acts of remembering/ disremembering (2015, 169; with reference to Munford and Waters 2012, 29). Just as this thesis argues that female authorship and depictions thereof are key sites of (post)feminist struggle, so Han identifies middlebrow culture's interest in female creativity (and the Brontë sisters in particular) as a locus for its engagement with feminism.

rage against postfeminist strictures" (2015, 18). Importantly, Cobb also sees the diegetic figure of the woman author as helping to "authorise" the off-screen woman filmmaker by "making a claim for the cultural legitimacy of female film authorship" (2015, 1); a claim which significantly informs this thesis' understanding of female authorship behind the camera in screenwriting and directing roles.

By contrast, Pamela Thoma's essay "What Julia Knew: Domestic Labor in the Recession-Era Chick Flick" (2014), emphasises the ways in which female authorship is presented as an entrepreneurial form of labour in *Julie and Julia* (2009) and *Eat Pray Love* (2010). Emphasising the gendering of authoriality, Thoma distinguishes between "the aestheticised, literary forms associated with the masculinised figure of the writer as artist" and the "devocationalised commercial forms of writing that are sanctioned for women" (2014, 125). Crucially, while the male writer is "ensconced in literary culture" and thus "understood to operate outside of, and be unconcerned with, commercial culture, or positioned as someone who suffers nobly for the rewards of participating in high culture", the woman author "participates willingly in an expanding global media industry effectively modelling an abiding interest in the production and consumption of the texts in which her work appears" (2014, 125). In fact, Thoma shows how female authorship "is presented as an appropriate and potentially lucrative alternative to the all-consuming professions that will leave women emotionally disconnected from others" (2014, 128). Thoma furthermore detects a linkage between women's writing and forms and modes of agency favoured by neoliberalism:

> Writing is represented as an appropriate form of entrepreneurial labor because it simultaneously monitors, reflects on, and expresses the heroines' unambiguous and authentic femininity. As a recurrent trope of female endeavour, writing facilitates the overt display of self-work via the extensive use of a first-person mode. Moreover, the expressive occupations of these protagonists provide a pretext for both autobiographical statements and a broadly confessional mode. Such a mode tends to operate via a set of formulas: the shaming of the flawed female subject, coupled with surveillance by audiences; her subsequent commitment to a makeover (with aid provided by

wise friends or lifestyle experts); and the presentation of a significantly changed heroine. (Thoma 2014, 126)

Worth quoting at length, this passage demonstrates the important synergies between women's authorship and neoliberalism in a recessionary context in which neoliberalism has become hegemonic (Gill 2017, 606). I return to Thoma's argument throughout this thesis. In Chapter 2, I notably consider in detail the ways in which biographical authorship has become an instrument of self-work for the postfeminist woman subject, while Chapter 3 explores the ways in which female authorship's recurrent configuration as a "relational gateway" works to suggest it is an appropriately feminised occupation. Building on Thoma's insights, this thesis tracks the ways in which authorship emerges as an appropriately gendered form of labour for the single woman subject.

In particular, this thesis seeks to establish the single woman author as a key, but as yet untheorised figure of postfeminist media culture. As Thoma makes the point,

> The protagonist as striving professional writer of some description is actually ubiquitous in postfeminist culture; the trope is particularly well established in chick lit, which features heroines employed in media outlets such as women's magazines, newspapers, TV stations, or bookstores. Writerly occupations with commercial potential are nearly as common in chick flicks, not only adaptations of chick lit […] but also such films as *You've Got Mail* (1998), *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days*, *The Ugly Truth* (2009), and *The Proposal* (2009). Finally, television is definitely in on the act with NBC's Liz Lemon in *30 Rock* (2006–13) and HBO's series *Girls* (2012–2017). (2014, 125)

Taking up Thoma's observation as a key starting point, this thesis investigates why the woman author protagonist is so "ubiquitous" in postfeminist media culture, asking: How do we explain the postfeminist cachet of this occupation? What does female authorship signify under postfeminism? And what is its relationship to singleness? As outlined above, recent scholarship has paid considerable attention to the figure of both the woman author, and the single woman, across contemporary cultural forms. However, no work has, as yet, considered the productive intersection

of female singleness with female authorship. In recognising the subjectivities "woman author" and "single woman" as mutually constitutive in a postfeminist context, this thesis illuminates the ways in which authorship is repeatedly figured as an ideal occupation for the postfeminist single woman subject, and vice versa. In particular, this thesis demonstrates how ideas of agency and unruliness are fundamentally entangled with the figure of the single woman author so that she emerges as the ideal prism through which to study postfeminism itself.

Postfeminism

Despite having become "one of the most important […] terms in the lexicon of feminist cultural analysis" (Gill 2007, 148), the term "postfeminism" has a complicated and hotly contested history. Since the 1980s, the term has been variously theorised as "an historical shift within", a "backlash against", an "epistemological shift in" feminism (Gill 2007, 148). My own understanding of postfeminism is particularly indebted to the work of Angela McRobbie (2004, 2009) and Rosalind Gill (2007, 2008, 2016, 2017), who emphasise postfeminism as an object of cultural analysis, and situate themselves as critical analysts of postfeminism. Like these theorists, I am interested in making visible, and making sense of "the contradictions or entanglements in postfeminist discourses" (Gill 2017, 607), which approaches such as "backlash" tend to ignore. For example, the "post" of postfeminism not only signifies a putative "after moment" after which inequalities are imagined to be over, but also enacts what McRobbie terms a "double entanglement." Using *Bridget Jones's Diary* as a key example, McRobbie illustrates how this sophisticated dynamic "positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force" (2004, 255). As McRobbie observes, the act of taking feminism into account is strategic, since it "permits all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal" (2004, 256). The double entanglement of invocation/repudiation thus works to imply that, having succeeded at securing women's rights, feminism can now safely be cast aside; it is the "very success of feminism that produces its irrelevance for contemporary culture" (Tasker

and Negra 2007, 8). Gill importantly theorises postfeminism as a "distinctive sensibility made up of a number of interrelated themes" including:

> the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of the makeover paradigm; a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference, a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. (2007, 147)

Other "core features of postfeminism" include:

> the emphasis upon individualism, choice and agency; the disappearance – or at least muting – of vocabularies for talking about both structural inequalities and cultural influence (Kelan, 2009); the 'deterritorialisation' of patriarchy and its 'reterritorialisation' (McRobbie, 2009) in women's bodies and the beauty industrial complex (Elias et al., 2017); the intensified surveillance of women (Winch, 2013); calls to work on, monitor and discipline the self (Ouellette, 2016); and the central significance of a 'makeover paradigm' (Heller, 2007; Weber, 2009) that extends beyond the surface of the body to an incitement to 'makeover' one's interior life, developing a new, 'upgraded' postfeminist subjectivity. (Gill 2017, 607)

In its broadest sense, then, postfeminism can be defined as a "a set of ideologies, strategies, and practices that marshal liberal feminist discourses such as freedom, choice, and independence, and incorporate them into a wide array of media, merchandising, and consumer participation" (Banet-Weiser 2018, 153). Postfeminism's obsession with vocabularies of "choice" and agency speaks to its crucial connections with neoliberalism, which I turn to in the next section of this literature review.

Sarah Projansky (2007) importantly warns of the shortcomings of engaging in "disruption-containment" criticism when discussing postfeminist media texts. Under this model, something is "understood to illustrate the ways in which girls can be

disruptive in popular culture […] while simultaneously being contained by popular culture" (2007, 66-67). She cites Michelle Byers' account of *My So-Called Life* (1994-1995) as a typical example: "the intersecting identity categories of difference are mobilised by this text, only to be shut down again and again. Although initially embraced, the Other, is in the end, always pathologised" (1998, 727). While recognising that such arguments are "all logical and necessary developments in our thinking" emerging "in the process of coming to terms with postfeminism in popular culture", Projansky argues that "the problem with these approaches is that they pretty much define all postfeminist media representations. In other words, postfeminism is by definition contradictory, simultaneously feminist and antifeminist, liberating and repressive, productive and obstructive of progressive social change" (2007, 68). As a means out of this critical impasse, Projansky suggests scholars of postfeminism "avoid claiming either disruption *or* containment" and emphasise, instead the "*both/and* nature of postfeminist representations" (2007, 68, emphasis added). Following Projansky's urging, this thesis wrestles with the "both/and" structures of postfeminist representations and considers the ambiguities and incoherences they inhere. This thesis furthermore draws on, and adds to the wealth of recent edited collections and monographs specifically concerned with the representation of women within postfeminist media culture, such as *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Tasker and Negra 2007), *Gender and the Media* (Gill 2007), *What a Girl Wants?: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (Negra 2009), *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (McRobbie 2009), *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers: Redefining Feminism on Screen* (Karlyn 2011), *Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture* (Waters 2011), *Neo-Feminist Cinema: Girly Films, Chick Flicks and Consumer Culture* (Radner 2011), *Single Women in Popular Culture: The Limits of Postfeminism* (Taylor 2012), *Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhood* (Winch 2013), and *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique* (Waters and Munford 2014).

The term "postfeminism" has recently once again come under scrutiny, with certain critics arguing that it "may be 'redundant' or 'falling short' for understanding this putatively 'new' moment" (Gill 2016, 620). This dissatisfaction is felt in Charlotte Brunsdon's description of the term as "broad and baggy", and in her suggestion of

the possibility that "its moment/utility is now waning" (2013, 378). Suzanne Leonard, meanwhile, observes that "what was once a winking or knowing postfeminist posture—evident particularly in romantic comedies, chick lit, and female-centered television drama—has hardened in recent years into a more brittle and even cynical vision" and that "twenty-first century female media is decidedly less misty-eyed in its estimation of the behaviors and postures that women must adopt" (2018, 19). The global economic downturn of 2008 has arguably been central to this critical soul-searching. Charting the gendered effects of the economic crisis, Negra and Tasker contend that postfeminism "has not disappeared but reads differently now that the economic bubble has burst" (2014, 6-7). For example, postfeminism's eliding of economic concerns in "setting aside the fact that the majority of women approach paid labor as a necessity rather than a 'choice'" no longer feels tenable in a recessionary context (Tasker and Negra 2007, 2). Along similar lines, Stéphanie Genz argues that

> the larger cultural climate and ethos of neoliberal postfeminism needs to be
> recalibrated and reassessed in the aftermath of the boom-and-bust economic
> model. Certainly, if late twentieth and early twenty-first-century
> postfeminism was marked by optimism, entitlement and the opportunity of
> prosperity, such articulations have become more doubtful and less
> celebratory in a post-2008 recessionary environment where the neoliberal
> mantra of choice and self-determination is still present but becomes inflected
> with the experiences of precarity, risk, and the insistence on self-
> responsibilisation. (2017, 18)

In addition, the renewed visibility of feminism in popular culture and the associated speculation regarding the potential emergence of a "fourth wave" (Munro 2013, Cochrane 2013, Rivers 2017, Chamberlain 2017), have given critics pause. As the title of the recent collection *Emergent Feminisms: Complicating a Postfeminist Media Culture* (Keller and Ryan 2018) suggests, such "feminist emergence" complicates the postfeminist media landscape. What, then, do we make of a current historical moment characterised by "feminism's renewed mattering to popular culture" (Keller and Ryan 2018, 1)? As Gill asks, "What place does the notion of postfeminism have at a moment in which feminism has seemingly become hip? Is

postfeminism irrelevant in these new times? Are we now *post-postfeminism*?" (2016, 611, emphasis original).

These crucial questions have especially coalesced around the HBO series *Girls* (2012-2017). Just as *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), *Sex and the City*, and *Bridget Jones's Diary* proved crucial to the critical articulation of postfeminism in the late 1990s and early 2000s,[14] so *Girls* has been a prism through which to apprehend ostensible shifts within postfeminist media culture, and, in turn, the continued relevance of the term in the 2010s. Sean Fuller and Catherine Driscoll thus argue that "if the discourse of postfeminism has always engaged with the impact of feminism on public and private life, popular culture today also records decades of postfeminist discourse and the television identified with it" (2015, 255). As a result, while critics "have retrospectively discussed popular television of the 1980s and early 1990s as 'postfeminist,'" *Girls*, on the other hand, "belongs to a very different moment in the histories of both postfeminism and television" (Fuller and Driscoll 2015, 255). In much the same way, Meredith Nash and Ruby Grant argue that "*Girls* allows for a re-articulation and re-mobilisation of post-feminism for a millennial generation" (2015, 2). Nash and Grant thus contend that *Girls* "embodies a distinctive post-feminist sensibility" (2015, 12). Recognising the "continued relevance of post-feminism" as a concept, Nash and Grant propose the term "post?feminism" to describe "a revised post-feminist sensibility for a millennial generation" (2015, 12-13).

Notwithstanding these insightful interventions, this thesis argues for the continued relevance of the term "postfeminism" in cultural analysis. As Tisha Dejmanee notes, "Declaring a theoretical fatigue with postfeminism does not erase its dominant presence in popular culture, and indeed a generation or more of women have now grown up not knowing anything but postfeminism" (2016,131). Arguing that postfeminism has undergone a "turn to interiority", Dejmanee suggests that such a turn "does not so much dismantle postfeminism as exemplify its resilience,

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[14] I'm thinking here of Kim 2001, Dow 2002, Dubrofsky 2002, Moseley and Read 2002, Ouelette 2002, Arthurs 2003, McRobbie 2004, Negra 2004, Busch 2009, Genz 2010.

adaptability and generativity within a variety of different social conditions and across a range of different media platforms" (2016, 131). Demonstrating precisely this "resilience, adaptability and generativity", Sarah Banet-Weiser unpacks the key synergies between contemporary "popular feminism" and postfeminism:

> While postfeminism and popular feminism are oppositional on the surface, they are actually mutually sustaining and focus on white, middle-class Western women. The feminist visions that come into dominant view in the current moment are shaped by the same affective politics that shape postfeminism: entrepreneurial spirit, resilience, gumption. And, these discourses of post- and pop-feminist empowerment are intimately connected to cultural economies, where to be "empowered" is to be a better economic subject, not necessarily a better feminist subject. (2018, 154-155)

Gill furthermore shows how "a postfeminist sensibility informs even those media productions that ostensibly celebrate the new feminism" (2016, 610). Not only have we not "beyond" postfeminism, Gill argues, but it is now "virtually hegemonic":

> Like neoliberalism, it seems to me that postfeminism has tightened its hold in contemporary culture and has made itself virtually hegemonic. It is harder today to see postfeminism's 'edges' or borders. Compared with a decade ago, it is much more difficult to recognize as a novel and distinctive sensibility; it has become the new normal, a taken-for-granted common sense that operates as a kind of gendered neoliberalism – and it is all the more troubling for this. (2017, 609)

Like Gill, I maintain that postfeminism as a category of cultural analysis "still has much to offer feminist cultural critics" (2016, 610). In particular, she sees the term as central to understanding inconsistencies and contradictions of "one of the most bewildering [moments] in the history of sexual politics"; a moment in which "for every uplifting account of feminist activism, there is another of misogyny" (2016, 613). In such a moment, Gill argues, it is "crucial that we *think together* the rise of popular feminism in tandem with rapidly intensifying misogyny" (2017, 611, emphasis original). This robust refutation of "post-postfeminism" feels especially

pertinent in the aftermath of the November 2016 US presidential elections in which Hilary Clinton (a symbol of the "rise of popular feminism") lost to Donald Trump (a signifier of that "rapidly intensifying misogyny"). In its ability to make sense of such contradictory social forces, postfeminism as a critical term enables precisely the kind of "thinking together" we urgently need. This thesis is moreover sympathetic to Gill's claim that "It is also crucial that we develop notions of postfeminism that can theorize both *continuity and change*, and that do not understand transformation in terms of simple displacement – as if the coming to prominence of one set of ideas automatically displaces another" (2017, 611). Rather than claiming a "displacement" of postfeminist ideas, this thesis tracks subtle shifts *within* postfeminism through its case studies.

Neoliberalism

Gill identifies choice as crucial to postfeminist sensibility: "the notion that all our practices are freely chosen is central to postfeminist discourses which present women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities" (2007, 153). This "grammar of individualism" importantly "turns the idea of the personal-as-political on its head", meaning experiences of discrimination are "framed in exclusively personal ways" (Gill 2007, 153). This emphasis on individualistic choosing emphasises "woman as empowered consumer" (Tasker and Negra 2007, 2), and ultimately transforms the female self into "a project to be evaluated, advised, disciplined and improved" (Gill 2007, 156). Noting the synergy between neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, Gill observes that the "autonomous, calculating self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism" (2007, 164). Taking Gill's point one step further, Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that "postfeminism is enabled by a neoliberal capitalist context, where values such as entrepreneurialism, individualism, and the expansion of capitalist markets are embraced and adopted by girls and women as a way to craft their selves" (2018, 154). Like Alison Winch, I understand neoliberalism as a "particularly aggressive period of dominant capitalism" privileging the individual, which "opens up every area of life to exploitation for profit - and surveillance - […] while governing citizens in other more intimate ways" (Winch 2015, 229). Anthony Giddens (1991) and Nikolas Rose (1996) show how,

under such logics, the self is conceptualised as a project requiring constant reflexivity and monitoring, whereby the self is produced "through a reflexive understanding of one's biography that is created, monitored and revised through sets of narratives that explain one to oneself as well as to others" (Winch 2013, 67). "Conceived as a 'personal responsibility' and an entrepreneurial investment with payoffs for the individual, self-work is crucial to contemporary discourses of post-welfare citizenship. When citizens are to live their lives as 'self-managed projects', then the self becomes a site of labour as well as governmentality" (Ouellette and Wilson 2011, 556).

In its emphasis on meritocracy, neoliberalism furthermore relies on "postracist" thought. Like postfeminism, postracism is "rooted in a generally decent, if misguided, belief that our society has reached a moment in which we are living out our lives in a level playing field" (Vavrus 2007, 222). In both articulations, the prefix "post" marks the perceived "'after' moment when inequality is over" (Joseph 2007, 61). Though it is variously theorised as "colorblind racism", "colormute", "racial apathy", or "post-civil rights" (Joseph 2009, 239), in this thesis, I privilege the term "postracism", in order to emphasise the mutually reinforcing synergy between postracism and postfeminism. In fact, these "postideologies" are so similar in their ideological manoeuvring that key texts critiquing them have strikingly similar titles: *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (Modelski 1991) and *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Bonilla-Silva 2013). Postracism furthermore spotlights the individual as a savvy and empowered consumer understood to freely opt in and out of raced identities. In "Color-Blind Privilege: The Social and Political Functions of Erasing the Color Line in Post Race America" (2003), Charles A. Gallagher explains, "affirming racial identity, like whites who have the luxury of an optional ethnicity" such as Irishness, "is an individual, voluntary decision" (29). In reality, this "voluntary decision" is simply not available to raced subjects. This "colourblind narrative" (Gallagher 2003 29) cross-fertilises with the fallacy of the meritocratic American Dream to deliver particularly damaging fictions of equality. By suggesting that success is freely available to all,

Postracism both relies on, and reproduces, the age-old mythology of American exceptionalism under capitalism: that by pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps, working hard, acting ethically, playing fair, and not asking for help it is possible to achieve the American dream of success. (Ono 2007, 228-229)

Gallagher's study furthermore evidences the ways in which white people's allegiance to colourblindness perpetuates racism by allowing "whites to imagine that being white or black or brown has no bearing on an individual's or a group's relative place in the socio-economic hierarchy" (2003, "Color-Blind Privilege", 22). Barack Obama's election in 2008 marks the ultimate validation of postracist thinking, "That a Black man became the president of the United States implies that past racial barriers to occupying that office are now gone" (Ono 2007, 228). The fact that Hillary Clinton came head-to-head with Obama in the Democratic Party primary moreover established a "double first" which was "offered up in the popular media as evidence of the United States emerging as a truly meritocratic state" (Joseph 2007, 59).

It is also important to note that "Scholarship on postfeminism has tended to center the white, middle class Western girl or woman as its primary subject", in part because the "the neoliberal capitalist context that enables postfeminism is one that privileges whiteness and the middle class as ideal subjectivities" (Banet-Weiser 2018, 154).[15] In *White* (1997), Richard Dyer importantly argues that,

As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm, Other people are raced, we are just people. There is no more powerful position that that of being "just" human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that—they can speak only for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent

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[15] Critics have nonetheless sought to challenge the whiteness and straightness of postfeminist heroines, see Banet-Weiser (2007), Springer (2007), and Molina-Guzmán (2014).

the interests of a race. The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge the them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act on and on the world. (1-2)

In this passage, Dyer articulates the exclusionary mechanisms underpinning claims of "universality". The assumption that white people are "just people" legitimises the marginalisation of people of colour while keeping white privilege invisible and uncontested. Invisibility is similarly central to Peggy McIntosh's conceptualisation of white privilege, as an "unearned advantage and conferred dominance," which functions as an "invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear and blank cheques" (1992, 70, emphasis added). As Dyer notes, the "invisibility of these assets is part and parcel of the sense that whiteness is nothing in particular, that white culture and identity have, as it were, no content" (1997, 9). The conceptual link between whiteness and absence underpins the spurious belief that "having no content, white people […] think, feel, and act for all people" (Dyer 1997, 9). This results in white people creating "dominant images of the world" without "quite see[ing] that they thus construct the world in their own image" (Dyer 1997, 9). In this thesis, I seek to resist postracist thinking by making whiteness and white privilege visible.

The neoliberal imperative to self-manage and self-monitor manifests in particularly gendered ways. As Lisa Blackman notes, "The injunction to understand one's life as an autonomous individual is governed through very different concepts, discourses and broader argumentative contexts, creating very different dilemmas and conflicts for men and women" (Blackman 2004, 230). Indeed, "To a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (Gill 2008, 443). In turn, this suggests that "neoliberalism is always already gendered, and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects" (Gill 2008, 443). With the 1990s advent of "girl power", the girl subject emerged as a particularly privileged site for the circulation and production of these discourses. In *Future Girl* (2004), Anita Harris shows how girl power rhetoric serves to recast structural disadvantage "as poor personal choices,

laziness, and incompetent family practices" (2004, 25). Constructing girls as "willful subjects" who are "imagined to have a range of good choices" available, success is embodied by the "can do girl" and failure by the "at risk" girl (2004, 25). While "can-dos are optimistic, self-inventing, and success-oriented", "at risk girls" are the focal point for anxieties about "juvenile delinquency, nihilism, and antisocial attitudes" (2004, 25). In this way, success and failure are constructed "as though they were dependent on strategic effort and good personal choices" (Harris 2004, 32), and "those who choose poorly have no one to blame but themselves" (Harris 2004, 30).

In short, neoliberalism "places full responsibility for failure or success on the individual and disavows any structural need for market regulation" (Thoma 2014, 126). In this context, if the "wrong" choices are made, the individual can be blamed as the "author of his [or her] own misfortune" (Rose 1996, 59). Rose's use of the term "author" here seems particularly apt in the context of this thesis which thinks through how authorship has emerged as a particularly postfeminist and neoliberal occupation. The question of what type of (paid) work is deemed appropriate for the single woman subject is one which recurs throughout this thesis. Under neoliberalism, women are indeed called upon to view work as "akin to a romantic relationship" (McRobbie 2016). With single women read as available for romance, it follows that the "romance" of work interpellates single women especially. With women strongly encouraged to "do what they love", is it any surprise that they are also expected to find love while they do it? "Passionate work", Angela McRobbie argues, has become "a further mark of feminine intelligibility and success", so that being a legible female subject "depends on having an interesting, possibly creative and ideally glamorous job" (2016). Inherent to the romance of the creative worker is the potential to break free from the office, a space which is imagined to be monotonous, oppressive, unrewarding, and alienating. Being "creative", on the other hand, is linked to ideas of authenticity, freedom and fulfilment. Creative entrepreneurs' "passion" is therefore thought to be "driving the production process rather than a mind-numbing need for minimum wage" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 118). Crucially, such work is characterised by "a number of relatively stable features" belying its precarious quality:

a preponderance of temporary, intermittent and precarious jobs; long hours and bulimic patterns of working; the collapse or erasure of the boundaries between work and play; poor pay; high levels of mobility; passionate attachment to the work and to the identity of creative labourer (e.g. web designer, artist, fashion designer); an attitudinal mindset that is a blend of bohemianism and entrepreneurialism; informal work environments and distinctive forms of sociality; and profound experiences of insecurity and anxiety about finding work, earning enough money and "keeping up" in rapidly changing fields. (Gill 2008, 20)[16]

Importantly, the optimistic promise contained within the imperative to "be creative" neatly sidesteps the precarious reality of self-employment by making it an integral part of the thrill, so that "risk is written into the excitement of the undertaking" and "insecurity is seen as part of the adventure" (McRobbie 2016, 15). As McRobbie astutely observes, the enthusiasm for precarious creative employment ultimately marks the success of neoliberalism, so that individuals now bypass "mainstream employment with its trade unions and its tranches of welfare and protection in favour of the challenges and excitement of being a creative entrepreneur. Concomitantly, when in a post-industrial society there are fewer jobs offering permanent and secure employment, such a risk-taking stance becomes a necessity rather than a choice" (2016, 11).

Authorship, I contend, is understood to be one such "creative" and "glamorous" occupation, yielding an enviable postfeminist lifestyle. Authorship indeed registers as a form of "immaterial labour", an activity, which, in producing "cultural content" is not "normally recognised as 'work'" (Lazzarato 1996, cited in Gill and Pratt 2008, 8). Being a woman author thus suggests fulfilment and self-actualisation for the single woman subject, in part because the product of the labour is "immaterial" and because the space in which "work" happens is coded as either domestic (the kitchen,

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[16] Like Gill and Andy Pratt, I use the term precarity in relation to employment to refer to "to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work -- from illegalised, casualised and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecework and freelancing. In turn, precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living" (2008, 4)

the bedroom) or associated with leisure (the café, the park), so as to not seem like "work" at all. What's more, as I show in detail in Chapter 3, the labour of the single woman author is configured in terms of a "relational gateway" which promises to remedy the single woman author's problematic singleness. In emphasising pleasure, passion, relationality, the "romancing" of women's work serves to elide women's labour as *labour*. Building on Negra's insights into how the feminisation of labour works to dissipate anxieties about working women (2009, 87), this thesis demonstrates how female authorship is imagined not as a form of effortful "work" performed for financial reward, but rather as an innately feminine, and innately pleasurable, leisure activity. Under the imperatives of postfeminism and neoliberalism, then, authorship thus emerges as a particularly privileged site for single women's self-making and self-expression.

The turn to affect

Recognising that postfeminism "operates on and through emotions", this thesis takes on board Gill's call for scholarship to "engage not only with its cultural forms but also with the affective and psychic life of postfeminism" (2017, 620). Gill's conceptualisation of postfeminism as a "distinctive sensibility" (2007, 147) indeed hints at the ways in which it circulates through, and is produced by, emotions and affects.[17] Just as postfeminism was "first apprehended as a hunch, an intuition, a sense that something was changing" (Brunsdon 2013, 388), the recent critical questioning of the term has likewise sprung from a "sense" that something has changed. See, for example, Catherine McDermott's claim that "There is a pervasive sense in *Girls* that something unintelligible has gone terribly wrong" (2017, 56). As

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[17] In *Politics and the Emotions: The Affective Turn in Contemporary Political Studies* (2014), Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson distinguish emotions from affect as follows: "Affect concerns the more embodied, unformed and less conscious dimensions of human feeling, whereas emotion concerns the feelings which are more conscious since they are more anchored in language and meaning. An affect such as anxiety is experienced in a bodily way, while an emotion such as jealousy is directed towards objects (a lover, a rival) which give it meaning, focus, intentionality" (2-3). This thesis is less concerned with the distinctions between emotion and affect than with what affect theory and the sociology of emotions have to offer to the study of postfeminist media culture.

indicated above, this thesis is not interested in problematising "postfeminism" as a critical term; rather, I am sensitive to the ways in which recent texts "feel" different and the need to attend to those feelings. To make sense of such feelings and intuitions, this thesis draws on affect theory concepts, in particular the work of Sara Ahmed (2010) and Lauren Berlant (2008, 2011), as well as earlier concepts which have been instrumental to recent developments in the field, such as Raymond Williams' "structures of feeling" (1954, 1977) as well as Arlie Hochschild's "feeling rules" (1983). In sharing a concern for "how power circulates through feeling and how politically salient ways of being and knowing are produced through affective relations and discourses" (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012, 116), this thesis is therefore significantly indebted to critical theory's recent "affective turn" (Clough 2007).[18]

Apprehending postfeminism as a "structure of feeling" crucially illuminates how the postfeminist sensibility manifests as a "particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period" (Williams 1977, 131). Work on the sociology of emotions furthermore highlights how "emotions— phenomena that have historically been viewed as inherently personal—are socially patterned" (Lively 2016). "Although emotions are typically seen as micro-events or constructs," sociologists of emotions argue that emotions nonetheless relate to "one's position on the social structure", and "through their management and their expression" emotions "serve to reproduce the society in which individuals are embedded" (Lively 2016). I also find Hochschild's concept of "feeling rules", or norms of emotions that are shared amongst social groups, for example feeling "gay at parties, sad at funerals, happy at weddings" (1979, 552) particularly useful here. As Negra (2009) shows, postfeminism relies on "a set of 'feeling rules' around gender" (12). Negra then goes on to argue that postfeminism's gendered feeling rules amount to a kind of "affective tyranny" (2009, 140). "Conceptualising postfeminism as a form of affective tyranny", Negra suggests, "helps to explain why a figure like domestic doyenne Martha Stewart is regarded so negatively by many" (2009, 140). Although Stewart is "utterly postfeminist in the ways that she models hyperdomesticity", she is

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[18] See also, Hogget and Thompson (2014). For a detailed account of the relationship between feminist theory and the "affective turn" see Pedwell and Whitehead (2012).

nonetheless "'off script' in affective terms. That is to say that the star's grim, controlling persona and icy demeanor make her cooking and crafts skills appear more as a display of virtuosity than a demonstration of labor in the service of others" (Negra 2009, 140). Building on Negra, this thesis demonstrates how postfeminist representations both rely on and produce gendered feeling rules relating to singleness and authorship.

In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed shows how feeling rules around happiness functions to police and reproduce the social order. Happiness, Ahmed argues, "functions as a promise that directs you toward certain objects, as if they provide you with the necessary ingredient for the good life" (2010, 54). Crucially, then, "Happiness is used to redescribe social norms as social goods", making "certain forms of personhood valuable" but not others (Ahmed 2010, 2 and 11). Since "happiness is assumed to follow from some life choices and not others", happiness functions to orient the subject toward certain objects (Ahmed 2010, 54). The life choices imagined to lead to happiness are articulated in "gendered happiness scripts" which provide "a set of instructions for what women and men must do in order to be happy" (Ahmed 2010, 59). As Ahmed notes, "Going along with happiness scripts is how we get along" and "to get along is to be willing and able to express happiness in proximity to the right things" (2010, 59). As a result, those unwilling or unable to "express happiness in proximity to the right things", for example marriage or motherhood, are marked as "killjoys." Feminists in particular are imagined to "kill joy simply by not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising" meaning feminism itself is imagined to be "saturated with unhappiness" (Ahmed 2010, 65). Ahmed goes on to argue that:

> Feminists by declaring themselves as feminist are already read as destroying something that is thought of by others as not only being good but as the cause of happiness. The feminist killjoy "spoils" the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble or to meet up over happiness. (2010, 65-66)

Crucially, Ahmed argues, we can "reread the negativity of such figures in terms of the challenge they offer to the assumption that happiness follows relative proximity

to a social ideal" (2010, 53). Indeed, Ahmed asks: "Does the feminist kill other people's joy by pointing out moments of sexism?" or, rather "does she expose bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy?" (2010, 66). While "Feminist subjects might bring others down" through discussions of "unhappy topics such as sexism", more importantly, they expose "how happiness is sustained by easing the very signs of not getting along" (Ahmed 2010, 66). As Ahmed concludes, "Feminists do kill joy in a certain sense: they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places" (Ahmed 2010, 66). In Ahmed's view, the Killjoy not only has the power to disrupt generically codified joy, but, in fact, expose happiness' coercive function. In this thesis, I periodically invoke the figure of the Ahmedian killjoy, to describe single woman author heroines such as Mavis (Charlize Theron) in *Young Adult* (2011), P.L. Travers (Emma Thompson) in *Saving Mr Banks* (2013), or Ricki (Meryl Streep) in *Ricki and the Flash* (2015) who in some way trouble the postfeminist formula. While these heroines might not be "feminist", they certainly fit the bill as "killjoys" whose refusal to ease "the signs of not getting along" draws attention to the contradictions and "bad feelings" which thrive under postfeminism.

This thesis is also interested in tracking shifts in postfeminism's structure of feeling. To make sense of such shifts, I draw on both the figure of the killjoy as an individual who disrupts the affective economies of postfeminism, and on Berlant's work around "cruel optimism". I find Berlant's work illuminates how texts like *Bridget Jones's Diary* or *Sex and the City* have codified a number of affective expectations relating to the realisation of the postfeminist good life—so much so that they have come to function as an interpretative rubric through the postfeminist female subject is invited to make sense of her life. Catherine McDermott shares this view, arguing that "it is through genre, that complex affective structures like postfeminism offer subjects ways of living in which they are invited to invest their subjectivity" (2017, 50). With this in mind, it becomes clear that the "something unintelligible" which has gone "terribly wrong" (McDermott 2017, 56) in a text like *Girls* is precisely the disparity between the glamorous lifestyle promised by the likes of *Sex and the City* and the lived experience of characters like Hannah Horvath (Lena Dunham) whose life is characterised by the precarity of postrecessionary culture. In *Girls*—and other recent contemporary screen texts featuring single woman author heroines—Hannah finds

herself unable to realise the postfeminist good life which she feels entitled to: professional success, class mobility, romantic love, fulfilment. These failures, McDermott argues, function as a breach of the postfeminist social contract (2017, 48).

Berlant's "cruel optimism" furthermore sheds light on the ambiguities of a text like *Girls.* As Berlant explains, a "relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire functions as an obstacle to your flourishing", for example by actively "imped[ing] the aim that brought you to it initially" (2011, 1). Where cruel optimism operates an "enabling" object, project or attachment is also "disabling", so that the "vitalising or animating potency of an object/scene of desire contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment in the first place" (Berlant 2011, 25). Central to the phenomenon of cruel optimism is the huge difficulty and loss entailed in attempting to detach from what is cruel. "It is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working" (Berlant 2011, 263) because it calls into question both the fantasy and the individual attached to it. McDermott astutely notes that "Falling for a false promise is not only inconvenient, it is embarrassing", in turn, "to acknowledge that we have misplaced our optimism feels less like genre's failure to live up to and fulfil our expectations than our own failure to reap the rewards promised by genre" (McDermott 2017, 55). McDermott then goes on to argue that to lose "hold of the fantasy that fulfilment resides in postfeminist genres has the capacity to devastate the sense of self-continuity that is derived from our attachment to genre" (2017, 55). The fear of having embarrassingly misplaced one's optimism and the potential loss of an object which enables subjects to "add up to something" (Berlant 2011, 2) elucidates why individuals persevere for so long in attachments that are "already not working". Paradoxically, it is precisely because of their attrition of fantasy, that scenarios of cruel optimism can offer hope. Cruel optimism indeed yields what Berlant terms the "impasse", defined as "a space of time lived without a narrative genre" (2011, 199). In the impasse subjects are simultaneously "overwhelmed, forced to change, but also stuck" (Berlant 2011, 21), yielding "dithering, tottering, bargaining, testing" (Berlant 2011, 28). Despite the huge loss which it entails, the impasse is therefore characterised by moments of "bargaining": it is "a space in which we learn to adjust to the loss of a fantasy" (McDermott 2017, 53). To adjust or adapt to the impasse

thus "involves a gesture, or undramatic action that points to and revises an unresolved situation" (Berlant 2011, 199).

In this thesis, I am interested precisely in gestures of adjustment or bargaining. In other words, I chart the ways in which texts and characters engage but also subvert postfeminist tropes. Each chapter in this thesis theorises a particular set of representational tropes recurrently linked with the figure of the single woman author. For example the trope of the single woman author producing autobiographical work, or the tendency to pair the heroine with an older male mentor. These tropes, I suggest, function as postfeminist "affective expectations". As I then go on to argue, certain texts in my corpus—in particular more recent films, usually released after 2010—find themselves at an impasse of sorts whereby they both rely on, and yet register an ambivalence toward reproducing, these postfeminist affective expectations. This ambivalence manifests through their self-conscious destabilisation of the very tropes associated with the figure of the single woman author. Tracking these films' small gestures of bargaining, I argue that such gestures mark small but significant revisions to postfeminism's affective economy. What's more, I contend that such shifts belie a broader shift in postfeminism as a sensibility. In doing so, this thesis makes the case that affect theory concepts, and, in particular the work of Ahmed and Berlant, have much to offer postfeminist media studies as a critical genre. As feminist media scholars, we indeed find ourselves in our own scenario of cruel optimism: both frustrated with the limits of postfeminism as a critical framework, and yet passionately invested in it as a tool enabling us to make sense of the world. To be clear, I have no wish to suggest that the term postfeminism is no longer useful or productive; rather, I contend that affect theory has the potential to unlock new avenues of enquiry within the study of postfeminism, a critical genre arguably at an impasse.

Methodology

Having established the key critical contexts in which this thesis is intervening, I now outline my methodology. I start by defining who "counts" as a single woman author in this thesis, and outline the rationale behind my definition. I then locate this figure by explaining the temporal and generic boundaries of the film sample. Next, I give an account of my approach to textual analysis, and provide an overview of each chapter's case studies and arguments. This chapter concludes with a critical reflection on my own positionality as a researcher and author.

Theorising the single woman author

As the literature review has made clear, the words "single", "woman", and "author" are each fraught with contradictions. The term "single woman", for example refers to a highly heterogeneous group. In line with the work of Bella DePaulo (2006) and Anthea Taylor (2012), my definition of the diegetic "single woman" encompasses never-married, divorced, and widowed women, whether they are heterosexual or not. This definition importantly also includes women who are coupled up but as yet unmarried. For example, the heroines of *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995), and *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (2002) are engaged, but in both cases, their unmarried status belies a disordered selfhood which needs "fixing" ahead of, and, indeed, through, marriage. In films such as *Their Finest* (2016) or *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (2018), the heroine's unmarried-but-coupled status allows her to end an unsatisfactory relationship and journey toward marriage with the "right" heterosexual partner. Including these almost-married heroines in my sample serves to highlight the continued centrality of heterosexual marriage (and in particular the significance of the wedding day as feminine rite of passage) in representations of Anglo-American society. In her study of chick lit, Stephanie Harzewski for example demonstrates how "wedlock still signifies a developmental endpoint of sorts; dating is teleological in intent" (2011, 180). Likewise, in *Wife Inc.: The Business of Marriage in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), Suzanne Leonard argues, "marriage persists as the preferred teleology that structures not simply individual lives, books, films, or television shows, but also entire genres such as

chick lit, romantic comedy, and reality dating shows" (5). As Leonard notes,
increasing cohabitation rates and increasing ages of first marriages have done little to
mitigate the "stronghold that marriage occupies in the symbolic imaginary" (2018,
4). "The perception that marriage no longer matters is also hard to sustain if one
makes even a cursory foray into the discourse of popular American media, and
particularly if one looks at the role of heterosexual women in those spaces" (Leonard
2018, 4). Leonard's argument also rings true in a UK context in which wife-centric
media circulates widely.[1] On the other hand, my decision to include both widows and
divorcées in my sample is underpinned by their status as women who are *no longer
wives*, and thus no longer subject to the patriarchal authority of a husband. While this
thesis recognises that never-married, divorced, and widowed women each register
differently as "single", I nonetheless contend that through their marital status such
heroines enjoy a troubled relationship to patriarchy.

Though such a definition in theory comprises a diverse set of women, in reality the
majority of the protagonists in this thesis are young, white, thin, able-bodied, middle
class, heterosexual, and never-married. Notable exceptions to this rule include
Something's Gotta Give (2003)*, Eat Pray Love* (2010), and *Wild* (2014) which
feature divorced heroines*,* as well as *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) in which
the protagonist is a widow in her 70s*.* In addition, the white working class
protagonist of *Albatross* (2011), and the black heroines of *The Jane Austen Book
Club* (2007)*, The Help* (2011), and *The Incredible Jessica James* (2017) inject a
(very) small, but much-needed, dose of diversity to these representations.
Notwithstanding this handful of texts, the narrowness of the category "single woman
author" highlights the pernicious ways in which privileged identities are still
problematically construed as the "norm" in postfeminist media culture. As I argue in
detail in Chapter 1, single woman author heroines' singleness often signifies as a

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[1] See, for example, American reality TV shows such as *The Bachelor* (2002-)*,
Bridezillas* (2004-)*, Say Yes to the Dress* (2007-)*, The Millionaire Matchmaker*
(2008-2015)*,* as well as *The Real Housewives* franchise (2006-) which have either
been broadcast on, or adapted for, British television. Other notable wedding and
marriage-focussed offerings on UK television include *Don't Tell the Bride* (2007-)
and *Married at First Sight* (2015). Wife-media illustrates the transatlantic quality of
postfeminist media culture and its construction of heterosexual marriage as a key
telos of women's lives.

form of feminist-inflected agency; in turn, the narrowness of these representations suggests that (post)feminist agency is solely the province of the privileged white subject.

The term "woman author" likewise requires unpacking. Mary Eagleton's *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction* (2005) favours the term "author" over "artist" or "cultural producer" because "it contains within its etymology connotations of 'authorising' and 'authority', both of which have been highly problematic concepts for women in the cultural sphere and for the development of a feminist cultural criticism" (2). In *Authorship, Adaptation and Contemporary Women Filmmakers* (2015), meanwhile, Shelley Cobb notes that "authors are not always writers" (15). Indeed, in Cobb's study, the woman author appears

> in many guises: as a writer, a photographer, a young videographer, a playwright, a quilt maker, a sketch artist, a frustrated journalist, a young girl who wants to be a writer, and two who steal stories from their lovers. They may seem like they have little in common, but the potential to subvert and upend power relations is found in each as they negotiate the difficulties of female agency and the desire to authorize oneself while being a woman. (2015, 15)

Building on both Eagleton and Cobb, I prioritise the term "woman author" because of its connections to "authority" and "authorisation", and in order to signal my interest in the ways in which female authorship is imbricated with ideas about female agency and female labour. Unlike Cobb, I have chosen to exclude visual forms of authorship such as visual arts, crafts, photography, and filmmaking. Though the figure of the female artist shares many of the struggles of the woman author (historical exclusion from the canon, denigration of "feminine" forms, for example), she also has her own rich and nuanced intellectual history, which is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with in detail.[2] Films excluded from the corpus therefore

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[2] See for example, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (Nochlin 1971), and *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (Parker and Pollock 1981).

include *Reality Bites* (1994), *Frida* (2002), *Save the Date* (2012) and *Big Eyes* (2014).

Notwithstanding the exclusion of visual arts, mine is a broad and inclusive definition of authorship, comprising acts of storytelling or creation most often (but not always) captured in writing. Genres of authorship included in this thesis include journalism, self-help, copywriting, fiction, drama, screenplays, song lyrics, poetry, erotica, academic writing, diaries, blogs, memoirs, life-writing, and correspondence. Other forms of storytelling I include which are less obviously "authorial" include the video blog (vlog), the talk show, and stand-up comedy. Under a rigid understanding of authoriality as necessarily "writerly", these three forms could easily be dismissed as irrelevant. However, in *Easy A* (2010), *Welcome to Me* (2013), and *Obvious Child* (2014) the vlog, talk show, and stand-up comedy are respectively depicted as self-conscious performances of the self, akin to autobiographical writing. All three films furthermore emphasise the female protagonist's control over her creation, which, in enabling her to tell her story (or "herstory") on her own terms, threatens to trouble traditional narratives of power. This deliberate breadth and flexibility, then, enables this thesis to unearth points of contact, as well as telling fractures, between representations of traditionally "writerly" genres of authorship and less obviously "authorial" forms.

Such a broad definition contrasts starkly—and indeed deliberately—with the narrow understanding of authorship displayed in Arthur's "The Written Scene: Writers as Figures of Cinematic Redemption" (2005). In this piece surveying early 20 mainstream films released in the period 1997-2004, Arthur's only female author case study is *Girl, Interrupted* (1999). Texts such as *You've Got Mail* (1998), *Mansfield Park* (1999), *Message in a Bottle* (1999), *Never Been Kissed* (1999), *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), *28 Days* (2000), *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), *Riding in Cars with Boys* (2001), *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (2002), *Possession* (2002), *Van Wilder: Party Liaison* (2002), *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (2003), *I Capture the Castle* (2003), *Something's Gotta Give* (2003), *Sylvia* (2003), *The Life of David Gale* (2003), and *Down with Love* (2004) are conspicuously absent from this analysis. In a footnote, Arthur addresses some of these exclusions:

Although I am concerned here with films that take writing "seriously", in several recent films characters are declared writers but this mantle proves either gratuitous or superfluous. For example, in *28 days,* a blithe spirit confined to a drug and alcohol facility calls herself a writer although little is made of this far-fetched claim. […] On the other hand, a surfeit of enacted, "non-professional" writing appears in *You've Got Mail* (e-mail correspondence), *Mansfield Park* (letter-writing), *The Cider House Rules* (local historiography) and *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Nonetheless its functions are largely instrumental, as source of exposition or revelation or dramatic anticipation. In none of these cases the process or ontology of writing is sufficiently thematised to sustain the long of analysis I sustain in this chapter. (2005, 340)

Tellingly, Arthur's definition of authorship works to exclude women authors. He notably dismisses diary writing as "non-professional", even though that is the primary subject of *Girl, Interrupted,* a film he *does* include in his sample. He also conveniently forgets that both the female writers of private correspondence of *You've Got Mail* and *Mansfield Park* go on to write novels. Nowhere does Arthur interrogate what it means for a film to "take writing 'seriously'", nor does he think films' tendency to deprofessionalise women's authorship (by not taking it "seriously") noteworthy. Unlike Arthur, I am interested in a range of authorial modes, both "serious" and "gratuitous", and I am committed to thinking through how such value judgements about authorial genres are connected to gendered double standards ultimately working to devalue women's authorship.

It is worth noting that the heroine's chosen genre of authorship often correlates with the tone, generic affiliations, and production values of the film itself. As Andrew Higson remarks:

a biopic about Austen has to be Austenian in tone, […] a Shakespearean biopic Shakespearean, and so on. In this way such films rework and reproduce a particular idea of the author, an idea that is shaped as much by her or his literary creations as by how those creations have themselves been

adapted, reworked and represented as films and television programmes. (2013, 112)

To Higson's observation, I add that this process is also tied to gender and the devaluation of feminised authorial genres. Broadly speaking, writers of literary fiction, poets, and academics tend to populate "literate" films such as biopics and adaptations of canonical novels.[3] Lifestyle journalists, diarists, bloggers, writers of commercial fiction, playwrights, and lyricists regularly appear in romantic comedies, while investigative journalists tend to feature in thrillers. These correlations in turn suggest a relationship between the perceived cachet or prestige of certain authorial forms and that of the film being produced. For example, the "literate", middlebrow, and therefore respectable quality of *Mansfield Park* and *Becoming Jane* lies in part in their connection to the equally literate, middlebrow, and respectable Jane Austen and their respective status as an adaptation and a biopic. On the other hand, self-help books and lifestyle journalism are both denigrated "feminine" genres of authorship, and their depiction in texts like *Down with Love* and *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* tallies with the films' generic affiliations as romcoms, a "feminine" film genre often dismissed as trivial or as a "guilty pleasure" (McDonald 2007, 7). Investigative journalism, meanwhile, is coded as a "masculine" or "serious" form of journalism warranting an equally "masculine" genre like the thriller, as evidenced by texts like *The Life of David Gale* and *State of Play* (2009). The relative infrequent appearance of the single woman author as an investigative journalist, or as a thriller heroine, suggests, in turn, that investigative journalism is deemed a "masculine" profession likely unsuited or unsuitable to women.[4] As this brief summary indicates, genre and gender are inextricably linked in this thesis.

This thesis marks the first exploration of the specifically postfeminist intersections of authoriality and marital status. It importantly contends that the identities "single woman" and "woman author" are mutually constitutive. In texts like *Blood Diamond*

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[3] See Higson 2013.

[4] Meryl Streep's role in *The Post* (2017), as the widowed Kay Graham, the first female publisher of a major American newspaper, is particularly interesting in this regard. While Kay is not an author, she does eventually "authorize" *The Washington Post*'s Watergate coverage.

(2006), singleness functions as a privilege, explicitly granting a woman the time and freedom of movement conducive to authorship. Meanwhile, in *Miss Potter* (2006), authorship grants the female protagonist the financial independence and agency needed to "authorise" her singleness. The quest to become unsingle sometimes even underpins the authorial project itself, documenting the project of coupledom via a diary, as in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, or lifestyle journalism, as in *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days.* In a handful of cases, such as *The Help*, authorship functions as an obstacle to matrimony. More often than not, however, the heroine's authorship functions in terms of what I call a "relational gateway", yielding romance, see for example *You've Got Mail, Never Been Kissed,* or *Message in a Bottle*.[5] The connection between authorship and marital status is furthermore underscored by the dual fulfilment of professional and personal ambitions in texts like *Little Women* and *Mansfield Park*, where the publication of the manuscript (professional success) coincides with, and is in some ways contingent upon, the securing of heteronormative romance (personal success).

One of my key arguments in this thesis is that the single woman author signifies the contradictions, ambiguities, and ambivalences constitutive of postfeminism. One such contradiction is her entanglement with conflicting discourses which characterise her as simultaneously rebellious and yet unthreatening to heteropatriarchy. These paradoxes are perhaps best embodied in popular culture by the real-world single woman author, Jane Austen, a figure of idealised "female authority and agency that is both feminine and feminist" (Cobb 2015, 136). As Cobb argues, Austen's authorship "functions as a representation of female agency but is constructed ambivalently in relation to feminism" (2015, 118). She traces "popular culture's particular obsession with Austen" as "founded on a 'commonsense' understanding of Margaret Kirkham's claim that 'Jane Austen is the first major woman novelist in English'" (Cobb 2015, 123). The phrase "first major woman novelist", Cobb notes, contains within it a typically postfeminist paradox: "she was 'the first', making her a 'groundbreaker' and a kind of rebel," while also being "'major', meaning her novels were popular and pleased the majority" (2015, 123). That Austen herself is popularly imagined as a

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[5] See Chapter 3 for a full definition and illustration of the "relational gateway."

figure who can be both ground-breaking and popular suggests a synergy with the postfeminist double entanglement, and thus a potential to function as a postfeminist signifier. "The appeal of Jane Austen to postfeminism," Cobb concludes, is rooted in "the idea of her as a sign of female agency also doubly entangled. She is both popular and a member of the canon; she writes 'romances' but is taken seriously; her life does not match the stories she wrote, and forever some critics will call her feminist and some an anti-feminist" (2015, 135). Through her doubly entangled status as simultaneously "rebellious" yet "safe", Austen emerges as the prototypical single woman author. Given her centrality in the cultural imagining of the single woman author, Austen occupies a particularly privileged position within this thesis. Four of the films in this thesis have an explicit interaction with the figure of Austen: *Mansfield Park*, in which the character Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor) acts as an Austen-proxy, *Becoming Jane*, in which Austen is characterised as an Elizabeth Bennet, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, in which an ensemble cast read their way to Austen's oeuvre, and *Austenland* (2013), in which the heroine travels to an immersive Austen experience. Chapter 3 in particular offers an analysis of the ways in which Austen's perception as a romance novelist contributes to the understanding that her works function as "relational gateways" for her readers.

Locating the single woman author: Periodisation

The 1990s are often understood as a postfeminist turning point in Anglo-American (post)feminism.[6] This was the decade that saw the rise to fame of beloved "singletons" Bridget Jones (Renée Zellweger), Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), and Ally McBeal (Calista Flockhart), marking what Melanie Waters and Rebecca Munford characterise as "the vigorous return of the prime-time single girl"

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[6] That is not to say that postfeminism as a contradictory set of discourses "having to do with the 'pastness' of feminism" (Tasker and Negra 2007, 1) was not in circulation before 1990. Both Tania Modleski's *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* and Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women,* crucial texts in this area, were published in 1991 and looked back at the 1980s. Likewise, Bonnie Dow's *Prime Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (1996) makes the case that 1980s TV was characterised by the emergence of postfeminist discourses. I explain my rationale for studying both British and American films in the next section.

(2014, 46). Candace Bushnell's column in the *New York Observer* began in 1994, was published as the collection of essays *Sex and the City* in 1996, and then adapted for television on HBO in 1998. Bridget Jones first appeared in the pages of *The Independent* in 1995, in novel form in 1996, and in film in 2001, while *Ally McBeal* hit TV screens in 1997. In popular culture, all three figures became signifiers of important shifts in the public perception of feminism, and, as such, instrumental to the articulation and circulation of postfeminist discourses.[7]

Figure 4: Time *Magazine's 1998 "Is Feminism Dead?" Cover*

On 29 June 1998, for example, *Time* magazine posed the (now infamous) question "Is Feminism Dead?" The magazine cover featured Calista Flockhart's colour photograph, captioned as "Ally McBeal" in a line-up of black and white portraits of

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[7] Ally, Carrie, and Bridget, and in particular their status as empowered, single, career women, loom large in studies of postfeminist media culture (see: Kim 2001, Moseley and Read 2002, Arthurs 2003, Negra 2004).

prominent feminist figures Susan B. Anthony, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan [See Fig. 4]. As Waters and Munford note of the design,

> Feminism's death is thus articulated in the shift from black and-white to colour, and from figures in feminism's political history to a fictional television character […] Emphasizing style and performance over history and politics, the ghostly sequence of disembodied heads consigns feminism to the past; collapsing the first and second waves of feminism into one self-contained and concluded moment, the *Time* cover buries Friedan and Steinem alive in its visual conjuring of feminist history. (Waters and Munford 2014, 47).

Figure 5: Time *Magazine's 2000 "Who Needs a Husband?" cover*

That Ally McBeal could be so effectively "Summoned as evidence of feminism's demise", is suggestive of the ways in which this fictional character had come to function as "the postergirl for a postfeminist generation," representing "the birth of a new brand of hyper-solipsistic lifestyle feminism" (Waters and Munford 2014, 46). The heroines of *Sex and the City,* meanwhile, became synonymous with the fate of the single woman, as evidenced by *Time*'s subsequent August 2000 cover featuring the four principal cast members and the headline "Who needs a husband?" [See Fig. 5]. By the early 2000s, Bridget Jones, as embodied on screen by Zellweger, likewise became a "visual shorthand for a series of assumptions and discourses around single women" (Taylor 2012, 37).[8]

The mid-1990s are also remembered as the start of "Austenmania," with a veritable cottage industry of Austen adaptations featuring witty and feisty heroines being produced, including the iconic BBC *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) starring Colin Firth, the teen movie *Clueless* (1995), as well as *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) and *Emma* (1996). Around the same time, the Spice Girls released their debut single "Wannabe" (1996). In different ways, the self-determining Austen heroines and the Spice Girls both contributed to, and relied on, discourses of "girl power". The Spice Girls' message of feminine sexual agency furthermore tallied with contemporaneous popular non-fiction books such as *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (Paglia 1990), *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus* (Roiphe 1993), and *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* (Sommers 1994). These non-fiction texts variously argued against an ostensible feminist orthodoxy understood to be victimising women and stopping them from fully enjoying their sexuality. Discourses centralising the agency of the girl subject also circulated in the pages of pop psychology bestsellers *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (Brown and Gilligan 1992), and *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (Pipher 1994). Though these texts invoke the figure of the "girl in crisis", they are nonetheless underpinned by ideas of girl power, so that "the adolescent girl finds herself empowered only after she discovers that she is vulnerable" (Marshall 2007, 126).

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[8] In fact, the cover of Taylor's own monograph, *Single Women in Popular Culture: The Limits of Postfeminism* (2012) features a still from *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Though the linkage of the "girl in crisis" and "girl power" may seem contradictory, as Marnina Gonick has shown, these figures are actually mutually reinforcing, participating in the "production of the neoliberal girl subject" (2006, 2). The 1990s were therefore a crucial moment in the circulation of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses across media in Anglo-American society.

The current historical moment is, likewise, being hailed as a critical juncture. Having become "popular" (Banet-Weiser, 2015 and 2018) or even "cool" (Valenti 2014), feminism has recently achieved "a new luminosity" (Gill 2017, 611). That feminism is "having a moment" (Gill 2017, 611) is evident through the evolution of the 1990s phrase "I'm not a feminist, but", into its 2010s counterpart "I'm a feminist, but."[9] This renewed visibility has, in part, been facilitated by social media activism such as the Everyday Sexism Project, the campaign to feature Jane Austen on the £10 bank note, and, more recently through the hashtags #MeToo and #TimesUp. The feminist-inflected discourse circulating in anglophone online platforms such as Jezebel.com, Bitchmedia.org, Feministing.com, xojane.com, or Vagendamagazine.com has also filtered into mainstream women's magazines. *Elle* (UK) for example ran a "Feminism Issue" in December 2014, and the US magazine *Teen Vogue* was widely praised for publishing cutting edge critique of US politics in 2016. British and American "celebrity feminists" such as Beyoncé, Emma Watson, or even Jennifer Lawrence have also contributed to this newfound popularity (see Hamad and Taylor 2015). Two decades after being coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the framework of "intersectionality" has furthermore gained prominence in popular feminist rhetoric.[10] It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the present moment is already being hailed as an emergent "fourth wave" (Munro 2013, Cochrane 2013 and 2014, Rivers 2017,

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[9] The phrase "I'm a feminist, but" has become a staple of the British "Guilty Feminist" podcast, whose aim is to "discuss the big topics 21st century feminists agree on, whilst confessing our 'buts' – the insecurities, hypocrisies and fears that undermine our lofty principles" (http://guiltyfeminist.com/).
[10] In 1989 Kimberlé Crenshaw argued that "Black women are theoretically erased" by the "single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law and that is also reflected in feminist theory and antiracist politics" (139). Taking issue with the damaging "tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (139), Crenshaw proposed "intersectionality" as a framework to conceptualise the lives of those "multiply-burdened" by intersecting experiences of gender and race (140).

Chamberlain 2017).[11] Such claims have nonetheless been complicated by the simultaneous rise in misogyny, exemplified both by the vitriolic "trolling" which women in the public eye are relentlessly subject to on social media, as well as the election of alleged abuser Donald Trump.

This thesis then, is interested in tracking the distance, but also the synergies, between these two "moments" in the history of feminism(s) and popular culture in Britain and America: the 1990s and the 2010s. Periodisation is always, to an extent, arbitrary, and this thesis is no exception. The definition of the boundaries of a film sample is for example entangled with the practicalities of conducting a time-bound research project: the competing necessities of keeping a sample manageable whilst also ensuring the period is long enough to register any important representational, aesthetic, or thematic shifts. There is also the question of access to prints, DVD, recordings, digital downloads, or streaming services. Bearing these conflicting demands in mind, this thesis takes up *Little Women*, released in 1994—the same year as Bushnell's *Sex and the City*—as its starting point.[12] Indeed, as I will show throughout this thesis, *Little Women* exemplifies four key representational tropes which are variously repeated and refracted in subsequent texts:

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[11] Discursive reliance on the wave metaphor regularly comes under scrutiny. As Nicola Rivers notes, "what distinguishes one wave from another is, like much within feminism, a contentious issue" (2017, 20). Part of the problem with the waves model is its linearity: there is a temptation "to present each wave as distinct from its predecessor" when "in reality the arrival of a new wave does not signal the neat conclusion of what came before" (Rivers 2017, 20). The wave model thus betrays a desire for uncomplicated historicisation, a "notion that feminist activity can be captured accurately or conceptualized as a single, uniform movement" (Rivers 2017, 21). The model moreover creates "divisions and exclusions" silencing those "who are not deemed the right fit" with a characterisation of a particular feminist wave (Chamberlain 2017, 21, 33). In fact, the "metaphor entrenches the perception of a 'singular' feminism in which gender is the predominate category of analysis" (Laughlin 2010, 77), thus failing to recognise or contend with the plurality of the movement. Despite these important critiques, the model remains widely used. My own use of the term "second wave" is therefore not intended as an endorsement of the wave metaphor, but rather as a shorthand to refer to the feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s and the key issues which this period of activism highlighted.
[12] Unfortunately, such a periodisation by definition involves the exclusion of earlier texts such as *Henry and June* (1990), *Impromptu* (1991), *Orlando* (1992), *Poetic Justice* (1993), *The Pelican Brief* (1993), and *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993).

1. The protagonist's authoriality and singleness signify as forms of protofeminist disruption and function as mutually constitutive identities
2. The protagonist authors a conventionally feminine autobiographical manuscript
3. The authorial process leads the protagonist to finding heterosexual love
4. The protagonist's professional success is facilitated by an older male mentor/lover

In simultaneously emphasising the single woman author's rebelliousness *and* ensuring that her disruptiveness is firmly kept within particular bounds, these tropes contribute to the production of a doubly entangled figure. In being caught between contradictory discourses, the single woman author thus emerges as a postfeminist subject par excellence.

In thinking through how the figure has been represented in film since 1994, I show that the single woman author has been the locus of shifting postfeminist anxieties for almost 25 years. I also posit that the last ten years or so have seen an affective shift within the representational tropes associated with this figure; a shift characterised by an intensification of ambiguity and ambivalence. Texts such as *Albatross* (2011), *Young Adult* (2011), *Girl Most Likely* (2012), *In a World…* (2013), *Adult World* (2013), *Saving Mr Banks* (2013), *Not Another Happy Ending* (2013), *Obvious Child* (2014), *The Girl in the Book* (2015), *Ricki and the Flash* (2015), *One More Time* (2015), *Top Five* (2015), *Their Finest* (2016), and *The Incredible Jessica James,* I argue, are illustrative of this trend. In this thesis, I employ the term "recent film" as a means of making this affective shift visible. Though the term's vagueness may feel unsatisfactory, it is also part of its appeal. In using "recent films", I am resisting the temptation to ascribe the shifts I describe to a singular motive or moment. With the experience of precarity looming so large in recent times, the term "postrecessionary" certainly comes to mind as one way to categorise such a change. The threat of homelessness, for example, is ever-present in recent texts, and with it, the possible loss of the generative potential of a room of one's own. *Girl Most Likely* and *One More Time* both see their female protagonists evicted from their New York City apartments; the heroines of *Adult World* and *In A World…* are kicked out of the

parental home; and *Saving Mr Banks'* P.L. Travers (Emma Thompson) is faced with the prospect of losing her London home, triggering echoes of childhood trauma. However, the 2008 recession is not solely responsible for these conditions of heightened precarity. In an article published in 2008, Rosalind Gill connects the growth of the precariat to "the growth and development of the World Wide Web and the huge expansion of the cultural industries and cultural production; both areas which are characterised by the degree to which they presume precarious labour" (16). In centralising the global economic downturn, the term "postrecessionary film" would therefore obscure the interconnectedness of precarity and the digital in relation to immaterial or cultural labour such as authorship.

Moreover, what is striking in recent films is not so much their depictions of economic precarity, but the implications of these depictions. In contrast to earlier films in the sample, authorship as a profession is no longer imagined to be capable of sustaining the single woman author's desired lifestyle. An important caveat to these films' depiction of precarity is that these heroines are educated, white, and middle class and thus in positions of relative privilege. In *Girl Most Likely* and *One More Time*, both protagonists are able to move in with a parent after being evicted; *In a World…*'s Carol (Lake Bell) temporarily stays with her sister; in *Adult World*, Amy (Emma Roberts) is able to secure a house-share, while P.L. Travers can save her home by selling the film rights to *Mary Poppins* in *Saving Mr Banks*. While the potential of "homelessness" is thus considerably cushioned by class privilege, its hovering threat nonetheless marks a breach of the social contract. Having hitherto promised the middle classes immunity from the experience of precarity, such moments puncture the postfeminist subject's "anticipation of the good life" (McDermott 2017, 47), and, in turn, call into question meritocratic narratives relating to young women and agency. It is this kind of affective shift, then, which this thesis is most keenly interested in.

Furthermore, the descriptive quality of an adjective like "recent" means it is devoid of value judgements which risk implying either a hierarchical relationship between films in the sample, or suggesting a clean break from the conventions crystallised in a text like *Little Women.* Indeed, it would be a great disservice to the early texts in my corpus to smooth over the ambiguities and ideological contradictions which

underlie them. Like many of their contemporaries, texts such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* or *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009) feature an undercurrent of uneasiness or discomfort with postfeminist ways of living. Bridget's cry of pain when waxing, or her rehearsing of appropriate conversation topics ("isn't it terrible about Chechnya?", she repeats while hoovering her flat in a vest and knickers) before a date hint at her failure to successfully inhabit the postfeminist "poise" she so desperately craves. Meanwhile, in *Shopaholic*, the joy of shopping is seriously undercut by Rebecca's (Isla Fischer) mounting debt. In recent texts, this underlying discomfort intensifies, curdling into "cruel optimism" so that postfeminism now appears to be simultaneously essential to, and impeding upon, the thriving of the heroine. These conditions of heightened ambivalence and ambiguity, I argue, register as an affective shift in this thesis.

Locating the single woman author: Genre and industrial provenance

It is important to note that the figure of the single woman author exists beyond cinema. As observed in the Introduction chapter, the figure frequently appears in "chick lit", on television, and in web series. That she recurs across media and across forms is expressive of the single woman author's status as a staple of postfeminist media culture. However, this thesis is primarily a study of cinematic representations of the single woman author, meaning other media forms are beyond the scope of this project. The TV series *Sex and the City, Girls* (2012-2017)*,* and *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* (2016) however stand out as notable intertexts to my sample. Given *Sex and the City* and *Girls'* central role in articulating postfeminist "moments" (and, in turn, the scholarly struggle over these texts' postfeminist articulation), I occasionally refer to both HBO series, as well as to critics who have studied them in order to elaborate on their arguments about postfeminism. Chapter 2 takes up the Netflix revival of *Gilmore Girls* to draw out important parallels with *Little Women*. What's more, with the advent of both home-streaming platforms such as Netflix or Amazon video, and film franchises such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in which "seriality" is a crucial ingredient, the boundaries between "television", "film", and "web series" are becoming increasingly unstable. My focus on feature films then, is not intended to reify often arbitrary distinctions between modes of

production, address, and distribution. Rather, my decision to focus on cinema serves to keep the thesis' corpus within manageable bounds.

Despite my focus on cinema, the case studies in this thesis form a large, and highly heterogeneous sample. These texts span a significant range of genres (from the biopic to the romantic comedy, from the thriller to the costume drama) and production contexts (comprising both big budget productions and "indies"). Not only do they have a varied industrial provenance (coming variously from Hollywood and Britain), but also different modes of distribution (including multiplex release, independent cinemas, Netflix), and box-office success levels. At first glance, the Miramax and BBC Films co-production, *Mansfield Park* (1999), an adaptation of Austen's novel of the same name, seems to have little in common with *Blood Diamond* (2006). Whilst *Mansfield Park* was screened in 152 cinemas in and took $4,775,847 at the box office, *Blood Diamond* is a journalism thriller which played on 1,920 screens in the US and took $171,342,482 internationally at the box office. Though they both arguably belong to the romantic comedy genre, *Bridget Jones's Diary*—a film adaptation of the British literary phenomenon of the same name, produced by Studio Canal and distributed by Miramax, which took a total of $281,929,795 worldwide at the box office—contrasts starkly with *The Incredible Jessica James*—an American indie film produced by Beachside Films, which premiered at Sundance and was distributed by Netflix.[13] My key contention, however, is that despite their heterogeneity these texts nonetheless draw on, deploy, and (re)produce a set of shared representational tropes associated with the hitherto untheorised figure of the single woman author.

While some scholars have studied the nationally specific character of postfeminism—see for example Justine Ashby (2005) and Sarah Hill (2015b), who make the case for a specifically British form of postfeminism—this thesis is attuned to the ways in which postfeminist ideas circulate across territories and borders. As Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra note, in "either originating in the United States and becoming hits in the United Kingdom or the reverse", a number of texts in the

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[13] As Netflix notoriously does not share viewing figures, it is impossible to compare box office takings with streaming viewership.

"postfeminist canon" can be said to be "transit texts" (2007, 13). Some postfeminist media texts further exhibit a transatlantic character through their funding streams and production companies, or through the presence of an American star in the role of British heroine, such as Renée Zellweger in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Miss Potter*, or Anne Hathaway in *Becoming Jane*. Taking up Tasker and Negra's contention that "Postfeminism is a pervasive phenomenon of both British and American popular culture often marked by a high degree of discursive harmony" (2007, 13), this thesis considers the ways in which the single woman author has become a staple of Anglo-American cinema. Her recurrence in both British and American film, I argue, precisely demonstrates this "high degree of discursive harmony" between both national contexts. I therefore use the term "Anglo-American cinema" to highlight the transnational character of representational tropes and thematic concerns associated with the single woman author.[14]

In the chapters that follow, I describe and analyse these tropes in detail, demonstrating how postfeminist questions of female agency and autonomy circulate around, and are problematised by, the figure of the single woman author. That these particular themes and tropes recur across such diverse generic terrain and industrial provenance, as well as during such an extended time period—from the mid-1990s to the present day—is suggestive of postfeminism's canny adaptability and resilience to change. The key intervention of this thesis lies precisely in this broad sweep across genres and production contexts in Anglo-American cinema, demonstrating not only the cultural significance of this untheorised figure, but also her shifting signification across the period.

Unsurprisingly, given "their primary appeal to female viewers, their concentration on issues relevant to women, and their focus on a female protagonist" (Hollinger 2008, 221), scholarship on postfeminist media culture has often privileged the "chick flick" (See for example Ascheid 2006, Ferriss and Young 2008, Negra 2009, Winch 2013,

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[14] My focus on the Anglo-American context means that texts such as *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) are excluded from my sample. It is likely that the tropes I explore in this thesis recur in some form in Western cinema, but it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this particular project to make such an assessment.

Schreiber 2014). Scholars like Catherine Han have furthermore noted the synergy between postfeminist discourses and the "middlebrow" (2016). Female-centred biopics and adaptations have also been discussed in the context of postfeminism (Polaschek 2013, Cobb 2015). Though they loom less large than ur-texts such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* or *Sex and the City*, crime dramas, horror films, thrillers, and sport films have also been analysed in relation to postfeminism (Thornham 2007, Brundson 2013, Gaine 2013, Fradley 2013, Lindner 2013, Hill 2015a). Few studies, however, track the significance of postfeminism explicitly *across* genres. Cobb's *Adaptation, Authorship and Contemporary Women Filmmakers* (2015) is a notable exception. While they span a range of genres, all the texts in her study are adaptations of books authored by women, directed by women filmmakers, and featuring a woman author character. As Cobb demonstrates, the figure of the woman author is used as a means to reflect on the difficulties of women's "real-world" authorship; in particular, the struggles of the female filmmaker. Like Cobb, I am alive to the urgency of uncovering traces of female authorship. As such, my filmography highlights woman authors in various guises, whether they be directors, screenwriters, or novelists. However, this thesis' corpus is deliberately broader, comprising both adaptations and original screenplays, and films with directors of all genders. The single woman author's recurrent appearance even in films not explicitly "authored" by women is thus suggestive of her ubiquity in popular culture.

This thesis moreover borrows the vocabulary of genre studies (including terms such as "narrative expectations", "conventions", "tropes", or "cycles") to make sense of the film sample.[15] I also draw on Thomas Schatz's conceptualisation of film genre as "both a *static* and a *dynamic* system" (1981, 16, italics original) to think through subtle shifts in the representation of the single woman author. Schatz's work crucially illuminates the ways in which films can deploy "a familiar formula of interrelated narrative and cinematic components that serves to continually reexamine some basic cultural conflict" while also "continually evolving" in line with "changes in cultural attitudes, new influential genre films, the economics of the industry" (1981, 16). Just as genre "codes and conventions change over time according to the

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[15] For accounts of genre studies as a discipline, see Thomas Schatz (1981), Rick Altman (1999), and Barry Keith Grant (2003).

ideological climate of the time" (Hayward 2013, 84), so this thesis interprets shifts in the codes and conventions associated with the single woman author as revealing shifts in the ideological climate of postfeminism. I also find Lauren Berlant's affective approach to genre particularly useful. In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Berlant defines genre as that which provides "an affective expectation of watching something unfold, whether that thing is in life or in art" (6). Berlant also uses the phrase "waning of genre" to characterise a condition whereby "depictions of the good life now appear to mark archaic expectations about having and building a life" (2011, 6). Relatedly, she defines the "impasse" as a "space of time lived without a narrative genre" (Berlant 2011, 199). Berlant furthermore employs the term "genre of living" to refer to the ways in which "affective expectations" structure not just fictional narratives, but also lived experience. To distinguish between these differing uses of "genre", I employ the term "genre" *tout court* to describe the generic affiliation of cultural products such as films or books, and "genre of living" to refer to subjects' affective expectations of what constitutes the good life. To be clear, I am not claiming that texts featuring a single woman author protagonist comprise a "genre." Rather, in drawing on genre studies and affect theory work on genre, this thesis sheds light on the ways in which an otherwise disparate group of texts share particular concerns about female agency as signified by both female authorship and female singleness. In addition, this thesis makes the case that the figure of the single woman author has become particularly important to postfeminist genres of living and to the articulation of the postfeminist good life.

While I demonstrate that the invocation of the single woman author engages certain thematic concerns and representational tropes, I am nonetheless sensitive to genre-specific variation within my film sample. Part of my project then, is to track how in a postfeminist context, the "problem" of female agency is inflected differently in accordance with generic codes. As I argue throughout this thesis, the stakes of female agency register differently in a romcom like *Bridget Jones's Diary* than in a costume drama like *Mansfield Park*—for starters, the contemporary heroine's ability to choose her life partner for herself is never in question. Though my intervention is not in genre studies, this thesis draws on the work of scholars working specifically on the romantic comedy and the costume drama. The contemporary romcom heroine's trajectory must for example be placed in the context of the genre's history, in

particular its roots in 1930s and 1940's romantic comedies in which the happy resolution is frequently associated with "an acceptance of the authority of the male and a rejection of the woman's economic independence" (Neale and Krutnik 1990, 154). In Chapter 3, I draw on Stephen Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990), Virginia Wright Wrexman (1993), Mark Rubinfeld (2001), and Celestino Deleyto (2009) to make sense of the ways in which the single woman author heroine's disavowal of authority or authoriality functions to authenticate patriarchal power.

In the costume drama, on the other hand, pre-feminist historical settings work to create what Antje Ascheid terms "safe rebellions" (2006). Ascheid contends that "in displacing the desire for both gender equality and sexuality onto historical periods commonly associated with overt domination […] contemporary period romances locate gender struggles in the past" (2006). However, in safely transferring feminist work to the pre-feminist past, these films simultaneously engage "a nostalgic sense of eroticism through emphasizing the sensuality of the periodic mise-en-scène and the thrill of forbidden pleasures" (2006). Offering scenarios of "romantic emancipation" as solutions to broader societal issues, costume dramas finally depict "safe rebellions that in no way challenge the contemporary status quo" (Ascheid 2006). Ascheid's "safe rebellions" thus highlights the paradoxes of a genre which both "activate[s] and seemingly reconcile[s] often contradictory narrative trajectories" (2006). In particular, the term illuminates the ways in which the prototypical female protagonist in these texts is "both 'different' (in the context of the historical setting)" and yet "thoroughly recognisable (to today's viewers)", such heroines thus "often seem like time travellers rather than historically authentic figures" (2006). I return to Ascheid's analysis in more detail in Chapter 1, to suggest that in postfeminist media culture both female authorship and female singleness are figured as forms of agency amounting to a "safe rebellion".

Terms such as "heritage films" (Higson 1993), "historical films" (Chapman 2005), "costume dramas" (Pidduck 2004), or "period films" (Vidal 2012) all broadly "describe films whose narrative is set wholly or partly in the past" (Chapman 2005, 2). Ascheid moreover proposes the term "woman's heritage film" to characterise a "particular kind of heritage film that has emerged within the context of postfeminist chick flick/lit culture in the 1990s" (2006). In this thesis, I prioritise the term

"costume film." Like Julianne Pidduck, I invoke "costume" to gesture toward "a refusal of historical or literary authenticity" (2004, 4). Importantly, the word implies "the pleasures and possibilities of masquerade—the construction, constraint and display of the body through clothes" (Pidduck 2004, 4). I am therefore interested in the implicit links between the costume film's connotations of masquerade and postfeminism's own interest in the role that clothing and makeup play in the construction and maintenance of the female self (see for example the trope of the makeover: McRobbie 2004, Gill 2008, Ferriss 2008). As James Chapman notes, "a historical feature film will often have as much to say about the present in which it was made as about the past in which it was set" (2005, 1). My intention is thus also to tease out how the protagonists of *Little Women, Mansfield Park, Becoming Jane* or *Miss Potter* appear to be postfeminist women displaced into the prefeminist past. As Karen Hollinger says of Austen adaptations specifically, "it seems clear that the films do not merely retreat into the past, but rework that past in accordance with contemporary ideas" (2012, 154). My own further contention is that the figure of the single woman author emerges as an important figure through which both the past and the present can be read, and both feminist and postfeminist discourses can be engaged.

A number of texts in this thesis additionally belong to contested categories such as the adaptation, the biopic, and the chick flick. Thomas Leitch has for example sought to theorise the adaptation as a genre (2008), and book-length studies such as Dennis Bingham's *Whose Lives are they Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (2010) and Bronwyn Polaschek's *The Postfeminist Biopic* (2013) suggest a desire to analyse biopics as a group in order to determine shared representational patterns akin to generic codes. Nonetheless, texts in both categories span a range of generic territories and arguably defy categorisation (Hollinger 2012, 147). Likewise, chick flicks "do not clearly align themselves with any particular genre" (Ferriss and Young 2008, 16). I occasionally use the term "chick flick" to differentiate between texts whose primary appeal is imagined (rightly or wrongly) to be to a female audience, from those more ostensibly "masculine" genres. While chick flicks might "be viewed as prime postfeminist media texts" (Ferris and Young 2008, 3), I show how the same postfeminist concerns relating to women's agency and autonomy recur in non-chick flick territory like the thriller. Using these terms is further complicated by their

complex academic histories. Just as using the term "chick flick" in an academic context engages a set of debates relating to its genealogy in the woman's film,[16] so the use of "adaptation" is almost inevitably followed by an assessment of its "fidelity" to its "source" material. In the influential essay, "Beyond Fidelity: A Dialogics of Adaptation" (2000), Robert Stam shows how "the language of criticism dealing with the film adaptation of novels has often been profoundly moralistic, awash in terms such as *infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and desecration*, each carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity" (54, emphasis original). Such language has been critiqued for "quietly reinscrib[ing] the axiomatic superiority of literary art to film" (Stam 2000, 58), as well as for its gendering of the ostensibly authoritative or authentic source text as male (Cobb 2012).

Importantly, this thesis is not an adaptation study; as such, I do not offer in-depth analyses of the interplay between source material and film text of the types offered by Belén Vidal (2012) or Cobb (2015). Where relevant, I recognise particular texts' status as adaptations so that I can draw attention to authorial figures beyond the text; often, the woman author of the source text (See appendix). In much the same way, I draw on biopic criticism to show how real world authors are depicted using the tropes associated with the single woman author, or conversely, how popular ideas about single woman author Austen have filtered into the single woman author as a cinematic figure. In fact, as suggested by my Introduction's opening quotation, Austen occupies a particularly important place in the single woman author imaginary. As I explain in more detail in Chapter 3, Austen emerges as the archetypal single woman author.

Thesis structure

This thesis tracks the figure of the single woman author through textual analysis of Anglo-American film texts released since 1994. In doing so, it identifies four key interrelated representational tropes recurring throughout this film sample. Firstly,

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[16] See notably, *Postmodern Chick Flicks: The Return of the Woman's Film* (Garrett 2007), and *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies* (Ferriss and Young 2008).

authorship and singleness signify as mutually constitutive identities ideally expressive of postfeminist agency. Secondly, authorship functions as an autobiographical outlet allowing for the expression of the single woman subject's innate femininity, in part defusing anxieties about women's professional labour. Thirdly, authorship enables the performance of relational labour which promises to "fix" the single woman's disordered unmarried subjectivity. And, finally, the single woman author's professional and personal success is facilitated by a male mentor in ways which authenticate or naturalise patriarchy.

This thesis is structured around these four tropes. Each chapter begins by highlighting key aspects of the chosen trope. This is then followed by detailed textual analysis of a series of illustrative examples. To draw out the mechanisms underpinning each representational trope, my close reading emphasises patterns relating to narrative structure and characterisation. Where relevant, I analyse formal or aesthetic cinematic elements, such as cinematography, editing, mise-en-scène, lighting, or costume, with a view to uncovering repetitions or motifs existing across the sample. Each chapter also importantly considers examples of notable variation within the trope, thus giving an account of its stability, or lack thereof. My key concern throughout is with forces circulating *within* the text: I am interested in the production, contestation, and evolution of "shared meanings" (Hall 1997) constructed through and around the figure of the single woman author. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider in detail paratextual elements, reception, or audience responses, each chapter does end by considering the broader significance and implications of the trope by proving a "real-world" intertext. This approach means I offer a series of detailed analyses of small—but, I argue, key—moments of a large number of films. Fulfilling Sarah Projansky's call for "both/and" approaches to postfeminist media texts (2007), such a methodology enables me to think through the rich and nuanced ambivalence and ambiguity of my case studies. These discrete close readings and extratextual gestures contribute to painting a bigger picture of postfeminist media culture. Crucially, I show how the repetition of these four tropes serves to naturalise particular regimes of femininity and feminised labour, thus shedding light on the "affective life of postfeminism" (Gill 2018), and the extent to which it functions as an "affective tyranny" (Negra 2009, 140). My interest in subtle affective shifts within these patterns furthermore allows me to give an account of

how these gendered feeling rules have been reproduced, enacted, and contested over the last two decades, and, likewise, how Anglo-American society's shared meanings around gender, labour, and agency have evolved during this period.

Chapter 1, "The Single Woman Author as Site of Postfeminist Agency" begins by demonstrating how films such as *Little Women, How to Make an American Quilt, Mansfield Park, Bridget Jones's Diary, Down with Love, Miss Potter,* and *Blood Dimond* mobilise both female singleness and female authorship's connotations of self-determination and autonomy. Through her recurrent signification as a "can do girl" (Harris 2004) whose singleness and authoriality are mutually constitutive, the single woman author emerges as an overdetermined site of "unruly" feminist-inflected agency. However, I also show that these feminist signifiers exist alongside conservative narrative trajectories which attempt to contain, contextualise, or frame the oppositional potential of this figure so that her (proto)feminism is refigured as an ambiguous "safe rebellion" (Ascheid 2006). Demonstrating the ways in which the single woman author embodies a form of feminine power which ultimately leaves undisturbed patriarchal authority, I establish that the figure functions as an overdetermined locus of postfeminist agency across film genres. The final section of this chapter then tracks the ways in which recent films both invoke and complicate this particular trope. With reference to texts such as *The Help*, *Girl Most Likely*, *In a World…*, *Adult World*, *Obvious Child*, *Ricki and the Flash*, and *Their Finest* I argue that recent films call into question discourses of "choice" which underpin meritocratic narratives of "agency."

The following chapter, "The Single Woman Author's Body of Work", explores the presumed connection between the single woman author's corporeality and her authorial corpus. I show how in *Possession, Music and Lyrics, Down with Love, Becoming Jane*, and *Begin Again,* the heroine's text is shaped by her embodied experiences. Offering a slight variation on the trope, *Girl, Interrupted, Bridget Jones, Never Been Kissed,* and *Eat Pray Love* on the other hand depict the single woman author's embodied experiences as (re)shaped by her authorship. The former scenario, I suggest, is consistent with postfeminist rhetoric encouraging women to perform work that is "expressive of women's essential femininity" (Negra 2009, 87), while the latter offers a means of complying with a neoliberal imperative for continuous

self-improvement. Importantly, both iterations of the trope exemplify the ways in which postfeminism and neoliberalism understand autobiographical authorship as an appropriate form of gendered labour for the single woman subject. In the final section, I consider how recent texts such as *The Secret Life of Bees, Easy A,* and *Welcome to Me* problematise both the link between corporeality/corpus and the neoliberal fallacies which continuously interpellate the postfeminist female subject to work on herself.

The third chapter, "The Single Woman Author's Work as Relational Gateway", turns its attention to the ways in which heterosexual romantic relationships are represented as entangled with authorship. Coining the term "relational gateway", I show how authorship is imagined as compensating for, or remedying, the single woman's ostensibly disordered singleness. Offering close readings of *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999)*, Never Been Kissed, Bridget Jones's Diary, Van Wilder: Party Liaison, Confessions of a Shopaholic,* and *Trainwreck* (2015), I show how female authorship is often deployed to authenticate patriarchal authority through what I term the "text of contrition". Referencing *The Jane Austen Book Club, Freedom Writers* (2007), and *The Help,* I then demonstrate that the single woman author's work is understood to produce affective connections amongst those who consume her texts through the medium of "intimate publics" (Berlant 2008). In both cases, I argue, authorship emerges as an ideal form of gendered labour for the single woman subject, thus assuaging anxieties relating to the figure of the female author as an unmarried working woman. In the final section of this chapter, I examine how recent texts like *Obvious Child, The Incredible Jessica James,* and *Their Finest* frustrate these tropes and offer revisions to what it means for gendered subjects to perform "romantic" gestures in twenty-first century society.

The final case study chapter, "Male Mentoring and the Single Woman Author", reprises the theme of relationships to consider the recurrent pairing of the single woman author with an older, male, authority figure such as a father or lover, whose controlling mentorship frames her authorial project. I suggest that in costume dramas such as *Little Women, Mansfield Park,* or *Becoming Jane,* the male mentor is usually figured as a benevolent force in his mentee's life, while journalism thrillers such as *The Life of David Gale, Blood Diamond,* and *State of Play* emphasise the mentor as

working to improve society more broadly. In these early texts, the male mentor's controlling behaviour is imagined to enable or facilitate the single woman author's personal and professional success, working, in turn, to naturalise and authenticate an unequal, gendered circulation of power, and to normalise scenarios of abuse. In recent films including *Albatross*, *Girl Most Likely*, *Not Another Happy Ending*, *Adult World*, *In A World…*, *The Girl in the Book*, *One More Time*, and *Their Finest*, however, the trope registers an affective shift. I show how, in refusing to smooth over the consequences of the male mentor's abuse, these texts thus increasingly characterise mentoring as scenarios of "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) which simultaneously enable and disable the fulfilment of the single woman author mentee.

Through these four tropes, this thesis contends, authoriality is imagined as an ideal form of labour for the single woman subject. Though both female singleness and female authorship are recurrently mobilised as signifiers of female agency with the potential to upend the traditionally gendered distribution of power, this thesis reveals how under postfeminism, the subject position of the single woman author becomes a desirable agentic subjectivity precisely because it leaves undisturbed hegemonic hierarchies of gender. The treatment of the single woman author furthermore reveals that feminism remains a contested force throughout the period 1994 to the present, even though the nature of this contestation is both ambivalent and ever-shifting. Recent texts' adjustment of the representational tropes associated with the single woman author marks a shift not only in the representation of this figure, but in postfeminist media culture more broadly. Recent films, then, demonstrate the filtering of feminist critiques of patriarchal structures into popular culture. However, at the same time, they also demonstrate the continued resilience of postfeminism and its ongoing ability to take account of feminism.

Locating the author of the thesis

I still remember the first time I watched *Little Women*. Growing up white, straight, middle class and generally privileged, I saw in Jo a template for who I wanted to be when I grew up. Blissfully unaware of the realities of precarious creative labour, I understood writing as containing a cluster of tantalising promises: self-actualisation, freedom from the mundanity of office work, but most of all, romance. I saw a

"bohemian" lifestyle I could aspire to, an ambition made legitimate through its endless repetition as I rewound the VHS tape and started the film over. As I think about this girl, the teenager she became, and the researcher she would grow into, I see a lineage of bookish women, with journals, quills, typewriters, computers, and laptops, endlessly—but precariously—at work on my film and TV screens.

As it turns out, writing a PhD thesis is just as entangled with fantasies of authorship. Doctoral researchers themselves are precarious subjects caught in cruel neoliberal narratives of "passionate work" (McRobbie 2016). When I place my laptop by the window, write in cafés, or sit in the grass reading and sipping an iced latte, I am self-consciously performing my own authorship. When I relentlessly photograph and document the researcher "lifestyle" on social media, I am complicit in the fetishization of precarious creative work in much the same way as my case studies. And in doing so, I erase the very real and painful struggle of academic labour. As I find myself uncomfortably enacting the very iconography I critique, it seems to me there is something ironic and untenable about my project and my positioning. As a feminist scholar, I believe it is crucial to acknowledge, and critically reflect upon, my own stake in this project. Just as Bonnie Dow argues that *Prime-Time Feminism* (1996) is in part an "attempt to dissect my own pleasures and interests" (xii-xiii), so this thesis is a means of revisiting my favourite texts, and with them, the genealogy of my writerly ambitions. My own authorship is revisionary in nature: the act of re-viewing these texts is crucial, as I increasingly see them as the site of my education in postfeminism. Through this project, I not only trace the trajectory of pernicious ideas about gendered labour, but I also hope to *re*write them, to revise my own assumptions, to check my own privilege, one single woman author at a time.

Chapter 1:
The Single Woman Author as Site of Postfeminist Agency

Introduction

In *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), the titular heroine (Renée Zellweger) quits her publishing job, declaring to her boss and former lover Daniel Cleaver (Hugh Grant), "if staying here means working within ten yards of you, frankly, I'd rather have a job wiping Saddam Hussein's arse." Just as the film cuts away from Bridget to her sniggering co-workers, the Aretha Franklin song "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" (1968) starts to play. Invoking the feminist connotations of the song lyrics, this scene characterises Bridget's dramatic resignation as a moment of female empowerment. Not only is Bridget established here as an autonomous subject demanding "respect", but her actions threaten the power traditionally held by the white male subject, Daniel. Likewise, when rebellious teenager Kat Stratford (Julia Stiles) challenges the masculine bias of her school's English curriculum in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), when a young Jane Austen (Anne Hathaway) seizes a bat and joins in an all-male cricket match in *Becoming Jane* (2007), or when WWII columnist Juliet Ashton (Lily James) boldly proposes marriage to Dawsey Adams (Michiel Huisman) in *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (2018), it is clear that the single woman author is recurrently figured as a self-determining heroine whose agency has the potential to upend gendered power relations. Such moments in part mobilise the feminist connotations of the identities "single woman" and "woman author" which I described in the Literature Review. However, this signification is deployed in complex and often contradictory ways, so that the single woman author's feminist-inflected acts occur within the context of conservative narrative trajectories and strategic disavowals attempting to contain her agency. In this chapter, I analyse the particularly bounded ways in which the single woman author is figured as a "girl power" subject, arguing that she emerges as an ideal site for the enactment of postfeminist agency. Indeed, through discursive movements which simultaneously invoke feminist discourses while also repudiating them, these texts

engage a set of sophisticated recuperative manoeuvres associated with postfeminism (McRobbie 2004).

In the first part of this chapter, I place these recuperative movements in the context of the costume film. Using Antje Ascheid's concept of the "safe rebellion", I show how texts like *Little Women* (1994), *Mansfield Park* (1999), *Miss Potter* (2006)*,* and *Becoming Jane* simultaneously foreground their protagonists' protofeminist disruptiveness and emphasise romantic self-fulfilment. Turning to thrillers such as *The Life of David Gale* (2003), *Blood Diamond* (2006) and *State of Play* (2009) and chick flicks like *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995), *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and *Down with Love* (2003), I explore how the heroine serves to problematise anxieties about working women's ability to "have it all." Demonstrating the ways in which the single woman author embodies a form of feminine power which ultimately leaves undisturbed patriarchal authority, I establish that the figure functions as an overdetermined locus of postfeminist agency across film genres. The final section of this chapter then tracks the ways in which recent films bargain with this particular trope. With reference to texts such as *The Help* (2011), *Girl Most Likely* (2012), *In a World…* (2013), *Adult World* (2013), and *Obvious Child* (2014), *Ricki and the Flash* (2015), and *Their Finest* (2016) I argue that recent films call into question the very discourses of "agency" and "choice" which underpin the postfeminist sensibility.

Feminine self-determination as "safe rebellion"

In this section, I contend that the characterisation of the single woman author as a signifier of postfeminist agency is most obviously marked in the costume film, in which the heroine's independent mindset chafes against historical convention while appealing to contemporary sensibilities. In texts such as *Little Women*, *Mansfield Park*, *Miss Potter,* or *Becoming Jane,* the single woman author is repeatedly characterised in terms of her early reluctance to marry and/or her rejection of an advantageous marriage proposal; her vocation to pursue professional authorship which is presented as an alternative to marriage; and her rebellious delight in masculine-coded activities such as sports. These displays of agency are perceived by her contemporaries as in some way deviant or disruptive, and therefore as posing a protofeminist threat to historicised social norms. However, I argue that the treatment

of the heroine's agency is far from straightforward; indeed, it is a site of contradictions and ambiguity. Drawing on Ascheid, I notably show how locating the heroine in a historical context "commonly associated with overt domination" places "gender struggles in the past", and how costume dramas invoke scenarios of "romantic emancipation" as solutions to broader societal issues (2006). These two sleights of hand, I suggest, strategically work to "post" the heroine's (proto)feminism as a form of political activism.

In the American civil war era-set *Little Women*, for example, the depiction of aspiring sensation novelist Jo (Winona Ryder) is reminiscent of Gilbert and Gubar's characterisation of the female author as "anomalous […] a freakish outsider" (2000, 48). Unlike her sisters Meg (Trini Alvarado), Beth (Clare Danes), and Amy (Kristen Dunst), Jo slouches at the breakfast table, is quick to anger, uses "slang", cuts her hair short for money, and shows little interest in marriage ("why must we marry at all?" she asks). In an early scene, she confesses to Beth: "truly, I don't know if I could ever be good like Marmee [their mother]. I rather crave violence. If only I could be like Father and go to war and stand up to the lions of injustice. […] I want to do something different." Through these kinds of exchanges, the film indicates that Jo struggles to conform to, and in fact wishes to transcend, the expectations of feminine "goodness" embodied by Beth as the "angel of the house". The film moreover connects Jo's disruption of gender roles to her status as avid producer and consumer of novels. Aunt March (Mary Wickes)—whose favoured reading material deals with the immateriality of the soul—looks down upon Jo's interest in novels, declaring: "this one has entirely ruined her disposition with books." Aunt March's censure evokes the eighteenth and nineteenth century moral panics around women's reading, and in particular, regarding novels' suitability as reading material for young women. In the Victorian era, women's reading became "a site on which one may see a variety of cultural and sexual anxieties displayed" (Flint 1993, 22). Debates about the novel as form are indeed indicative of broader societal anxieties regarding "unregulated social and economic forces, and the erosion of established hierarchies of value and authority" (Clery 1995, 88). In this period, reading was figured as a potentially seditious activity providing to women an "indirect, even an only half conscious, language for appeal, complaint or rebellion" (Pearson 1999, 93). With the "period's constant elision of textuality and sexuality", this potential seditiousness was

displaced onto the female body, so that women's reading was "repeatedly figured as a sexual act or seen to reveal their sexual nature" (Pearson 1999, 87). No wonder then, that Aunt March condemns Jo's reading as "ruining" her marriage prospects.

Just as Jo's novel-reading is figured as transgressive, so is her novel-writing, which requires her to "cross-dress" in order to occupy the male identity of author. She writes stories full of "murder and gore" which deliberately differ from her confined feminine existence ("the first rule of writing," she proclaims, "is never write what you know!"), publishes under a male pseudonym ("Joseph March"), and directs plays while dressed in male attire. When writing alone in her garret, her red velvet cap signifies her affectation of maleness deemed essential to her embodying of authoriality. Jo's pursuit of professional authorship is also framed as a potential alternative to marriage. "Wait till I'm a writer, I'll buy you the best piano in all creation," she tells Beth. When her Amy suggests that the piano might be more normatively acquired by marrying into wealth, Jo retorts: "I wouldn't marry for the money. What if his business goes bust? Besides, down at *The Eagle* they pay $5 for each story they print. Well—I have ten stories in my head right now!" Unlike marriage, commercial authorship is envisaged by Jo as a reliable and autonomous source of income. When she sells her short stories "The Daily Volcano" and "The Sinner's Corpse" to a newspaper, Jo observes that her fee will "buy a new coat for Beth", suggesting that her participation in paid labour enables her to take on the masculine role of provider for her family. In figuring Jo as somehow masculine, the film nods to the history of women writers using male pseudonyms for publication. Importantly, such a disruption of normative femininity also offers up a potential queer reading, in which Jo's singleness might also be read as a rejection of compulsory heterosexuality.

Implicit in Jo's yearning to "do something different" is a critique of the limitations of historicised feminine conduct and its gendering of agency as male. It is worth noting, however, that this particular adaptation of *Little Women* was released in 1994 in the midst of emerging "girl power" discourses celebrating young women's agency; such a context works to reconfigure Jo's rebelliousness as a particularly palatable form of "deviance." As much as Jo violates nineteenth century norms of femininity, she complies with twentieth century expectations: her slang is relatively tame ("awful",

"scoundrel"), her short hair is nonetheless feminine, and her reluctance to marry eventually cast aside. In this way, Jo is "both 'different' (in the context of the historical setting)" and yet "thoroughly recognisable (to today's viewers)" (Ascheid 2006). As I argue below in more detail, the queer potential of the heroine's singleness is moreover recuperated through the suggestion that it is not marriage—or indeed the patriarchal implications of heteronormative marriage—which the heroine rejects, but the individual suitor himself. In short, Jo's protofeminist subjectivity is particularly ripe for postfeminist appropriation.

Jane Austen's meek heroine Fanny Price is reinvented as a similarly headstrong girl power figure in *Mansfield Park*. In the film, Fanny (Frances O'Connor) owes much to *Pride and Prejudice*'s (Austen 1813) ironic protagonist Elizabeth Bennet, *Northanger Abbey*'s (Austen 1817) Catherine Morland, and indeed to Austen herself. Throughout the film, Fanny uses authorship as a means of escape. When growing up in Portsmouth, she entertains her younger sister Suzy (Talya Gordon) with escapist tales filled with swooning and madness which make the hardships of poverty more bearable. Staying with rich but cold relatives at Mansfield, she finds refuge from loneliness by continuing these stories, and, later, chronicling the history of England and bemoaning its retrograde gender politics: "The men all good for nothing and hardly any women at all!" Like Jo, Fanny's interest in literature is linked to her marriage prospects (or lack thereof). Connecting Fanny's act of autonomous choosing (she has refused to marry an eligible suitor) to her appetite for reading, her formidable uncle Sir Thomas (Harold Pinter) remarks "you read too many novels, girl." In such a context, Fanny's reading and writing is more than a mere coping mechanism; rather, it signifies a subversive subjectivity. Importantly, Fanny's early writings borrow from Austen's own juvenilia, in particular her epistolary work "Love and Freindship" (completed 1790), and her satire of English history, "The History of England" (completed 1791). The line "the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention" is lifted from *Northanger Abbey,* in which the young heroine is an avid reader of Gothic novels. Austen's "History of England" is furthermore notable for its inversion of the "conventional Whig narrative, which interpreted English history as a gradual march towards increased liberty and as a progressive defeat of absolutism" (Murray and Doody

1993, 328). In devoting several early scenes to its composition, *Mansfield Park* works to establish Fanny as an Austen-proxy with a gift for ironic social commentary. As I suggested in my Introduction, Austen herself is imagined as a doubly entangled figure, an idealised signifier of "female authority and agency that is both feminine and feminist" (Cobb 2015 136). In conflating Fanny with Austen, then, the film characterises the former as a particularly postfeminist figure.[1]

Feminised literature also provides a metaphorical escape through Fanny's horse, a mare significantly named "Mrs Shakespeare." When riding Mrs Shakespeare, Fanny is able to elude the control of her uncle Sir Thomas, who closely monitors her behaviour. As the film makes clear, Sir Thomas' patriarchal gaze restricts Fanny's movements. Catching Fanny as she runs down the stairs to the stables, the camera dizzily pans 180 degrees to align itself with the movement of her uncle's gaze. Fanny finds herself effectively stilled into female passivity by his stern look and rebuke, "Fanny Price, will you please try to act with some decorum!" She curtsies and walks away slowly. The film then cuts to a hand-held shot of Fanny running after Edmund (Johnny Lee Miller) outside the house, creating the impression that she moves too fast to be captured on film. Fanny then drops her riding jacket, and turning to pick it up, is once again "caught" misbehaving by her uncle, pictured from a low angle shot, literally looking down upon her. She is once again stilled by his gaze and walks away slowly. That the camera is now stationary adds to the sense of stillness, and contrasts starkly with the previous hand-held shot. Riding Mrs Shakespeare, then, provides her with a means of escaping this constant surveillance by escaping the house itself: "Mrs Shakespeare… she's my refuge", she tells Edmund. This scene, I argue, captures the plight of the nineteenth century female author, who, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, was "in some sense imprisoned in men's houses" (2000, 83). "Figuratively, such women were […] locked into male texts", experiencing an "education in docility, submissiveness, selflessness", in other words, "learning to become a beautiful object" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 83, 54).

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[1] I consider the implications of the recurrent conflation of the single woman author with her creations in detail in Chapter 3.

The cinematography thus evokes Fanny's metaphorical imprisonment inside houses owned by her male relatives and her status as an object of the male gaze; a gaze seeking to turn her into "beautiful object" devoid of subjectivity, agency, or movement. Such a "stilling" attempts to turn the energetic Fanny into a compliantly feminine, slow-moving tableau. That Mrs Shakespeare is associated with motion is therefore crucial; it is at odds with Fanny's education in stillness and passivity [See Fig. 8]. Through horse-riding, Fanny transcends the status of object, into that of subject. The contrast between outdoor motion and indoor stillness is key here; when indoors, single woman authors like Fanny, Jo, and Jane are repeatedly framed in doorways and windows [See Figs. 6 and 7]. This framing is central to the aesthetics of the costume film: as Julianne Pidduck argues, "the woman at the window captures a particular quality of feminine stillness, constraint and longing that runs through 90s film and television adaptations of Jane Austen's novels" (2004, 25). This mise-en-scène, she contends, "encapsulates a gendered structure of feeling at work in Austen and in costume drama more generally" (2004, 26). While these films orchestrate "a sumptuous experience of gracious nineteenth century living," on the other hand "this panoply of detail also at times evokes the claustrophobic weight of history, oppressive patriarchal laws of inheritance, and the strict codes of comportment that Austen at once problematises and upholds" (Pidduck 2004, 29).

Figure 6: Aesthetic framing in doorways in Becoming Jane

Figure 7: Aesthetic framing in windows in Becoming Jane

In much the same way, in *Little Women* and *Becoming Jane*, Jo and Jane's bold participation in sports suggest their rejection of female passivity. Jo thus delights in fast-paced ice skating with her male friend Laurie (Christian Bale), her sister's accident testifying to the dangerous nature of such an undertaking. *Becoming Jane* meanwhile sees its heroine participate in an all-male cricket match, her mastery of the cricket bat an early indication of her ability to wield phallic objects and succeed in a male-dominated field (quite literally) despite public outcry [See Fig. 9]. As Leslie Heywood (2007), Katharina Lindner (2013), and Sarah Hill (2015) have shown, the female athlete is an ideal vehicle for narratives of "can do" agency and female ambition. Intertwining neoliberal and postfeminist discourses are thus "variously inscribed on and embodied by the figure of the female athlete" (Lindner 2013, 238), so that she becomes the "perfect representative agency for this idea of success, the 'can do' mapped directly onto her biceps" (Heywood 2007, 104). Through their historicised sporting prowesses in masculine sports, then, Jo, Fanny, and Jane are characterised as empowered "can do" girls. Figuring the historicised feminine subject as a quasi-contemporary "can do girl" importantly reinforces the sense of these heroines as "time travellers" (Ascheid 2006).

Figure 8: Fanny delights in riding Mrs Shakespeare in Mansfield Park

Figure 9: Jane joins in the male-only cricket match in Becoming Jane

Like Fanny, *Miss Potter*'s heroine is an independently minded young woman. Beatrix (Renée Zellweger) for instance remarks to her mother that "one day I shall make enough money to buy my own clothes. I'm far too old to be living off the generosity of my father." For her, the ability to purchase clothes with money earned through the sale of her children's books signifies not just financial independence, but indeed the right to self-determination as an unmarried woman. In fact, it is Beatrix's singleness (her freedom from demanding domestic obligations) which means she is free to pursue professional authorship, and, by the same token, her success as a commercial author means she is at liberty *not* to marry. In other words, female authorship and female singleness signify as mutually constitutive identities which simultaneously enable and express Beatrix's agency. Her aspiration for autonomy is eventually realised as she uses her considerable new fortune to buy a property in the Lake District. The move to "rooms of her own" enables her to live an independent

life, finally free from her mother's interference. In striking postfeminist and neoliberal terms, Beatrix's engagement in paid work enables her participation in consumer culture, which in turn yields independence and self-realisation. Crucially, Beatrix's disruption of gendered and classed norms in pursuing paid work and refusing eligible suitors serves an otherwise deeply conservative political agenda. By the end of the film, her hard-earned cash is used to "save" the Lake District from the threat of industrialisation. This literal investment into the nostalgic pastoral celebrates a rural disconnect from, and a misremembering of, urban modernity; ironically the very modernity which made her purchase of the land possible through the printing of her books.

The fact that Beatrix's desire for autonomy specifically comes into conflict with maternal authority is reminiscent of the trope Kathleen Rowe Karlyn describes in *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers: Redefining Feminism on Screen* (2011). Writing about *Titanic*'s (1997) generational mother/daughter conflict, Karlyn asks: "what does it mean on the brink of the millennium for girls to see feminism in terms of defying one's mother?" (2011, 40). Karlyn observes that "Rose's [Kate Winslet] vibrant, unruly independence" emerges *through* the repudiation of her mother (2011, 4). Importantly, *Titanic*'s failure to "extend to the mother its analysis of and sympathy for women's suffering under patriarchy" compromises "The film's gestures toward feminism" (Karlyn 2011, 40-43). Indeed, the text so "powerfully condenses its critique of class on" the figure of the mother "that the reasons for her own suffering as a woman become lost" (Karlyn 2011, 40). The same logic, I argue, applies to *Miss Potter* which similarly fails to connect the heroine's "suffering under patriarchy" to her mother's. In short, the heroine refuses to be figured as her mother's sister. The daughter's disavowal of the mother not only buys into the oft-critiqued "wave metaphor", but in refusing to recognise her mother as a woman engaged in her own set of gender struggles, Beatrix's generational rejection also undermines the collectivist dimension of feminism.

Figure 10: Millie (left) and Beatrix (right) discuss the benefits of singleness for women in Miss Potter

Beatrix's friendship with "tradespeople" such as Norman Warne (Ewan McGregor) and his sister Millie Warne (Emily Watson) is deemed especially shocking by her snobbish mother. Indeed, her friendship with Millie is coded as particularly unruly. In one key scene, Millie and Beatrix are pictured in medium shot, side by side, as they stroll through an art gallery [See Fig. 10]. Millie's costume (buttoned shirt, tie and jacket) as well as her physical dominance in the frame (she is taller and broader than Beatrix) codes her as masculine and therefore deviating from conventional femininity. As they walk and talk, the film cuts to a shot of a painting in the gallery, "The Rape of Europa", by Jacopo Amigoni (ca. 1729) [See Fig. 11] and returns to another medium shot of the two women. All the while, Millie engages in "outrageous" conversation: "Men are boors. They're useful for only two things in life: financial support and procreation. Ah, but the price. [...] Domestic enslavement. Childbirth. Terrifying. No, unmarried women have a better life. I swear it's true. No houses, no babies, no husbands demanding things all the time." The painting here functions as a cautionary tale adding weight to Millie's argument. The scene depicts Europa, decorating a delicate, gentle-seeming bull with garlands of flowers; a peaceful tableau occurring moments before her abduction by Zeus/Jupiter who has metamorphosed into a bull as part of a stratagem to lure Europa. Though the bull may appear to be gentle, he is really a "boor" plotting to commit an act of sexual violence. That the film cuts to the painting after the words "domestic enslavement"

highlights that Zeus himself traps Europa into the "domestic enslavement" of marriage.

Figure 11: "The Rape of Europa" by Jacopo Amigoni (ca. 1729)

In invoking the threat of sexual violence, the burden of unpaid domestic labour, and the dangers of childbirth deemed inherent to marriage, as well as the relative safety and liberty of unmarried women, *Miss Potter* mobilises female singleness as an oppositional subjectivity. *Mansfield Park* makes a similar thematic link between marriage and slavery. Fanny's first refusal of Henry Crawford (Alessandro Nivola), "I will not be sold off like one of your slaves" frames the marriage market as a slave auction. While this equivalence is deeply problematic in its elision of the privileges of whiteness, it is certainly in line with second-wave feminist thought. What *Miss Potter* fails to acknowledge, of course, is that a woman's ability to evade "domestic enslavement" by remaining single is only made possible by significant class and racial privilege. Fanny is not quite so fortunate, as her refusal of Henry Crawford results in her being sent home to Portsmouth and being made painfully aware of the precariousness of her financial status. Despite their historical proximity to first-wave feminism, both Millie and Fanny's rhetoric anachronistically owes more to second-

wave feminist critiques of marriage (see Dixon 1969, Millet 1970, Cronan 1970) than to the first-wave's focus on legal rights relating to property or suffrage.

However, in both films, romance plays a key role in rehabilitating heterosexual marriage, and with it, authenticating patriarchal authority. Despite their passionate critiques of marriage, both Fanny and Beatrix end up married. In fact, when Beatrix nervously breaks the news of her engagement to Millie, the latter retracts her criticism of matrimony altogether: "Beatrix, don't be a fool. Marry him. Tomorrow. Don't waste a moment. How could you hesitate? [...] if someone came along who loved me and whom I loved, I would trample my mother." When asked, "But what about all the blessings of being alone?", Millie revokes her previous praise of single life: "Hogwash. What else is a woman on her own supposed to say?" In explicitly disavowing its own feminist rhetoric, *Miss Potter* enacts the postfeminist double entanglement (McRobbie 2004). The film manages this ostensible incoherence by locating sexism not in patriarchy or marriage, but in individually "bad" patriarchs or marriages. In a montage depicting the series of supposedly eligible bachelors of rank and family introduced to Beatrix, each of the three suitors is depicted as ludicrous in some way (clothing, behaviour, speech). The suitor montage is anaphoric in structure, with the same music, setting (a dark, cluttered, drawing room), shot compositions and camera movements (camera panning from right to left, from a mid-shot of Helen and Beatrix seated side by side, to a mid-shot of a suitor and his mother) repeated three times [See Figs. 12, 13, 14]. This repetition conveys Beatrix's boredom at being introduced to a seemingly endless string of unattractive men. The stylised oppressiveness of the montage contrasts starkly with the airy and naturalistic aesthetics of the previous scene, in which Beatrix has tea with Norman, Millie and their mother in a garden. The absence of non-diegetic music contributes to the "naturalistic" feel of the sequence. The high key lighting, lush foliage, and free-flowing conversation furthermore suggest the Warne family, and Norman in particular, are warm, friendly and unaffected. As such, Norman emerges as the only truly eligible bachelor of the film [See Fig. 15].

Figure 12: Miss Potter'*s series of unsuitable suitors (1)*

Figure 13: Miss Potter's *series of unsuitable suitors (2)*

Figure 14: Miss Potter's *series of unsuitable suitors (3)*

Figure 15: Norman emerges as the only truly eligible bachelor in Miss Potter

Similarly, in both *Little Women* and *Mansfield Park,* the heroine rebels against social mores through her initial refusal of an advantageous offer of marriage, but eventually builds an equal romantic partnership with a hero, whom, like her, appears to be a twentieth century character "displaced into the historical past" (Ascheid 2006). In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny's refusal of Henry Crawford is figured as "an act of feminist resistance against marriage as a meal ticket" (Ascheid 2006). As Ascheid notes, in the original Austen novel, Fanny's refusal is much less romantic, and stems instead from her "incapacity to commit herself to someone whom she suspects to be of low moral character" (2006). As such, the film figures Fanny's "resistance to marrying a man she does not love [….] as reflecting the attitude of a protofeminist humanitarian, rather than that of the righteous and prudish moralist the novel celebrates" (Ascheid 2006). In depicting refusals of marriage as key moments of "feminist" agency, these texts suggest that securing individual women's right to heterosexual romance and guaranteeing the autonomy of choice regarding one's life partner, are the overarching goals of feminism. As I go on to show in depth in Chapter 4, "good" patriarchs, who, like Professor Bhaer (Gabriel Byrne) in *Little Women*, Edmund in *Mansfield Park*, and Norman in *Miss Potter* take on the role of enabling mentor, are essential to both the personal and professional flourishing of the single woman author heroine. In these texts, a happy ending is predicated not just on heterosexual coupling, but also on professional success, recurrently signified by publication. Concerned with "having it all", such texts "suggest that women's self-realization comes from a combination of romantic fulfillment and professional, preferably artistic, success" (Ascheid 2006). Exemplary of this trend, *Little Women* concludes with a typically postfeminist entanglement of romance and professional success encapsulated in the

final scene in which "Bhaer's delivery of the novel is also the novel's delivery of Bhaer to Jo. Authorship has brought her romance and romance has brought her authorship" (Cobb 2015, 90).

Like *Little Women, Mansfield Park,* and *Miss Potter*, *Becoming Jane* characterises its protagonist's agency as socially disruptive. The film opens with a series of establishing shots, evoking a peaceful, pastoral setting: a ticking clock showing the time, 6:14 in the morning, a dripping pipe, a slow-moving stream, a sow with its litter of suckling piglets, various members of the household asleep. Intercut between these shots are glimpses of a young Jane struggling to find the right turn of phrase while writing what will turn out to be a speech celebrating the engagement of her beloved sister, Cassandra (Anna Maxwell Martin). Having finally found the right words, Jane celebrates her successful composition by loudly playing on the pianoforte. Through the use of rhyming before/after shots, the sudden intrusion of music is shown to disrupt the household, the rules of propriety, and indeed nature itself. A maid drops a jug of water down the stairs, Cassandra and her fiancé run into each other on the landing in their bed clothes, and, startled, the piglets interrupt their feeding. In this way, Jane's authorship is figured as inherently transgressive. Such transgressiveness, the film suggests, is "a problem to be solved by marriage" (Govender 2008, 92-93). Indeed, the film links explicitly links Jane's authorship to her status as a single woman through its first line of dialogue: "That girl needs a husband!" exclaims Mrs Austen (Julie Walters) displeased with her daughter's indecorous waking of the household. In the eyes of her mother, Jane's singleness and authorship signify an *un*becoming, disordered subjectivity which needs be normalised by patriarchal authority. The end of the title sequence further hints at Jane's deviant status. As the Austens walk from the parsonage to call on Lady Gresham (Maggie Smith), Jane is pictured trailing behind the rest of the group—her placement within the frame signalling her eccentricity. She throws a pebble into the pond, causing ripples in its calm waters, the composition suggesting that Jane herself will cause ripples in Steventon's polite society [See Fig. 16].

As much as Jane's disruptiveness is a source of spectatorial delight in this early scene, her failure to conform is also a source of anxiety as the narrative unfolds. In the scene in which Jane visits Gothic "authoress" Mrs Radcliffe (Helen McCrory)

Becoming Jane betrays an ambivalence toward the figure of the working woman, and scepticism regarding the possibility of women satisfactorily balancing family life with paid work. Described as something of a recluse, Mrs Radcliffe appears subdued, and the conversation stilted. When Jane observes that Mrs Radcliffe's "imagination has brought [her] independence", the latter replies: "at a cost. To myself and to my husband. Poor William. To have a wife who had a mind is considered not quite proper. To have a wife with a literary reputation: nothing short of scandalous." At this point, the film cuts to a close-up of Jane, looking increasingly anxious, she turns her head to the right, toward where Tom Lefroy (James McAvoy), and Mr Radcliffe (Glenn Gannon) are sitting. Beginning to understand the impact of her desired profession on the man she intends to marry, she asks, "but it must be possible? To live as both wife and author?" To which Mrs Radcliffe responds, "Oh I think so," adding after a beat: "Though never easy." The sequence ends with a long low angle shot of Mrs Radcliffe, standing at the top of a decrepit and dusty staircase. In this way, the film visualises the paradoxical cost of Mrs Radcliffe's success: despite her significant income, her lodgings appear less than prosperous, and she must live at a distance from polite society. Crucially, though, it is her husband who is imagined to bear the burden of her unruliness and the censure of her scandalous profession. The film's ambiguity about whether Mrs Radcliffe has found true happiness and fulfilment as both author and wife poses the question of whether authorship and marriage are mutually exclusive for women, and more broadly, what costs are associated with women's entry into paid work.

Figure 16: Composition highlights Jane's eccentricity and the ripples she will cause in Becoming Jane

The struggle to "have it all"

While they operate in very different generic terrains and are set over a century after *Little Women, Mansfield Park* or *Becoming Jane,* thrillers such as *The Life of David Gale*, *Blood Diamond,* and *State of Play* similarly emphasise the single woman author as a signifier of problematic female agency. Though these films take for granted women's access to the workplace, the figure of the single woman author as professional nevertheless uncovers contemporary anxieties to do with what kind of work is deemed appropriate for women, and in which configuration. Like Diane Negra, I am concerned here with "mapping the paradoxes which so often emerge in postfeminist culture" (2009, 6). For example, Negra notes, "certain female job roles have become overrepresented and fetishized even as postfeminist culture exhibits a persistent distrust of the 'working woman'" (2009, 6). Authorship, this thesis contends, is one such profession which has become "overrepresented and fetishized" even though, the (single) woman author simultaneously elicits suspicion.

The Life of David Gale is for example suggestive of the professional woman's potential to disturb the traditional distribution of power along gender lines. The film indeed upends the male boss/female intern dynamic, as investigative journalist Bitsey Bloom (Kate Winslet) is assisted by the young and inexperienced Zach (Gabriel Mann). *State of Play* meanwhile characterises feminised journalistic forms such as blogging as a threat to newspaper reporting. Youthful blogger Della Frye (Rachel McAdams) thus represents the medium which threatens the integrity of ageing old school journalism (and its "old boys" network) as embodied by Cal McAffrey (Russell Crowe). While Della is "cheap", "hungry", and able to "churn out copy every hour", Cal is "overfed", "expensive", and "take[s] way too long", a binary visualised through the contrast between Rachel McAdam's slender frame and Russell Crowe's bulky body. A running joke throughout the film is that Della never has a pen when she needs to take notes. Implicit in Della's immaterial digital authorship is the eschewing of the pen as metaphorical penis (Gilbert and Gubar 1979): blogging, then, heralds the castrating disappearance of the phallic instrument. In *Blood Diamond,* it is the idea of the single woman as unencumbered by domestic and familial responsibility which resonates as adrenaline-junkie Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly) is able to travel to war zones such as Bosnia or Sierra Leone

precisely thanks to her marital status. Her comments, "3 out of 5 ex-boyfriends say I prefer to be in a constant state of crisis…" and "I have three sisters. Each married to good men. I prefer my life", further confirm that her work is an obstacle to long-term commitment—and vice versa. The anxieties coalescing around Bitsey, Della, and Maddy are crucially managed through their pairing with an older, more experienced male mentor. As I explain in detail in Chapter 4, the mentor serves to symbolically "authorise" the single woman author's disruptive agency, and, in turn, she deploys her authoriality to authenticate patriarchal authority. In this way, the thriller heroine embodies a particularly conflicted form of feminine agency, one which is both disruptive and yet entangled with hegemonic masculinity.

The resonance of this representational trope is indicated by its recurrence across genres. Chick flicks such as *How to Make an American Quilt*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and *Down with Love* likewise problematise the heroine's prioritisation of paid work over marriage. In depicting some of the constraints potentially placed on women's authorial agency, these films place the identities "wife" and "mother" into conflict with female authorship and signal their preoccupation with women's ability to "have it all". The authorial project of *American Quilt,* a Master's thesis exploring women's handiwork in tribal cultures, is figured as an obstacle to matrimony for heroine Finn Dodd (Winona Ryder), a free-spirited young woman with a thirst for independence and self-determination. The film opens with Finn's decision to go away for the summer in order to complete her thesis. The film's first hint that Finn will struggle to marry authorship with matrimony is that her departure coincides with her boyfriend Sam's (Dermot Mulroney) proposal of marriage. Through voiceover, we gain access to Finn's doubts: "Sam's great, and I really love him. And I'm 26. This is not an unreasonable age to get married. Especially if you've found your possible soul mate. But how do you merge into this thing called 'couple', and still keep a little room for yourself?" Finn's need to "keep a little room" for herself suggests that marriage has the potential to destroy her identity. In this way, *American Quilt* echoes the narrative of *Little Women*, in which Jo's departure for New York, where she pursues professional authorship, directly follows her refusal to marry Laurie. Jo's remark that

she "can't just go and be a wife" similarly suggests a concern that wifehood would impede upon her authorial ambitions.[2]

Figure 17: The erosion of Finn's writerly space in How to Make an American Quilt

The threat that Sam poses to Finn's desire for a metaphorical and literal "room of her own" is crystallised when he colonises her professional space (her writing desk) with blueprints of their house, which he is remodelling while she is away. The composition of the scene sees Sam towering above Finn, expressing his spatial dominance. He holds a pen in his right hand, indicating that, although Finn is ostensibly a writer, it is he who has the power to (re)write their future [See Fig. 17]. This literal and symbolic erosion of Finn's professional space is then echoed in their conversation, as Finn notes: "You were supposed to give me three months. Three months to get my head together. And here you are two weeks later." Furthermore, while showing Finn the plans, Sam suggests that the spare room be used as a nursery, rather than Finn's expressed preference for "a separate room" for her office. In Sam's absence, Finn articulates feminist-inflected critiques of marriage, calling it an "anachronistic institution, created for the sole convenience of the father who needs to pass off his daughter into the care of another man". She then concludes, "You know,

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[2] This fear is realised in both *The Hours* (2002) and *Sylvia* (2003) in which the domestic everyday "inhibit[s] the woman writer's creative practice" (Sim 2006, 364).

now that we've gotten our independence and that we earn our own living, there's really no purpose in being someone's wife."

Though Finn's reticence to marry initially reads as a feminist desire for self-determination, the film subsequently characterises this rejection of matrimony as a symptom of a disordered personality. Sitting on the porch with her mother, Finn discusses the effects of having grown up hearing that "marriage is bullshit." "Do you have any idea how crazy you've made me?" She asks, before concluding, "the imprint's been made. I'm a mess." Through this conversation, *American Quilt* warns of the dangers of being your mother's sister-in-feminism: it makes you "crazy." The film thus reveals that Finn's reluctance to marry—which initially appeared to be rooted in a well-articulated critique of patriarchal structures—is really "craziness" resulting from irresponsible feminist mothering. In sum, Finn's issues are personal, not political. With her feminism revealed to be finally untenable, Finn is "liberated" from her own bankrupt ideology and left free to embrace heteronormative romance. The disappearance of Finn's feminist rhetoric is mirrored by the metaphorical disappearance of her similarly disruptive thesis whose pages are dispersed by a sudden gust of wind. Once reconstructed, her thesis becomes narratively irrelevant. Instead, the film focuses on the completed wedding quilt lovingly crafted by the older women of the quilting bee. Wrapping herself up in the quilt, Finn symbolically acquiesces to the conservative gender script of marriage which she had hitherto rejected. In enacting the double entanglement which "positively draws on" but also "repudiates" feminism (McRobbie 2004, 255), Finn emerges as a complex signifier of postfeminist agency.

The parallels between Finn in *American Quilt* and Jo in *Little Women* are intensified by the fact that Winona Ryder plays both roles. In fact, these characters' perceived unruliness trades on Ryder's 1990s edgy star persona and her entanglement with "Generation X" (Shugart 2001, Oake 2004). Appearing seemingly "overnight", by the mid-1990s, the term "Generation X" came to "operate in public culture as a catch-all label for a particular cultural formation of problematic youth" (Oake 2004, 84). As a counter-culture positioned in conflict with its parent generation, the "Baby Boomers", the moniker necessarily connoted disruption—and so did Ryder. Ryder's own discursive linkage with Generation X "is primarily if not exclusively

attributable to her lead role in the film, *Reality Bites* [1994]," (Shugart 2001, 141). In the film, Ryder's character, aspiring documentarian Lelaina Pierce, a single woman author of sorts, epitomises both the rebellious aesthetic ("oversize thrift-store garb") and affect ("angst, irony, apathy, cynicism") perceived to typify Generation X (Shugart 2001, 141).[3] Contemporary commentators moreover recycled the same handful of facts as evidence of Ryder's nonconformist off-screen credentials: her being named after a city in Minnesota; her unusual upbringing on a commune without electricity; her parents' counter-cultural activities as archivists of magazines devoted to mind-altering substances; and her connections to controversial high profile men, such as her godfather Timothy Leary, and former fiancé Johnny Depp (Shugart 2001). Ryder's gendering is particularly significant here: her persona was "premised largely upon flaunting the rigidly defined gender constraints regarding femininity in mainstream popular culture"; and as such, she represented a challenge "to traditional feminine gender norms" (Shugart 2001, 138).

That Ryder's Jo and Finn both find their feminist disruptiveness narratively tempered importantly correlates with Ryder's own edginess being discursively contained in contemporary coverage of the star. This manoeuvre was largely achieved by highlighting Ryder's "fragility", "tormentedness", or "diminutive" frame, with critics regularly using words such as "ethereal" or "waiflike" connoting feminine vulnerability (Shugart 2001). Ryder's 1999 Diane Sawyer interview during her *Girl, Interrupted* (1999) promotional tour strongly reinforced this impression of fragility, as she admitted on air to having suffered with severe anxiety and depression, and checking herself into a clinic. Similarly, 1990s photographic portraits of Ryder frequently foregrounded a startled, fearful, or melancholy facial expression, or

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[3] As I explained in my methodology section, I have opted to exclude visuals forms of authorship such as filmmaking from this thesis' sample. It is clear that despite the medium specificity of documentary-making, *Reality Bites* mobilises agency as a signifier for female agency in ways comparable to texts such as *American Quilt*. *Reality Bites* for example opens with Lelaina's college graduation speech, in which she rejects Baby Boomer status signifiers such as long working hours and expensive commodity products. Similarly, the grunge aesthetics of her documentary eschew the "invisibility" of the camera which characterises traditional narrative film, privileging instead, hand-held shots and conspicuous camera movements. In this way, *Reality Bites* suggests that Lelaina and her Generation X peers are intent on unsettling socio-cultural norms, and/or are being unsettled by their revision.

awkward poses speaking to mental distress, many of them in black and white. This fragility still seems to hold currency, as her 2015 Sundance festival portrait and recent role as the empowered yet emotionally fragile mother-of-two Joyce Byers in *Stranger Things* (2016–) suggest [See Fig. 18]. As much as Ryder's edgy haircuts and clothing ostensibly subverted "traditional feminine gender norms" (Shugart 2001, 138), her transgressiveness was nonetheless tempered by her delicate white femininity (daintiness, big eyes, pale skin) and her publicly enacted heterosexuality. As I have suggested elsewhere, through her contradictory star persona and recurrent linkage with the figure of the single woman author in *Little Women, American Quilt*, and *Girl, Interrupted*, Ryder embodied the contradictions and ambiguities constitutive of 1990s postfeminism (Thouaille 2017).

Figure 18: Winona Ryder's 2015 Sundance festival portrait

Figure 19: Cosmo points out that "Time's a-running out. Tick tock" in Bridget Jones' Diary

Mobilising anxieties about women in the workforce, the heroine of *Bridget Jones's Diary* is also characterised as an independent woman whose prioritisation of professional labour is perceived as a threat to the family as an institution. In the film, dialogue repeatedly pits women's participation in the workplace as an obstacle to motherhood. Una (Celia Imrie) and Cosmo's (Mark Lingwood) patronising and intrusive remarks—"you career girls can't put it off forever, tick tock, tick tock" and "You really ought to hurry up and get sprogged up, old girl. Time's a-running out. Tick tock", "Seriously, though, office is full of single girls in their 30s. Fine physical specimens, but they just can't seem to hold down a chap"—furthermore suggest that "smug marrieds" view singleness and childlessness as particularly pathological forms of female subjectivity in need of policing. Cosmo's use of the phrase "fine physical specimens" epitomises what Negra terms the "diagnostic gaze" directed at single women (2009, 61). His hand movement, as he taps his wife Woney's (Dolly Wells) pregnant stomach in time with the ticking of the "biological clock" furthermore hints at the mundane ways in which women are refused control over their own bodies, in particular during pregnancy [See Fig. 19].[4]

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[4] See for example "'I felt I was being punished for pushing back': pregnancy and #MeToo" (Leun 2018).

Figure 20: The smug marrieds' diagnostic gazing toward Bridget in Bridget Jones's Diary

Figure 21: Bridget conspicuously alone at the head of the smug married dinner table in Bridget Jones's Diary

In this context, Bridget's non-pregnant body signifies her nonconformist subject position. The composition of the "smug married" dinner scene, in which she is pictured conspicuously alone at the head of table while surrounded by couples, highlights her aberrant status as the sole uncoupled individual. This contrast is heightened when Woney asks: "Why is it there are so many unmarried women in their thirties these days, Bridget?" At this point, the diegetic music and chatter dies down, and the film cuts to a shot of all the dinner guests looking up expectantly [See Fig. 20], and back to a close up of Bridget, alone [See Fig. 21]. Both the cinematography and Bridget's ironic response, "Oh, I don't know. I suppose it

doesn't help that, underneath our clothes, our entire bodies are covered in scales" problematise the smug marrieds' "diagnostic gaze" (Negra 2009, 61).

Agency—exercised in both one's professional and personal life—is one of the key discourses circulating in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Bridget memorably "rejects the pejorative label 'spinster' and its negative connotations of unattractiveness, loneliness, and social ineptitude and, instead, redefines her status by coining the term 'singleton,' a new, rebel identity with its own language and attitudes" (Genz 2010, 100). After her breakup with Daniel, Bridget's voiceover declaration of her refusal to "be defeated by a bad man and an American stick insect" signals the film's deployment of contemporary discourses of agentic choosing. What follows is a montage scored to Chaka Khan's upbeat "I'm Every Woman" (1978) during which Bridget takes action by throwing out liquor bottles, cigarettes, and a series of self-help books, attending the gym, replacing her self-help books, and looking for a new job. Implicit in Bridget's swapping male-focussed self-help literature including *What Men Want, How Men Think,* and *How to Make Men Want What They Don't Think They Want* for titles such as *How to Get What You Want, Life Without Men,* and *Women Who Love Men Are Mad* is the threat of single women doing away with men altogether. Her refusal to continue working with Daniel similarly hints at the possibility of women walking out of hostile work environments and standing up for themselves in romantic relationships. Crucially, Bridget's singleness and its imbrication with authorship is inflected differently from Jo or Finn's. Unlike them, Bridget actively aspires to coupledom and marriage; rather than an obstacle to matrimony, her confessional authoring of the titular diary is deployed as a self-help tool to secure heteronormative romance.[5] Like Jo and Finn, though, the contradictions mapped onto Bridget are expressive of a particularly postfeminist form of agency, one which is both feminist and feminine, simultaneously agentic and romantic.

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[5] For more detail on the diary's function as an instrument of self-help see Chapter 2. I also analyse the ways in which authorship is imagined as a gateway to romance in Chapter 3.

Mobilising Renée Zellweger once again as a signifier of empowered singleness, *Down with Love* sees its heroine's self-help book galvanise women to challenge both unsatisfying romantic attachments and leave discriminatory workplaces. Penned by single woman author protagonist Barbara Novak/Nancy Brown (Zellweger), the book-within-the-film encourages women to stop "expend[ing] all their emotional energy on finding a male partner", and, instead, focus on gaining ground in the workplace (Taylor 2010, 79). The success of the book leads one male character to complain: "that pink book is ruining my life! Woman acts as if she has a mind of her own. She refuses my advances. This goes straight to the sanctity of a man's most fundamental right!"[6] As Taylor notes,

> In discouraging affective investments in heteronormative mythologies of romance and by focusing predominantly on the cultivation of the (sexual) self, Novak's book is exemplary of a strand of popular feminism in its so-called 'second-wave'. In particular, it bears marked similarities to Helen Gurley Brown's S*ex and the Single Girl* (1962) as well as less patent links to Betty Friedan's ground-breaking polemic, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). (2010, 79).

As Taylor shrewdly argues, in the film, "the feminist past is […] re-imagined so that its central goals become identical to those of postfeminism" (2010, 85). The film therefore positions second-wave feminism as "that to which postfeminism is indebted (as opposed to that which it must repudiate)" (Taylor 2010, 85). Central to the re-imagining of 1960s feminism is the film's neoliberal, individualistic stance. By focusing on Barbara's *Sex and the Single Girl*-type manual, *Down with Love* elides "the more radical collectivist forms that helped constitute the women's liberation movement", and thus "presents a view of second-wave feminism that is

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[6] Like the TV series *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), *Down with Love* treats the subject of sexual harassment mostly lightly. In the recent context of the #MeToo movement which has uncovered a multitude of allegations of serious sexual misconduct in a range of professional contexts (most notably in the film industry), *Down with Love*'s joke about women resisting advances as "going against a man's most fundamental right" makes for uncomfortable viewing.

more in tune with the type of postfeminism which characterizes many mainstream narratives in the audience's present" (Taylor 2010, 92).

The film's plot twist is that Barbara wrote her feminist self-help book in an elaborate ploy to trick Catcher Block (Ewan McGregor) into falling in love with her. This revelation, Taylor argues, is "sharply dissonant with the substance of her book's liberal feminist rhetoric" (Taylor 2010, 83). However, this narrative sleight of hand must also be read in the context of the film's homage to 1960s sex comedies which recurrently employ this kind of narrative manoeuvre. Not only does the film's retro styling recall films like *Pillow Talk* (1959), but the basic plot—womanising reporter impersonates a mild-mannered man in order to expose the single woman author of a bestselling self-help manual as a fraud but inadvertently falls in love with her—especially mirrors that of the film adaptation of *Sex and the Single Girl* (1964). In this way, *Down with Love* celebrates a postfeminist mode of agency combining feminine empowerment through authorship and singleness with the promise of heterosexual romance.

Postfeminist agency at an impasse

So far in this chapter, I have tracked the ways in which the single woman author functions as a signifier of postfeminist agency. I have argued that across genres, the mutually constitutive identities "woman author" and "single woman" are expressive of women's desire for self-determination and autonomy. In a postfeminist context, the single woman author importantly emerges as a neoliberal "can do" subject whose agentic choosing is imagined to be unconstrained by inequalities or injustice (see Harris 2004, McRobbie 2007, Gill 2007). However, precisely because she signifies *both* feminist unruliness *and* recuperation into patriarchal structures, simultaneously embodies disruption *and* containment, the single woman author is also an ambiguous, polysemous figure. As I show in the remainder of this chapter, recent texts exhibit an intensification of these existing ambiguities; an intensification, which, I argue, puts considerable strain on discourses of agency and choice. Indeed, with the extension of conditions of precarity to the middle classes traditionally exempt from such insecurity, the meritocratic underpinnings of neoliberalism are increasingly called into question. As recent texts reveal that the feminine subject's

access to certain choices is restricted by material and social factors, postfeminist agency finds itself at an impasse: for all its emphasis on "girl power", "can do girls" and "top girls" (Harris 2004, McRobbie 2007), it becomes clear that postfeminism only offers false choices to women. In making explicit the structures which enable or disable the single woman author's agency, these films in turn reveal that women's choices are embedded in, and limited by, systems of oppression and inequality.

Recent films like *Girl Most Likely*, *Adult World,* and *Obvious Child*, as well as TV series such as *Girls* (2012–2017), and *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* (2017) employ the figure of the single woman author in ways that challenge her status as a "can do" subject. Common to all these texts is the depiction of the central heroine as a figure of wasted potential whose deeply held belief in her destiny as a successful author jars with her lived experiences of precarious freelancing and unemployment. The sense "that something unintelligible has gone terribly wrong" which Catherine McDermott detects in *Girls* (2017, 4) likewise pervades *Girl Most Likely, Adult World, Obvious Child,* and *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life.* Such "crisis ordinariness" (Berlant 2011, 10), I argue, stems in part from breach of the social contract signalled by the "can do" girl's inability to reap the promises of girl power. Exemplary of this trend, *Girl Most Likely,* sees its protagonist Imogene (Kristen Wiig) define herself in relation to her failure to fulfil her potential: "Imogene Duncan doesn't have anyone to marry. Doesn't have anywhere to live. Used to be a writer. Used to fool people into thinking she was the real thing." Meanwhile, in *Obvious Child,* Donna Stern's (Jenny Slate) mother summarises her stand-up career as "wasting your 780 Verbal on telling jokes about diarrhoea in your pants."

In *Adult World,* the hard-working, white, middle class, young, university graduate and aspiring poet Amy (Emma Roberts) likewise reads as an ideal neoliberal subject waiting to excel. Graduating into a recessionary job market with few opportunities for anyone (let alone poets), she quickly discovers that her impeccable academic credentials no longer register as predictors of professional success, and she eventually takes on part-time work in a sex shop to subsidise her writing career. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's "waning of genre", I see in characters like Amy the waning of the "can do" girl. Such a waning exposes how the single woman author's own good life aspirations "now appear to mark archaic expectations about having

and building a life" (Berlant 2011, 6). For example, Amy must relinquish the very fantasies which have, until now, enabled her to "add up to something" (Berlant 2011, 2) and traumatically recognise that she has "misplaced" her optimism (McDermott 2017, 13). The puncturing of Amy's fantasy of agency is crystallised in the following exchange with her mentor Rat Billings (John Cusack).[7] As Amy hysterically claims, "I am special! I got straight As! I scored in the 97th percentile on my SATs!" he responds, "SATs don't mean shit, it's like believing in Scientology." Underlying the waning of the "can do" girl, then, is the possibility that success may not finally be "dependent on strategic effort and good personal choices" (Harris 2004, 32), in which case, agency itself "doesn't mean shit."

Texts such as *In a World…* and *Their Finest* further problematise neoliberal discourses of agency by highlighting the ways in which the broader cultural context—rather than the heroine's strategic choosing—can either enable or impede the single woman author's professional success. *In A World…* for example suggests that Carol's (Lake Bell) success as a voiceover artist for *The Amazon Games* (a female-centred action film franchise) has less to do with her personal talent than with her gender. As *The Amazon Games*' executive producer Katherine Huling (Geena Davis) tells Carol:

> Sure, you have perfect tone and a strong sound that's a fitting choice for the genre. […] But I'm using you for a bigger purpose. […] You got this job because whether the general public chooses to acknowledge it or not, voiceover matters. Everyone in the world watches movie trailers. Everyone in the world sees commercials on television. Or they hear them on the radio. And that is power! Look, this quadrilogy is going to make billions of dollars and your voice is going to be the one to inspire every girl who hears it. And that's why I chose you. Not because you were the best for the job.

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[7] Amy's passionate investment in the fantasy of the enabling mentor/lover is another example of "misplaced" optimism. As I show in detail in Chapter 4, *Adult World* offers significant revisions to this representational trope.

While this speech punctures Carol's meritocratic fantasies of equality—she was not "the best man for the job" after all—it is clear that Carol's contribution to the franchise is intended to help to deliver gender equality in the long run. Geena Davis' performance as ruthless and hard-edged producer suggests that twenty-first century feminism requires women to make hard choices and to capitalise on the popularity of girl-centred franchises even if they are "pseudo-feminist fantasy tween chick-lit bullshit". The film's implicit championing of the adage "you can't be what you can't see" (or in this case, you can't be what you can't hear) is echoed by the casting of Davis, herself a signifier of screen feminism. Best known for her high-profile roles in women-centred films such as *Thelma & Louise* (1991) and *A League of their Own* (1992), and in her role as the first female US president in the TV series *Commander in Chief* (2005-2006), Davis champions female representation on screen through the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. Through this scene and its intertexts, *In a World…* acknowledges the ways in which more so than personal talent, hard work or determination, structural factors such as industry context dictate which stories get told, when, and by whom.

These questions recur in the recent comedy drama *Their Finest*, in which Catrin Cole's (Gemma Arteton) authorship as a screenwriter is largely facilitated by the wartime context. As the film shows, Catrin's foray into this male-dominated profession is directly linked to the war effort. On one hand, the shortage of male labour increasingly drives women to work outside the home, and, on the other, the home front itself creates a cultural need for films to appeal to female audiences through "slop" (women's dialogue). Secondly, in dwelling on the practicalities of film production, *Their Finest* disrupts the figuring of the (screen)writer as originator of meaning, so that the script serves or adapts to the needs of the production, and not the other way around. From the start, Catrin is keen for her female protagonists Rose and Lilly to "be the hero", by having them fix a broken propeller whilst under enemy fire. This suggestion is met with furious resistance from her bullying-yet-pining mentor Buckley (Sam Claflin) who angrily retorts "they're girls! Girls don't want to be the hero, they want to have the hero, they want to be had by the hero!" Despite Buckley's sexist disdain, Catrin's original vision for the scene eventually makes it into the film. The subplot is depicted as socially progressive in that it inspires the real-life Rose and Lilly to leave their abusive father to join the war effort. To an

extent, it is Buckley's death that authorises Catrin to follow through with her intended ending, powerfully suggesting that the death of the male author marks the birth of the female author. However, the film also emphasises that Catrin's version of the scene is only shot because of talent (un)availability. Like *In a World…*, *Their Finest* correlates social change with cultural representation, and uses its film industry setting to reflect on the political responsibility of women authors as cultural producers. Crucially, both texts also suggest that much lies beyond the individual woman screenwriter, director, or producer's control, thus raising the extra-textual question: what material and cultural conditions have made it possible for women filmmakers Lake Bell and Lone Sherfig to respectively direct *In a World…* and *Their Finest*?

While the single woman author arguably benefits from social forces in *In a World…* and *Their Finest*, on the other hand, *Ricki and the Flash* exposes the ways in which social mores contrive to punish women for their choices. In the film, the ageing singer songwriter Ricki (Meryl Streep) pays the price of having prioritised her career over her role as wife and mother. Early in the film, Ricki's daughter observes that she has had to "give up a lot of special things to become a rock star," and it is precisely these losses which the film works to make visible, and visibly painful.[8] Ricki notably finds herself affectively replaced by her ex-husband's second wife Maureen (Audra McDonald), a warm, gracious, homemaker who enjoys close relationships with all three of her grown-up step-children. This emotional estrangement is conveyed through the physical distance between Ricki and her family at her son's wedding: she sits in the back row during the marriage ceremony, and away from the top table during the reception. In addition to costing her her family, Ricki's choice to pursue professional authorship has cost her the comforts and cultural capital of middle class life. While her ex-husband owns a large house in a gated development in Indianapolis, pays for long-distance flights at the drop of a hat, and shops at Whole Foods*,* Ricki lives in a dingy condo in California, can't afford to travel, and *works* at

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[8] Ricki's sacrifice is the reverse of that staged in *Coyote Ugly* (2000), in which it is revealed that the protagonist's late mother gave up a promising singing career in order to prioritise family life. Significantly, *Coyote Ugly* keeps the mother's sacrifice hidden for many years under a narrative of stage fright, and the mother herself is kept safely off-screen by her death.

Whole Foods. In addition to making visible the affective and material costs Ricki has incurred in pursuing her career, *Ricki and the Flash* exposes the insidious double standards constraining women's ability to "have it all".[9] While performing with her band in a bar, Ricki reflects on parenting:

> Funny thing about Mick Jagger. He's got seven children by four different women. […] Of course, he didn't raise those kids. He's a rock star. And more importantly, he's not the mother. Daddy can do whatever daddy wants. Daddy can go make love with whoever he wants. He can take risks. He can get hooked on drugs. He can leave and... Who cares? Some people get hurt. As long as you get some great songs out of it. […] Hey, by the way, though, your kids will still respect, and they'll love you because you're the man! You know what I'm talking about, girls? Yeah. But if you're a woman, mm-mm. God forbid you should forget one school concert or you... Or a wedding or... Or you forget to be the tooth fairy... One time because you had a gig. Congratulations, you're a monster.

Strikingly, Ricki articulates a critique of gendered double standards which make it acceptable for men like Mick Jagger to pursue rock star careers with little concern for their families, while women like Ricki are perceived as monstrous for prioritising their careers over their children. Ricki's outburst is awkward: the loud, rowdy crowd falls silent, and her bandmates try to ease the awkwardness of the situation with banter and hurry her along into the next song. As something of an Ahmedian killjoy, Ricki refuses to erase "the very signs of not getting along" and exposes how much of happiness and public comfort relies on the erasure of such signs (Ahmed 2010, 66).

In line with its predecessors, *The Help* mobilises the white single woman author, Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan (Emma Stone), as a sign of doubly entangled postfeminist agency. However, Skeeter's "can do" heroine is paired with another single woman author heroine, black domestic Aibileen Clark (Viola Davis) who problematises the

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[9] Another Meryl Streep character who draws attention to the difficulty for women to "have it all" is *The Devil Wears Prada*'s (2006) Miranda Priestley, whose professional success requires strategic betrayals of those closest to her.

race and class privilege which Skeeter benefits from as a wealthy, college educated, white woman. The film for example emphasises the ways in which Skeeter's authorship exploits the experience and labour of women of colour. Skeeter happily recycles Aibileen's domestic tips for her *Jackson Journal* column and uses the narratives of numerous black maids in the writing of the book-within-the-film. This appropriative practice mirrors that of her original creator, the novelist Kathryn Stockett, who allegedly based the character of Aibileen on her brother's long-time maid. In other words, not only is *The Help* a film within which a white single woman author profits from the lives of women of colour, it is also a novel authored by a white woman author who profits from the real and/or imagined lives of women of colour. Both Stockett and Skeeter thus rely on their privilege as white women in order to inhabit, and appropriate from, marginalised women's subjectivities.

Skeeter also importantly benefits from the domestic labour of women of colour, as Aibileen hosts and cooks when they meet in secret to write the book. In revealing the ways in which the white single woman heroine's authoriality relies on the work of less privileged women, *The Help* reveals the limitations of discourses of "choice" associated with women under postfeminism. While Skeeter arguably has "a range of good choices" available (Harris 2004, 25), systemic discrimination severely limits Aibileen's own ability to make choices. For example, in pursuing their writing project, Skeeter runs comparatively lower risks than her collaborators Aibileen and Minny (Octavia Spencer). Though Skeeter's authorship threatens her social status and marital prospects—the book's publication precipitates her breakup with her boyfriend and her expulsion from the Jackson Junior League—she is nevertheless able to start her life over in a new city afterwards. Thanks to her education, her family's wealth, and her racial privilege, Skeeter only ever endangers her social status within a small community in Mississippi. Minny and Aibileen, by contrast, risk jeopardising both their livelihoods as domestics and their safety simply by taking part in this civil-rights aligned project. As Minny observes, in the climate of racist oppression under Jim Crow, participating in the project is tantamount to "setting [one's] own house on fire."

Figure 22: The long road ahead awaiting Aibileen in The Help

As I have suggested elsewhere, *The Help* subverts Skeeter's "invisible whiteness" in order to foreground Aibileen's authorial agency (Thouaille 2015). This prioritisation of the single woman author of colour, I contend here, represents an important gesture of bargaining and revision with the representational tropes recurrently associated with the single woman author. Importantly, the final sequence of the film focuses solely on Aibileen and her future: the camera pans alongside her as she walks out of her former employers' front door and wipes her tears. Aibileen's voiceover narrates her internal monologue: "No-one had ever asked me what it felt like to be me. Once I told the truth about that ... I felt free … My boy, Treelore, always said we going to have a writer in the family one day. I guess it's gonna be me." As the voiceover ends, the camera stops, pans back and upward, to reveal the long, deserted road that lies ahead for Aibileen [See Fig. 22]. The shot then remains static for the next three minutes, as she walks away and disappears into the distance. "The Living Proof" (2011) by Mary J. Blige, a cautiously hopeful track, begins to play: "It's gonna be a long long journey / It's gonna be an uphill climb … But I'm ready to carry on … I feel like I can do anything / And finally I'm not afraid to breathe."

The film's closing shot, voiceover and song signal Aibileen's ongoing struggle for authorship and authorial identity. In focussing on Aibileen—a single woman author whose ability to exercise agency is significantly constrained by systemic discrimination and poverty—*The Help* troubles the normative whiteness of the single woman author and complicates narratives of agency and choice. While they may not

straightforwardly read as *feminist* killjoys (Ricki's racism and homophobia for example complicate potential interpretations of her character as "feminist"), like Aibileen, characters such as Amy, Carol, Catrin, and Ricki nonetheless "disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places" (Ahmed 2010, 66). In various ways and to various extents, *The Help, Adult World, In a World, Their Finest,* and *Ricki and the Flash* disturb the fantasy that women's choices are freely made, and finally call into question the grand narrative of meritocracy.

Conclusion

In March 2013, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg published her "sort of feminist manifesto", *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*. Rapidly climbing to the *New York Times* bestseller list, the book would go on to sell 4.2 million copies worldwide and spawn countless think pieces struggling over the various feminist merits and shortfalls of Sandberg's message. *Lean In* has for example come under fire for its "enthusiasm for capitalism and advocacy of a depoliticized strategy that focused on self-improvement rather than collective action" (Geier 2013). Susan Faludi similarly sees *Lean In* as symptomatic of the ways in which "in the postindustrial economy, feminism has been retooled as a vehicle for expression of the self, a 'self' as marketable consumer object, valued by how many times it's been bought—or, in our electronic age, how many times it's been clicked on" (2013). Elsewhere, bell hooks views in Sandberg's politics an elitist, liberal, and crucially, white, "faux feminism" with no ambition to dismantle patriarchal or white supremacists structures (2013). The book, hooks goes on to argue, has "captured the attention of progressives, particularly men" precisely because of its packaging of the "message of 'let's go forward and work as equals within white male corporate elites' in the wrapping paper of feminism" (2013). hooks' image of the "wrapping paper of feminism" powerfully evokes the ways in which Sandberg's philosophy mobilises feminism (or "sort of" feminism) in ways that are ultimately unthreatening to patriarchy or white supremacy: "The model Sandberg represents is all about how women can participate and 'run the world.' But of course the kind of world we would be running is never defined. It sounds at times like benevolent patriarchal imperialism" (hooks 2013). *Lean In* therefore epitomises the kind of "taking into account" of feminist politics and rhetoric which Angela McRobbie describes in *The*

Aftermath of Feminism (2009): "Elements of feminism have been taken into account and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like 'empowerment' and 'choice,' these elements are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse" (10).

As an educated and wealthy white woman whose strategic choices to "lean in" have enabled to rise to the top of the corporate ladder whilst lovingly raising two children, Sandberg functions as a real-world signifier of postfeminist agency. In ignoring other categories of difference such as race or class, and calling for individual self-help rather than systemic change, Sandberg's rhetoric indeed neatly encapsulates the blind spots of neoliberal agency. And yet, just as the representation of the single woman author has registered a shift in recent years, with narratives of agency becoming strained, so Sandberg's own rhetoric has undergone a small, but significant change. In May 2016, a year after the sudden death of her husband Dave Goldberg, Sandberg reflected on the struggles of becoming a single mother in an emotional Facebook post.[10] Acknowledging her substantial privilege ("I realize how extremely fortunate I am not to face the financial burdens so many single mothers and widows face […] I am also lucky that I have close family and friends who have done so much to support me and my children), Sandberg noted that "I will never experience and understand all of the challenges most single moms face, but I understand a lot more than I did a year ago." In this act of checking her privilege, I read a small revision of Sandberg's message, one which acknowledges that women's ability to lean in is in fact circumscribed by forces other than their sheer "will to lead."

One of the key contentions of this thesis is that the ambiguities and ambivalence inherent to the single woman author's representation means she is an ideal prism through which to track shifts in postfeminist media culture. That the single woman author's signification as a site of postfeminist agency now appears to be at an impasse in recent films indicates a broader shift in culture, which, I argue, is mirrored in Sandberg's very public change of heart. While neither Sandberg's newfound sympathy for single mothers, nor recent films' representation of the single

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[10] "On Mother's Day we celebrate all moms", 6 May 2016, Facebook post, https://www.facebook.com/sheryl/posts/10156819553860177.

woman author are tantamount to an embrace of intersectional feminism, they are suggestive of a desire to make visible the structures which enable or disable women's agency. That is not to say, however, that postfeminism has somehow run its course. Rather, its ability to adapt to the "crisis ordinariness" (Berlant 2011) which characterises the present moment signals its canny resilience to change and ability to "take into account" recent developments in feminist thinking such as the rise of intersectionality. As I will show throughout this thesis, the treatment of the single woman author figure reveals how now, more than ever, feminism remains a contested force.

Chapter 2:
The Single Woman Author's Body of Work

Introduction

In the opening act of *Eat Pray Love* (2010), single woman author protagonist Liz Gilbert (Julia Roberts) attends the premiere of her stage play *Permeable Membrane*. As the play's blonde female protagonist articulates the ways in which she "disappears" into her romantic relationships—"I am the permeable membrane. If I love you, you can have it all. My money, my time, my body. My dog! My dog's money!"—the film cuts meaningfully to Liz sitting in the audience as if to say that it is really Liz who is a "permeable membrane". This play, the film suggests, is autobiographical, and, as such, it provides an insight into the inner life of its playwright. Or, in the words of *Little Women* (1994) the experience of consuming the single woman author's text is "like opening a window into your heart." Like *Eat Pray Love* and *Little Women*, countless films figure the single woman author's text as personal, biographical, or somehow revelatory of an essential truth about their author.

In this thesis' corpus, the autobiographical text appears under numerous different guises, authorial modes, and generic forms, with the authorial motto "write what you know" echoing throughout these films. Diaries, journals, oral histories, blogs, video blogs (vlogs), and memoirs for example appear in *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003), *The Perfect Man* (2005), *Freedom Writers* (2008)*, The Secret Life of Bees* (2008), *Easy A* (2010), *Eat Pray Love* (2010), *The Help* (2011), *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011), *Wild* (2014) *Testament of Youth* (2014), *Ask Me Anything* (2014), and *The diary of a Teenage Girl* (2015).[1] Films also recurrently feature a single woman author heroine writing personal correspondence such as letters or emails in *You've Got Mail*

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[1] See also, on television: *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* (2007-2011), *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2011), *Awkward* (2011-2016), *Girls* (2012-2017), *My Mad Fat Diary* (2013), *Jane the Virgin* (2013-), as well as the web series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013) and *Emma Approved* (2013-2014).

(1998), *A Cinderella Story* (2004), *Dear John* (2010), *Letters to Juliet* (2011), and *Hateship Loveship* (2013). Along more traditionally writerly lines, the protagonist is depicted as an author of autobiographical novels in *Little Women, Becoming Jane* (2007), *Atonement* (2007)*, Young Adult* (2011)*, Albatross* (2011), *Not Another Happy Ending* (2013), *Saving Mr Banks* (2013), *Crimson Peak* (2015), *Mary Shelley* (2017). Poems and songs also register as autobiographical genres in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), *Possession* (2002), *Adult World* (2013), *Begin Again* (2013), and *Ricki and the Flash* (2015). Likewise, stage plays and screenplays are presented as personal in *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (2002)*, Something's Gotta Give* (2003), *Eat Pray Love, Girl Most Likely* (2012), *The Rewrite* (2014), and *La La Land* (2016). Journalist heroines similarly draw on their lived experience in *Never Been Kissed* (1999), *Message in a Bottle* (1999), *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (2003), *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009), and *The DUFF* (2015).[2] The autobiographical text furthermore manifests as a graduate school application in *The Nanny Diaries* (2007), a self-help book in *Down with Love* (2004), a stand-up comedy routine in *Obvious Child* (2014), and a talk-show in *Welcome to Me* (2014).

Interrogating this salient representational pattern and its diverse iterations, this chapter asks: what ideological function does the autobiographical text serve in relation to the single woman author? In the first section, I show how *Little Women, Never Been Kissed, Possession, Down with Love, Music and Lyrics* (2007)*, Becoming Jane, The Help,* and *Begin Again* construe female authorship as somehow "natural" or essentially "feminine". In depicting the single woman author's text as necessarily bearing the marks of its author's gender, these films contribute to the cultural devaluing of female authorship. Next, I consider how autobiographical authorship is recurrently mobilised as form of therapeutic self-work for the single woman author, whose singleness signifies a disorderly "lack". In *Girl, Interrupted, Bridget Jones, Never Been Kissed*, and *Eat Pray Love,* I argue, writing emerges as a means of complying with the neoliberal requirement to perpetually work on oneself. The final section of this chapter explores how recent texts such as *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, Atonement, The Secret Life of Bees, Easy A, Young Adult, Adult*

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[2] See also, on television: *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and *The Bold Type* (2017-).

World, and *Welcome to Me* problematise the assumption that the single woman author's body of work is indissociable from the body which has authored it. Tracking the trope across genres, this chapter concludes that under postfeminism and neoliberalism, autobiographical authorship is recurrently figured as an ideal form of gendered labour for the single woman subject.

Writing the feminine self

In numerous films, the single woman author heroine's authorship is construed as "natural", an expression of her innate femininity. This "naturalness" manifests through spontaneous acts of authorship in which words seem to "pour out" of her and onto the page, as though the text itself were an extension of her selfhood. Toward the end of *Little Women,* for example, Jo March (Winona Ryder) returns to her hometown of Concord to nurse her dying sister Beth (Clare Danes). Shortly after her death, Jo fondly sifts through her sister's belongings. The film then cuts to a shot of a quill scratching against parchment, and pans to show Jo at work on a new project, while Beth's and Amy's voices are heard narrating earlier episodes from the film. The camera then slowly pans 360 degrees around the room, and eventually reveals Jo finishing her manuscript. Birdsong, and light streaming through the windows signal that it is now morning, and although Jo's clothes and hair have changed, the seemingly seamless editing of the scene implies that she has written the entire manuscript in one sitting. Later, we find out that this manuscript is the novel *Little Women*. This trope is also prevalent on television, with Netflix's *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* (2016) employing similar strategies. While Rory Gilmore (Alexis Bledel) wanders around her grandparents' house, she is similarly reminded of previous "episodes" from her life. As Kathryn VanArendonk (2016) notes, "She looks into the dining room and remembers a scene from an old episode superimposed on the familiar setting. She hears audio of herself telling her grandparents how to reheat food in the kitchen." She then enters her grandfather's study—briefly remembers him sitting at his desk—and then sits down to write her own family's story, which she eventually titles *The Gilmore Girls.* When discussing the writing process, Rory explains: "I sat down and it just came out. Flew out […] it's like the story has just been there in my brain taking up space […] it's been here waiting for me to put it down on paper. Nothing I've ever written has been this easy."

The two sequences' striking parallels, I argue, shed light on the ways in which texts' investment in ideas of women's autobiography as "natural" serve to divert attention away from writing as a form of labour. The use of flashbacks figures the heroine's authorship as a passive act: to remember is to hear or watch previous scenes from the narrative, scenes whose existence in the diegesis guarantees their status as "truthful" and "objective", audience members' own memories of watching these scenes intervening to authenticate their truthful status. In both texts, then, to remember, and, crucially, to write one's memories, requires no interpretative labour: it is simply to write the objective truth. This depiction of memory-as-truth, obscures not just the heroine's subjectivity and vested interests, but also the labour of interpretation, organisation, composition, editing, and revision inherent to the authoring of a memoir. Their remembrances of things past—so central to both memoirs—are depicted as largely unintentional. Remembering is portrayed as a visceral reaction to external stimuli, rather than a deliberate action. Jo and Rory react to their memories by writing, rather than recall the memories in order to write. In *Little Women,* Beth and Amy's third-person voiceovers ("The real charm lay in Beth's happy face as she leaned over the grand piano"; "during the next few minutes, the rumour spread that Amy March had 24 delicious limes") convey the impression that the disembodied voices of the March sisters are dictating Jo's manuscript to her. In much the same way, *Gilmore Girls'* reliance on the metaphor of words rushing out to meet the blank page invests words themselves with agency, not Rory. In the end, they are both construed less as agentic authors, than as conduits through which "truth" can be expressed.

In both cases, the effortlessness of the scene of writing functions as a key marker of the text's authenticity. Unlike her previous works which required Jo to pause to ascertain certain facts ("How long would strychnine take to dissolve in brandy? Eight minutes? And is a dagger worn at the waist, or is that a sabre?", she asks), Jo's autobiographical novel needs no research, nor discussion. The implication is clear: given the right subject, the words will effortlessly materialise on paper. In the logic of *Little Women*, Jo's generic shift from sensation to domestic fiction furthermore mirrors her growth as an artist finally finding the "courage to write" from "the depths of [her] soul". Rory's adamance that her life story has "been here waiting for [her] to

put it down on paper" and that "Nothing [she's] written has ever been this easy" similarly implies that the ease with which the manuscript is crafted (or, more to the point, the ease with which the manuscript crafts itself) signifies its value as the authentic project the heroine was always destined to write. That the heroines' book-within-the-text ends up bearing the title of the text itself consolidates this sense of authorial predestination, while also suggesting the film/TV text is on some level "self-begetting". This trope recurs in numerous film and TV texts including: *Sex and the City, Never Been Kissed, 10 Things I Hate About You, Under the Tuscan Sun, How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, Down with Love, Atonement, Eat Pray Love, Albatross, Welcome to Me, Testament of Youth,* and *Crimson Peak.* Yet the final irony of a film like *Little Women* is that in the act of writing the autobiographical text, Jo becomes a successful author whilst simultaneously exhausting the very material that grants her authorial status: her life.

In a text like *Never Been Kissed*, the effortlessness of autobiographical authorship is conveyed through the seamless transition from the scene of production to the scene of consumption. Toward the end of the film, Josie Gellar's (Drew Barrymore) first-person narration resumes over a shot of hands typing on a laptop. Mirroring the shot structure of the *Little Women* sequence discussed above, the camera then pans upward to reveal Josie sitting in her living room surrounded by artefacts from her undercover assignment at South Glen high school, and then pulls back for a fuller view of the room. Unlike Josie's previous voiceover (for example at the start of the film), this narration is explicitly linked to her newspaper feature "Never Been Kissed". As the voiceover carries on, the film immediately cuts to a series of shots of readers depicted engrossed in, and moved by, her article. Using the continuing voiceover narration to link the scene of writing to scenes of reading, the film suggests that the final print copy has emerged fully formed from Josie's mind and into the newspaper. Despite acknowledging that numerous individuals other than reporters are involved in the production of the *Chicago Sun Times* (including the newspaper's owner, editors, and copy-editors) Josie's own authorship is decidedly singular, and requires no labour beyond the initial moment of creativity signified by Josie typing on her laptop at home; rewriting, copy-editing, typesetting, and printing are indeed invisible.
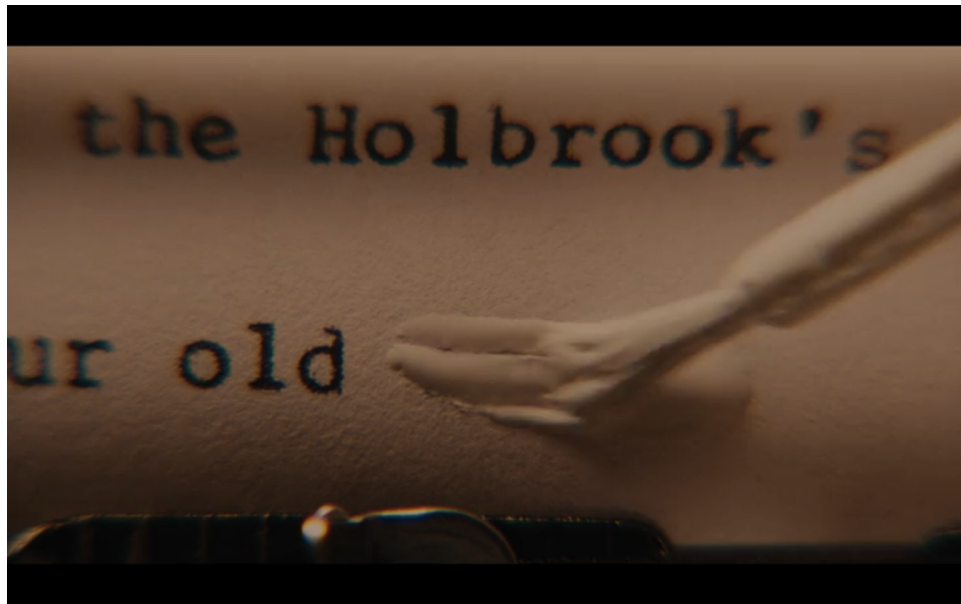
Figure 23: Authorial labour as cinematic absence in The Help

When editorial labour is implied to exist, as in a film like *The Help,* it is nonetheless rendered cinematically invisible. When single woman author protagonist Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan (Emma Stone) makes a significant and intentional editorial change to the *Jackson Junior League Newsletter* which she edits, the scene is characterised by whiteness and absence. In a close-up of the typescript Skeeter is working on late one night, she whites out the word "coats" from the sentence "Come on by the Holbrook's and drop off your old coats" [See Fig. 23]. The camera then elliptically cuts to Skeeter asleep on her bed. The viewer can later infer that Skeeter replaced the word "coats" with "commodes", as a multitude of toilets are dropped off on the Holbrooks' front lawn. Crucially, Skeeter is never shown making the final inscription: we are only shown the absence of "coats". By withholding the shot of Skeeter making the final edit, the film links her with absence, whiteness and invisibility. In "whiting out" the evidence of Skeeter's editorial intervention *The Help* reproduces, and contributes to the erasure of the editorial labour of the single woman author.

That many of the films analysed in this thesis minimise those aspects of authorial labour which do not "self-evidently offer the sort of cinematic dynamism and narrative pulls usually considered the staple fare of the movies" (Buchanan 2013, 3) does not, crucially, mean to say that their exclusion is insignificant. Their very

absence reveals blind spots and assumptions repeatedly reproduced on screen. As this thesis attests, contemporary films return again and again to the figure of the single woman author and to the scene of her writerly production, so that through their screened repetition certain elements of the "writing process have become cinematically iconized and even iconically conventionalized" (Buchanan 2013, 4). One such iconised aspect is the effortlessness of the single woman author's labour. This gendered representational trope, I argue, contributes to the re-signification of female authorial labour as "pleasure" rather than "work". The slippage of female authorship from "labour" to "pleasure" is particularly striking in song-writing films such as *Music and Lyrics* and *Begin Again*. In the former, Sophie Fisher (Drew Barrymore) spontaneously hums song lyrics while watering plants, and is declared a "born lyricist" by love interest Alex Fletcher (Hugh Grant). In *Begin Again*, the only scene in which Gretta James (Keira Knightley) is depicted writing a song is characterised as a moment of emotional catharsis to do with her breakup with Dave Kohl (Adam Levine). Gretta in fact rejects the professionalised status of "performer", explaining: "I write songs from time to time […] for pleasure and for my cat."

That both *Music and Lyrics* and *Begin Again* construe the single woman author's writerly labour as somehow "natural", "intimate", or tied to pleasure however serves to authenticate the single *male* author's own labour as "work", while simultaneously culturally devaluing women's authorship. Both films indeed dwell on the work performed by single male music producers, Alex and Dan Mulligan (Mark Rufffalo), at Sophie and Gretta's expense. In *Music and Lyrics*, Alex plays multiple musical instruments in his home studio and lays the tracks together. When Sophie complains that she cannot write due to a lack of inspiration, he retorts: "I don't care if you're inspired. Inspiration is for amateurs," thus implicitly casting Sophie and Alex in the opposing roles of female amateur (the woman for whom song-writing is about pleasure and inspiration) and male professional (the man for whom song-writing is a job requiring tenacity and determination in the face of difficulty). Similarly, in *Begin Again,* it is Dan who recruits musicians, makes practical arrangements for the exterior recording, and literally holds the recording equipment. In the scene in which *Begin Again* "begins again", the film re-plays Gretta's performance of "A Step You Can't Take Back" at an open mike night. In this second version of the scene, the film grants the viewer access to Dan's creative vision: around Gretta, the unmanned

instruments begin to play as Dan arranges the song in his head [See Figs. 24-25]. Dan's arrangement, the film implies, vastly improves the song, which, outside of his fantasy, is greeted by a disappointingly lukewarm reception. The implication here is that it is Dan who has the professional vision needed to elevate Gretta from mediocre open mike night-fodder to best-selling artist.

Figure 24: Instruments play themselves in Dan's creative vision in Begin Again

Figure 25: Dan foregrounded as an author figure in Begin Again

Importantly, this figuring of the single woman author's work has gendered implications in terms of how women's labour is understood in postfeminist media culture. In an analysis of beauty advertisements, Michelle Lazar shows the emphasis on the vocabulary of "fun" and "play" is deployed by makeup brands so that "the

activity of beautification is overtly re-classified as play" (2009, 395). As a result, "the actual feminine labour involved in beauty practices gets re-framed as non-work, as a pleasurable feminine activity" (Lazar 2009, 395). A similar process, I argue, is at work in the films analysed in this thesis, whose reliance on ideas of "naturalness" and "pleasure" serves to reclassify the heroine's authorial labour as "play". *Eat Pray Love*, for example, omits the fact that the real-life Elizabeth Gilbert (played in the film by Julia Roberts) financed her year-long trip to Italy, India, and Indonesia through a publisher's advance to write about her experiences. In this way, the film "sidelines the labor of writing the culinary travel/spiritual quest narrative and its conversion by Liz into a best-selling commodity" (Thoma 2014, 116), and instead frames Liz's adventure as a pleasure-seeking voyage of self-discovery. At stake in this resignification of female authorial labour is the need to manage the anxieties surrounding the figure of the working woman. Indeed, as Diane Negra argues in *What a Girl Wants* (2009), "the ambivalence with which postfeminist culture treats women in the workforce […] dissipates when such work is seen to be expressive of women's essential femininity" (87).

Commercial autobiographical authorship, I suggest, is one such occupation "seen to be expressive of women's essential femininity" (Negra 2009, 87), since it relies on the (re)production of feminine intimacy to create capital. In the context of *Sex and the City,* for example, Carrie's (Sarah Jessica Parker) "intimacy (and that of her girlfriends) is her asset", and in successfully managing her emotions by "objectifying them and turning them into capital" (Winch 2009, 70), Carrie makes a living out of her personal life. In the act of recounting her life in an article or memoir (*Sex and the City, Never Been Kissed*, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, Eat Pray Love, Gilmore Girls*), or sharing it via video (*Never Been Kissed, Easy A*), the single woman author heroine thus transforms her private life into objects for public consumption. Furthermore, as Pamela Thoma argues, "The entrepreneurial labor of writing is a sanctioned form of work because it aids the self-making considered crucial for the appropriately feminized postfeminist female worker who willingly accommodates a gendered division of domestic labor" (2014, 124). In this context, "Being a writer is presented as an appropriate and potentially lucrative alternative to the all-consuming professions that will leave women emotionally disconnected from others and only interested in individual career success" (Thoma 2014, 128). Not only does the work

of autobiographical authorship function as a "vehicle by which these heroines seek happiness" (Thoma 2014, 122), but the space in which work is conducted is coded as either domestic (the kitchen, the bedroom) or public (the café, the park) so as to not seem like work at all. Foregrounding the single male author's interventions, while deprofessionalising the single woman author's labour, as in *Music and Lyrics* and *Begin Again*, serves precisely to dissipate the threat posed by professional women. Configuring Sophie and Gretta's labour as intimate, and "expressive of [their] essential femininity", both texts in turn characterise their female protagonists as free-spirited "manic pixie dream girls" uniquely positioned to rehabilitate failing masculinities, and restore normative gender roles.[3] In *Little Women*, *Gilmore Girls*, or *Never Been Kissed*, meanwhile, the emphasis on the heroine's authorship as "natural", "effortless", and "personal" similarly functions to accommodate traditional gender roles, such as the gendering of professional work and ambition as male.

Underpinning these texts is an assumption that the heroine will not just write "what she knows", but that her creations bear marks of her embodied experience. Exemplary of this kind of thinking, *Possession* sees modern-day academics Roland Michell (Aaron Ekhart) and Maud Bailey (Gwyneth Paltrow) shed new light on the work of Victorian poets Randolph Henry Ash (Jeremy Northam) and Christabel LaMotte (Jennifer Ehle) thanks to their discovery of a secret love affair between the two authors. In an early scene, Maud and Roland visit Christabel's old bedroom, Maud observing that "Christabel wrote dozens of poems about this place." The film then cuts to a point of view shot, panning around the room, and back to a medium shot of Maud looking around, engrossed in thought. Through voiceover, we hear Maud whispering lines from Christabel's poetry. Combined with Paltrow's performance, the voiceover suggests that the space of the bedroom has triggered Maud's memory, with specific items of furniture resonating with passages from Christabel's oeuvre. She repeats the lines "Dolly keeps a secret/ Safer than a friend/ Dolly's silent sympathy/ Lasts without end" correctly inferring that Christabel's dolls

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[3] Though he has since disavowed the term (see Rabin 2014), Nathan Rabin defines the "manic pixie dream girl" as a female character whose primary function is to "teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures" (2007). I discuss the trope of the single woman author as rehabilitator of failing masculinities in more detail in Chapter 4.

conceal a (very literal) secret: a cache of love letters is concealed within the dolls' crib. Later in the film, a visit to Thomason Foss waterfall near Whitby, triggers another flash of insight. As the scene cuts from a medium shot of Roland and Maud both basking in the natural beauty of their surroundings, to a shot of the waterfall they are admiring, and back to the characters, Maud's expression shifts to indicate an important realisation. "I think Christabel did come here", she says, "Listen. 'Three elements combine to make the fourth/ But above the water and the light together made/ a halo in the darkened cave.'" With the date of the poem matching Ash's own recorded trip to the falls, Maud suggests that "if there's a cave behind it, that might be all the proof we need" that the two poets indeed travelled together as lovers. As in the "dolly keeps a secret" scene, the editing once again works to suggest that profound insight into Christabel's work requires the reader to be physically present in the spaces Christabel herself occupied or was inspired by: the physical space of the bedroom or the waterfall must be "read" alongside the poetry in order to unlock the poet's best-kept secrets.

In insisting that Christabel's lived experiences have necessarily left an imprint upon her text, *Possession* endorses biographical reading methodologies. Whereas Maud's highly theorised academic reading has hitherto led her to incorrectly understand Christabel's lifelong singleness as a signifier of homosexuality, when she performs the "right" kind of reading, Maud discovers both the true meaning of Christabel's singleness and the true meaning of her poetry: her love for a married man. In this way, the film subscribes to conceptualisations of the author's embodied experiences as stable originators of "meaning" in the text. Biographical approaches of this kind have largely fallen out of favour in literary studies, as poststructuralist critiques of the figure of "the Author" transformed literary criticism in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet, Deborah Cartmell argues, films such as Jane Austen screen adaptations appear "unperturbed by concerns over the intentional and affective fallacies" and "seem to doggedly cling to old-fashioned biographical approaches to fiction that equate interpretation with finding out 'truths' about the author" (2013, 157). Judith Buchanan similarly notes that "The desire to find a synergy between the life and the work becomes central to many literary biopics and biographically inflected adaptations" (2013, 13). *Possession*, I argue, takes this approach one step further in suggesting that both academic thought and human relationships are

shackled by developments in literary criticism. As I argue in the next chapter, it is Maud and Roland's twin disavowal of "academic" reading practices and "academic" approaches to love which finally enables them to connect at a personal level with Ash and Christabel's texts, and, in turn, reap the benefits of romance in their own lives. Through this disavowal, *Possession* aligns itself with the "middlebrow", which, Catherine Han notes, "often resists interrogating authorship or creative genius as culturally constructed entities" (2015, 37). In suggesting that theory has little to offer Maud except for obstacles, and that a literal or biographical reading enables the discovery of a greater "truth", *Possession* militates for an understanding of the authorial corpus as intrinsically linked to the gendered authorial body.

While *Possession* suggests that the life of the author functions to illuminate their work, texts like *Becoming Jane* reverse this logic by reading the life *through* the works. The relative scarcity of information about Jane Austen's life is no deterrent to such biographical approaches; on the contrary, that "she left so little evidence of her personal self behind", Cartmell suggests, has "led readers to seek in her fiction clues reflecting the author's life" (2013, 151). Austen's singleness is of key interest here, with her enduring popularity "for better or worse intertwined with her mystique as a single woman" (Cartmell 2013, 151). Isn't it ironic, commentators recurrently ask, that "one of the supreme purveyors of romantic love in English literature, and the creator of numerous blissful couplings in print, never took her own trip down the aisle"? (Lassman 2016). The Brontë sisters suffer much the same fate, with their singleness and quiet lives considered antithetical to their fictional creations.[4] The 2013 TV documentary, *The Brilliant Brontë Sisters* epitomises this rhetorical trend. In her introductory segment, presenter Sheila Hancock states: "I rate each of the Brontë sisters amongst the greatest novelists I have ever read. But I am left with a question: How did three spinsters who spent most of their life in a remote parsonage, on the edge of the moors, come to write books that I find shocking, erotic, profoundly moving and quite wonderful?"

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[4] It is worth noting that Charlotte Brontë did eventually marry. After her siblings' deaths, she married Arthur Bell Nicholls in 1854. She died the following year in 1855.

Such questioning springs from the "common sense" adage "write what you know", which presumes that first-hand experience is essential to good writing. Since Austen herself is widely understood as a "romance novelist" (Cobb 2015, 125), and since a "biopic about Austen has to be Austenian in tone" and plot (Higson 2013, 112), it follows that *Becoming Jane* uses Austen's oeuvre to fill in the blanks of her biography. Her singleness and the scant information about her life therefore provide an ideally blank canvas on which to paint a suitably romantic life. Jon Spence's biography of Austen, *Becoming Jane Austen* (2003)— the source material for the biopic *Becoming Jane*—is characteristic of this tendency. Spence notably contends that "Jane Austen's mature novels tend to point to or confirm connections between her art and her life. An awareness of autobiographical elements in the work enhances our understanding and appreciation, not of the novels but of the woman who wrote them" (Spence 2003, xi). Following Spence's lead, *Becoming Jane* takes up Austen's novels and their adaptations as its intertexts. The film thus alters "the biographical material to fit with the nature of Jane's [Austen's] text," so that "Mr. Collins becomes John Warren (Leo Bill), Mr. and Mrs. Bennet become Reverend Austen (James Cromwell) and Mrs. Austen (Julie Waters)" (Govender 2008, 89). Meanwhile, Austen (Anne Hathaway) herself "is configured as the ur-Elizabeth Bennet in both circumstance and sensibility" (Buchanan 2013, 16), while Tom Lefroy (James McAvoy) is "played out in the film as a model for Darcy" (Higson 2013, 114). However, by the end of the film, "Jane has completed her canon; she begins the film as Elizabeth Bennet and ends it as Anne Elliot, sacrificing love for what she perceives to be the greater good and taking consolation in her fame as a leading novelist" (Cartmell 2013, 154). Through this implicit characterisation of Jane-as-Elizabeth and Jane-as-Anne, the film conflates Austen with her heroines.

This kind of characterisation—however inadvertently—works to devalue Austen's authorship. Indeed, like Cartmell, I see *Becoming Jane* as "privatising Austen's fiction by 'reducing' it to personal reflections of the self, something akin to diary entries" (Cartmell 2013, 154). In this respect, *Becoming Jane* resembles the earlier blockbuster biopic *Shakespeare in Love* (1998)—a film which likewise trades on the absence of biographical information. As Richard Burt notes, *Shakespeare in Love* offers "a very conventional way of representing literary authorship: Shakespeare's composition is privatised, and the sonnets and plays about love are granted a

privileged generic status precisely because they are to be read as autobiographical documents" (2000, 216). Though the parallels between *Becoming Jane* and *Shakespeare in Love* are many,[5] it is crucial to note the gendering of authorship at work in both texts. As I argued in the introduction, the use of female first name and male last names in biopics of famous writers is particularly revealing in this regard. This thesis moreover situates *Becoming Jane*'s privatisation of literary authorship within a broader devaluing of female authorship in popular culture. Discussing the biopic *Sylvia* (2003), Bronwyn Polascheck argues that "The existence of a dramatic biography, and particularly a structuring romance, has enabled scholars to read a woman's aesthetic work as direct autobiography, and as inspired by an external male artistic mentor, rather than acknowledging the intellect and skill a woman must have to create art" (2014, 65). This certainly applies to *Becoming Jane*, where the imagining of a "dramatic biography", and "structuring romance" with an "external male mentor" authorises a biographical reading of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)*,* whilst downplaying "the intellect and skill" of a young Jane Austen.[6] As I have suggested, the depiction of female authorship as personal, intimate or in some way biographical, is entrenched in a postfeminist conceptualisation of female labour, and, in particular, postfeminism's need to dispel the threat of female agency as represented by the working woman. To figure Austen's authorship as "personal", then, functions on some level to deprofessionalise her labour, and see it as expressive of her "essential femininity". This process of elision and deprofessionalisation crucially redirects critical discourse away from analysis or appraisal of a text and inevitably toward the biography or romance (or lack thereof) of the author. As such, I argue, such a portrayal is complicit with the cultural devaluing of women's literary authorship.

Just as Austen is conflated with her fictional creations in *Becoming Jane*—so they are with her in adaptations of her novels. As Han notes, "Screen adaptations of Austen's novels frequently emphasise or, in some instances, invent, correspondences between the heroines and the writer" (2015, 172-173). Allusions to the author's life or work are therefore deployed "to portray the heroines as similarly creative and engaged in the process of authoring their own narratives" (Han 2015, 172-173).

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[5] See Cartmell 2013.
[6] I analyse the function of Tom's mentoring of Jane in Chapter 4.

Mansfield Park for example "portrays Fanny as a writer but also heightens her resemblance to Austen by having the fictional character read out Austen's juvenilia as her own writing" (Han 2015, 172-173). Adaptations of *Jane Eyre* meanwhile, "encourage the conflation between the authorial [Charlotte Brontë] and the fictional Jane [Eyre] through the use of costume", so that diegetic Jane Eyre often "recall iconic imagery" of Charlotte Brontë (Han 2015, 173). Cartmell nonetheless distinguishes between Austen and Brontë's respective conflations with their literary creations: "it is often the case that, rather than the author becoming her heroine (as in Jane Eyre), the heroine becomes the author, a version of Jane Austen, the writer" (Cartmell 2013, 161). In my view, however, whether the author becomes her own heroine, or the heroine becomes the author in the end amount to the same thing: a refusal to acknowledge the boundary between a woman author and her work. Such a conflation of the single woman author's corpus with her corporeality is crystallised in *Sylvia* as Ted Hughes (Daniel Craig) leans to kiss his deceased ex-wife's manuscript, only for the film to substitute the text for Sylvia Plath's (Gwyneth Paltrow) face in the next shot [See Figs. 26-27].
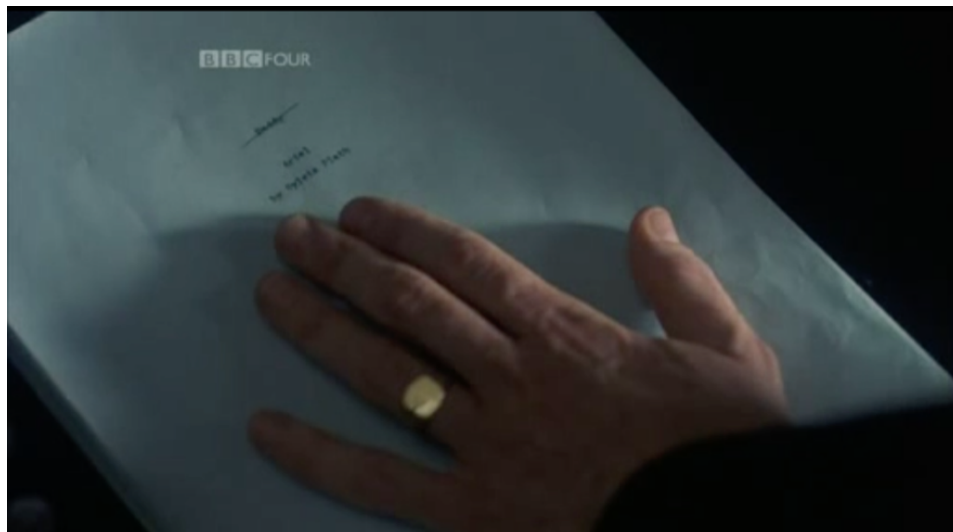
Figure 26: Ted Hughes cherishes Sylvia Plath's manuscript in Sylvia

Figure 27: To kiss the manuscript is to kiss the author herself in Sylvia

The conflation of the life and the work is so well-established that discrepancies between the two risk jeopardising the success of the single woman author in both *Down with Love* and *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007). In the former, an homage to 1960s Doris Day/ Rock Hudson sex comedies, journalist Catcher Block (Ewan McGregor) seeks to discredit self-help author and icon of singleness Barbara Novak (Renée Zellweger) by having her fall in love with him. Such a romantic attachment, Catcher suggests, would conclusively prove that she does not truly espouse the politics of her bestseller, *Down with Love*. Given her book's key thesis—that women must abandon monogamous heterosexual relationships synonymous with love and pursue "sex à la carte" instead—Barbara's continued singleness is crucial to her ongoing credibility. In revealing that Barbara (whose real name is Nancy Brown) has written a self-help book promoting views which deliberately diverge from her own, *Down with Love* appears to play with the trope. The fact that Barbara writes the book in order to *trick* Catcher into writing an exposé about her in fact suggests how predictable and clichéd this narrative convention has become by the mid-2000s. The film's final twist, however, is that in the act of writing *Down with Love,* and performing the role of literary celebrity and feminist icon, Nancy Brown has become a "down with love" girl. As Anthea Taylor argues, "Through her text, the author herself – like the myriad readers seen to be engrossed in it and whose behaviors have been accordingly modified – is dramatically altered" (2010, 91). In other words, Nancy/Barbara's life has rearranged itself to mirror her work. By the end of *Down with Love,* any remaining discrepancies between "the work" and "the life" are

resolved by the collaborative authoring of new, authentically autobiographical, book entitled *Here's to Love*. In *The Jane Austen Book Club*, on the other hand, unmarried woman author Corrine (Parisa Fitz-Henley) appropriates her girlfriend Allegra's (Maggie Grace) experiences as material for her short stories. For failing to write from *her own* life, Corinne is rejected both by her publishers—who detect a lack of "authenticity" in her writing—and by Allegra, who ends the relationship. *The Jane Austen Book Club* thus warns of the danger of not complying with the requirement to produce autobiographical material: exclusion.[7]

Righting the flawed female self

Building on the assumption I have tracked so far in this chapter—that the single woman author's body of work is indissociable from the body which has authored it—this section argues that in the act of writing her self, the heroine is also imagined to be "righting" her self. In texts such as *Girl, Interrupted, Bridget Jones, Never Been Kissed, Freedom Writers,* or *Eat Pray Love,* autobiographical authorship is repeatedly depicted as a means of complying with the neoliberal imperative for continuous self-improvement. In an economic context characterised by uniquely precarious working conditions, the self is indeed conceptualised as a project requiring constant improvement (Giddens 1991, Rose 1996). Working on the self—to remain competitive on the job and marriage markets for example—is no longer "optional but imperative in this new economy" (McGee 2005, 12). With the concept of self-work so central to the ethos of personal responsibility and citizenship, "the self becomes a site of labour as well as governmentality" (Ouellette and Wilson 2011, 556); it is "belabored" (McGee 2005). Autobiographical narratives therefore play a crucial role in both producing the belaboured self, and evidencing the labour undertaken by the self-governing subject. As Alison Winch argues, the self is indeed produced "through a reflexive understanding of one's biography that is created, monitored and revised through sets of narratives that explain one to oneself as well

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[7] Corinne's status as one of the few women of colour represented in this thesis troublingly exposes the ways in which "the limits on women's authorship are even sharper for black women" (Cobb 2015, 136). Corinne's marginality, and with it, her marginal access to authorial agency, is further compounded by her sexuality as a lesbian woman.

as to others" (2013, 67). In films like *Girl, Interrupted, Bridget Jones, Never Been Kissed,* and *Eat Pray Love,* the act of authoring an autobiographical text is therefore figured as a form of intimate labour in which the production of the text coincides with the production of a transformed heroine, whose self-work is both performed in, and authenticated by, the autobiographical text itself. As such, I argue, the notion of female self-determination through *écriture feminine*, advocated by feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous (1976), has been co-opted by the gendered neoliberal and postfeminist logics of personal responsibility and self-governance. Authorship does not retool an oppressive patriarchal society, but, rather, adjusts the female self to suit the needs of this society.

Like Thoma, I therefore see postfeminist media culture as conceiving of autobiographical writing as "a socially approved form of entrepreneurial labor for women" (2014, 126). Thoma demonstrates how women's first-person "writing facilitates the overt display of self-work" by incorporating "the mechanisms of the postfeminist makeover" (2014, 126-127).[8] This process operates "via a set formula", beginning with "the shaming of the flawed female subject", followed by "her subsequent commitment to a makeover", and, finally "the presentation of a significantly changed heroine" (Thoma 2014, 126). Thoma's analysis is chiefly concerned with *Julie & Julia* (2009) and *Eat Pray Love'*s resonance within the recessionary moment. However, as I will show, the trope of women's autobiography-as-makeover not only predates the 2008 recession, but figures the single woman as its ideal subject. In these films, singleness is indeed often figured as a signifier of an aberrant or disordered female subjectivity needing fixing, with the single woman author herself using authorship to deploy a "diagnostic gaze" (Negra 2009) at her own singleness.

In texts such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* for example, the use of the first-person voiceover facilitates the "shaming of the flawed female subject" (Thoma 2014, 126) through the production of "toxic shame" (Peck 1995). In the film, Bridget's "flaws" and their associated affects are signified through her marital status, her singleness

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[8] For detailed accounts of the postfeminist makeover see Ferriss 2008 and Weber 2009.

acting as a marker of a disordered subjectivity requiring the activation of therapeutic discourses. The film opens with Bridget's (Renée Zellweger) narration: "It all began on New Year's day in my 32nd year of being single." On screen, Bridget is pictured in medium shot, walking alone through the falling snow, both the image and voiceover emphasising her presumed loneliness as a never-married woman. Following Bridget's first encounter with eventual love interest Mark Darcy (Colin Firth) at her parents' annual turkey curry buffet, Mark tells his mother: "I do not need a blind date. Particularly not with some verbally incontinent spinster who smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish, and dresses like her mother." During Mark's damning assessment of Bridget's marital status, lifestyle, and clothing, the camera pans forward to reveal Bridget overhearing the hurtful remark [See Fig. 28].

Figure 28: Freeze frame on Bridget emphasising the production of "toxic shame" in Bridget Jones's Diary

As the onscreen Bridget pretends not to have heard, her voiceover intervenes to set the record straight:

> And that was it. Right there. Right there. *That* was the moment I suddenly realised that unless something changed soon, I was going to live a life where my major relationship was with a bottle of wine and I'd finally die fat and alone and be found three weeks later half eaten by Alsatians. Or I was about to turn into Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*.

Marking the significance of Bridget's recognition of her aberrant nature (she's a spinster who talks too much, drinks too much, smokes too much), the image freezes for several seconds, before cross-fading to a shot of Bridget's London flat. Bridget's toxic shame at being single is comically reinforced through her fear "that she is in danger of becoming socially worthless, a body whose abjection is so complete that upon her death it will go unnoticed and her corpse will be eaten by dogs" (Negra 2009, 62).[9] The alternative scenario of long-term singleness invoked is the equally bleak fate of "bunny boiler" Alex Forrest (Glenn Close) in the 1987 film, *Fatal Attraction*. Known for their articulation of "backlash" narratives (see Faludi 1990), late 1980s and early 1990s films such as *Fatal Attraction* depicted "career women as paranoid or breaking down due to alienation from the familial" (Jermyn 1996, 254). Bridget's predictions that her future as a single woman will inevitably be characterised by alienation and loneliness suggests that "the spectre of singlehood [is] a fate to be avoided at all cost" (Negra 2009, 8). What's more, as Negra argues, "This hysterical sense of accelerated time that leads a woman in her 30s to fixate on her death expresses both the imminent social death for which the single woman is at risk and a sense of the centrality of her abject selfhood" (2009, 62).

Such moments of shameful realisation are central to the postfeminist makeover formula, which, first and foremost, requires its subjects—"predominantly women"—to believe "that they or their life is lacking or flawed in some way" (Gill 2008, 441). The trope of the makeover importantly relies on discourses and affects associated with the self-help industry. Indeed, as Micki McGee argues in *Self Help Inc: Makeover Culture in American Life* (2005), "The literature of self-improvement defines its readers as insufficient, as lacking some essential feature of adequacy" in order to "offer itself as the solution" (McGee 2005, 18). Through their titles, films such as *Never Been Kissed, Confessions of a Shopaholic,* or *The DUFF* similarly construct their heroines as somehow lacking: in sexual experience signified by kissing; in self-control as suggested by an addiction to shopping; or in desirability as

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[9] See also, *The Sex and the City* episode "Splat" (season 6, episode 18), in which Carrie's over-40 single friend Lexi (Kristen Johnston) is defenestrated at a party: the abject ageing single female body is simply too unsightly to behold and must disappear from view.

evoked by the acronym DUFF, meaning "designated ugly fat friend". In the same vein, the title *Eat Pray Love* identifies nourishment (both literal and spiritual) and love as those ingredients missing from the heroine's life. The title moreover doubles as an interpellation: the single woman author must eat, pray, love, in order to be liberated from her melancholy burden. As I have shown in the Literature Review, in postfeminist media culture, female singleness is often considered an "off-script" form of female selfhood, one which signifies as a "lack"—of heterosexual love and companionship—begging to be fixed.

Figure 29: Bridget's diary as means of neoliberal self-surveillance in Bridget Jones's Diary

The promise of the single woman author's autobiography-as-makeover, however, is that this "lack" will, in due course, be remedied through the self-work of authorship. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the diary itself is the carrier of this optimistic promise of transformation through self-work. Following her recognition of her flawed, singleton subjectivity, Bridget commits to enacting change through authorship: "And so I made a major decision. […] I decided to take control of my life and start a diary to tell the truth about Bridget Jones… the whole truth." The lexicon of "choice" here recurs through the words "decision" and "decided", implying that Bridget's current abject single status has been a matter of poor choosing. As Bridget is pictured sitting down and unwrapping her new red leather journal, we hear the sound of pen scraping against paper, and the handwritten words "weight 136 lb, cigarettes 42, alcohol units 30 50" appear overlaid on top of the image [See Fig. 29]. Visualising Bridget's determination to "tell the truth about Bridget Jones… the whole truth", these words

moreover signal her participation in neoliberal processes of self-surveillance and self-shaming, and her hope that the diary will enable her to make strategic choices in the future (see McRobbie 2004, 35).

As Eva Illouz notes, self-help narratives rely on the articulation and public exposure of painful personal feelings (2007, 52). In the therapeutic biography, for example, "private emotions" such as guilt or shame are turned "into public objects to be exposed, discussed, and argued over"; as such "the subject participates in the public sphere through the construction and exposure of 'private emotions'" (Illouz 2007, 52). Identity, Illouz argues, is "expressed in the experience of suffering and in the understanding of emotions gained by the telling of the story" (2007, 53). As a result, "The narrative of self-help and self-realisation is intrinsically a narrative of memory and of the memory of suffering" (Illouz 2007, 54). The postfeminist makeover narrative—in particular that which is chronicled through autobiographical writing— follows the same affective logic. *Never Been Kissed*'s narrative of self-realisation is for instance reliant on flashbacks to the protagonist's past suffering. Ahead of her undercover assignment posing as a teenager in a Chicago high school, Josie is reminded of her own teenaged experience of bullying. For Josie, the prospect of returning to high school marks a return to the site of suffering: looking in the mirror, she comes face to face with her nerdy, 17 year-old self [See Fig. 30], the mirror a space of encounter with her painful recollection.

Figure 30: The mirror as site of encounter with memory of suffering in Never Been Kissed

The mirror plays a similar role in a later scene in which she discovers she has the word "LOSER" literally stamped on her face after a night out. However, it is not

enough for Josie to be privately shamed: her humiliation must be made public. Equipped with a miniature camera worn on her cardigan, Josie is constantly watched by her colleagues at *The Chicago Sun-Times*. After the "LOSER" incident, her editor Gus comments "It's like the all humiliation network." Crucially, it is the "exposure" of her private emotions which authenticates Josie's participation in the makeover/self-help narrative.[10] That the trope of autobiography-as-makeover requires the articulation, recollection, and public circulation of personal emotions exposes how far postfeminism functions as an "affective tyranny" (Negra 2009, 140); which is to say that postfeminism as a structure of feeling relies on gendered feeling rules such as the circulation of (female) shame.

*Eat Pray Love'*s narrative of self-transformation similarly depicts the recollection of memories of suffering or guilt as the starting point for self-growth. In the film, author Liz Gilbert intends to recover from an acrimonious divorce, as well as an unhappy rebound relationship by spending a year travelling to Italy, India, and Indonesia.[11] While in Rome, Liz visits the Augusteum, a ruin which becomes metaphor-fodder for the ruins of her relationship with actor David (James Franco). Following her visit, Liz writes to her former lover. In her email, she observes that the Augusteum "feels like a precious wound, like a heartbreak you won't let go of because it hurts too good." Eventually reasoning that "Ruin is a gift. Ruin is the road to transformation", Liz concludes that "in this eternal city, the Augusteum showed me that we must always be prepared for endless waves of transformation. Both of us deserve better than staying together because we're afraid we'll be destroyed if we don't." In writing to David, Liz not only commits to ending their unfulfilling relationship, but indeed embraces "ruin" as "the road to transformation." Illouz's suggestion, that at the centre of the self-help narrative "lies the injunction that one exercises one's memory of suffering in order to *free* oneself of it" (Illouz 2007, 54, emphasis added) certainly

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[10] In avidly consuming Josie's adventures, her co-workers become affectively linked to one another in what amounts to an "intimate public" (Berlant 2008). The recurrence of intimate publics bound by the single woman author is a trope which I examine further in the next chapter.

[11] According to Gilbert's original memoir, "It was only later, after admitting this dream, that I noticed the happy coincidence that all these countries begin with the letter I. A fairly auspicious sign, it seemed, on a voyage of self-discovery'' (2006, 30).

applies here, as Liz's email-writing enables her to unburden herself from the memory of her suffering with David and move forward. It is her autobiographical authorship, through the expression of the experience of suffering, and the associated articulation of the insight "gained by the telling of the story" (Illouz 2007, 53) which thus facilitates the construction of a new identity.

Such an invocation of therapeutic discourses aligns *Eat Pray Love* with what Leigh Gilmore theorises as the "American neoconfessional":

> Unlike testimonials that bear witness to human rights abuses and are more directly political in their aims, the American neoconfessional primarily bears witness to personal pain. By locating the cause, experience, and end of suffering within the framework of the individual rather than in histories of violence that require political critique and legal and social remedies, and that compel readers to negotiate identification and witnessing, neoconfessionals displace the analysis of wrongdoing away from questions of justice. The subjects of these memoirs seek nothing in the way of a reckoning from their audiences. (2010, 659)

Girl, Interrupted, in which protagonist Susanna (Winona Ryder) recovers from Boderline Personality Disorder (BPD) through a combination of talking therapy and autobiographical authorship, is exemplary of this same logic. Highlighting the ways in which psychiatric practice functions to pathologise non-normative female behaviours, the film notably testifies to the sexist oppression of "madwoman" subjects.[12] In requiring Susanna to individually shoulder the burden of self-transformation through autobiographical writing, rather than burden society itself with a responsibility to address its structural oppression, the film however emerges as "juxtapolitical": it "lack[s] political analysis, even as [it] teems with political material" (Gilmore 2010, 664, see also Berlant 2008). In the end, *Girl, Interrupted* seeks little "in the way of a reckoning from [its] audience" (Gilmore 2010, 659);

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[12] For feminist accounts of women's madness see for example Showalter 1987, Ussher 1991, and Chesler 1997.

subscribing to postfeminist and neoliberal logics, it evacuates the very rubric which would allow a politicised reading of female suffering.

Underpinning the diary project of *Girl, Interrupted,* then, is an equation of autobiography with "girl power" agency over one's life. This rhetoric is mobilised in part through the casting of Winona Ryder in the role of Susanna. Drawing on Ryder's previous "can do" single woman author roles in *Little Women* and *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995), Susanna is aligned with girl power discourses recasting structural inequalities "as poor personal choices, laziness, and incompetent family practices" (Harris 2004, 30-32). *Girl, Interrupted* furthermore links Susanna's disordered personality with childishness, and her recovery with responsible choosing. The film's infantilisation of Susanna is particularly striking in the scene in which nurse Val (Whoopi Goldberg) carries her out of bed, and drops her into a cold bath to draw her out of a lethargic state. Walking past the tub, Val briefly pushes Susanna's head under water, before calmly heading for the door. Susanna angrily slams her hand in the water and shouts, "get me the fuck out of this tub!" "Get yourself out," Val responds. Susanna's repeated swearing, as well as her movements characterise her as a sulky teenager. Val, however, has no patience for Susanna's performance: "You know, I can take a lot of crazy shit from a lot of crazy people. But you, you are not crazy. […] You are a lazy, self-indulgent little girl who is driving herself crazy." Throughout the exchange the shot/reverse shots are set up so that Val is filmed from a low angle, towering over Susanna, herself filmed from a high angle as she lies in the bathtub. The camera work locates Susanna in the wrong while her carer is literally given the moral high ground, thus consolidating the scene's moral coding. As Val concludes "you're throwing it all away" the film suggests that Susanna in fact holds the key to her own recovery, and is wasting her potential as a girl power subject. However, Val's subject position is within Susanna's grasp. In the scene which functions as the turning point in the narrative, Susanna lies in bed while Val sits up next to her. Having abandoned all traces of childish performativity, Susanna lies very still. Filled with anguish after a friend's suicide, she finally acknowledges her flawed selfhood and articulates her desperate need for self-transformation. As Susanna speaks, the camera slowly moves into an extreme close up, so that her tear-streaked face fills up most of the frame; she is no longer portrayed as childish or self-indulgent, but remorseful and in need of rescue. In the next shot, Susanna sits up and

embraces Val, marking the two women as moral equals and friends. Now that she has made the correct moral choice to recover, she is able to abandon her indulgent, and self-isolating pose, and meet Val at her level for a hug.

Figure 31: Susanna's self-expression as self-work in Girl, Interrupted

Importantly, once Susanna has made the "choice" to recover from her illness, her autobiographical authorship becomes a vehicle for her girl power agency. Val in fact suggests that journaling can help to unburden Susanna of her pain: "Put it down. Put it away. Put it in your notebook. But get it out of yourself. Away, so you can't curl up with it anymore." From this point onward, Susanna's self-expression practices are characterised as therapeutic acts associated with achieving mental health. In an extended montage of cross-fades, and intermingled voiceovers, she is pictured constantly occupied in writing, sketching, and painting, reflecting on her illness and on her recovery [See Fig. 31]. Along with her therapy sessions, Susanna's journal and art visualises the process of self-work. Later, when she is about to be released from hospital, Susanna watches the final scene of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). In this scene, Dorothy (Judy Garland) realises that she always possessed the power to return home to Kansas. Aligning Susanna with Dorothy, the scene cannily suggests that all Susanna needed in order to come home was to discover her own girl power agency, and to exercise that agency through autobiographical authorship. Under neoliberalism, autobiographical authorship is thus harnessed as an instrument of self-governmentality for the single woman subject whose singleness is a "problem" in

need of fixing. In fact, as I go on to argue in the next chapter, authorship functions as a relational gateway uniquely placed to deliver the single woman subject's absorption into heteronormativity.

Autobiography at an impasse?

As I have shown so far, films in my corpus frequently engage two interrelated narrative conventions: the trope whereby the heroine's text is shaped by her embodied experiences, and that of her embodied experiences being (re)shaped by her authorship. The former, I've suggested, is consistent with postfeminist rhetoric encouraging women to perform work that is "expressive of [their] essential femininity" (Negra 2009, 87), while the latter offers a means of complying with a neoliberal imperative for continuous self-improvement. Both tropes, I have argued, exemplify the ways in which postfeminism and neoliberalism understand autobiographical authorship as an appropriate form of gendered labour for the single woman subject. As I now go on to argue, recent films find themselves at a Berlantian impasse whereby they both rely on, and yet register an ambivalence toward reproducing these particular tropes. The impasse, Lauren Berlant contends, is a "delay that demands activity"; to adjust to it involves "bargaining" gestures which "point to and revise an unresolved situation" (2011, 199). In this section, I explore how recent texts such as *Atonement, Young Adult,* and *Adult World* bargain with the tropes of autobiographical authorship through the use of an unreliable narrator and/or a move away from an autobiographical mode. Next, I analyse the ways in which *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, The Secret Life of Bees, Easy A, Wild,* and *Welcome to Me* express a skepticism toward the affective expectations of the autobiography-as-makeover paradigm. In this way, recent texts work to highlight the cruel optimism inherent in the conflation of the single woman author's body with her body of work. In this subtle revision of the representational patterns associated with the single woman author, I read *both* a filtering of recent cultural critiques of patriarchal structures *and* the resilience of postfeminism's ability to take feminism into account within an ever-shifting political context.

Where a text like *Little Women* values the heroine's autobiographical text for its authenticity, presumed objectivity, and for the ease with which it is written,

Atonement emphasises instead the subjectivity of perception and memory, the difficulty of authorial labour, and the artifice of the single woman author's text. Toward the end of the film, 18 year-old Bryony Tallis (Romala Garai) visits her sister Cecilia Tallis (Keira Knightley) and lover Robbie Turner (James McAvoy) in Balham. Wishing to atone for past wrongdoings, Bryony offers to alter a testimony she gave five years prior and help to clear Robbie of false assault charges. Robbie instructs Bryony to "Write it all down, just the truth, no rhymes. No embellishments, no adjectives." In the next scene, Bryony is pictured sitting on an underground train. As the train's lights flicker to the same rhythm as the sound of a non-diegetic typewriter's keystrokes, there is an implication that Bryony intends to follow Robbie's instructions and finally author a truthful, "unembellished" testimony which will set things right. The scene that follows initially consolidates this impression, as an aged Bryony (Vanessa Redgrave) is now being interviewed on television regarding the launch of her latest novel, *Atonement*. Like *Little Women*, the central conceit is that the film we are watching is a version of an autobiographical novel of the same name written by the film's single woman author protagonist. Meeting the narrative expectations I have described so far in this chapter, *Atonement* establishes the autobiographical content of Bryony's novel through dialogue: "I haven't changed any names, including my own. I had for a very long time, decided to tell the absolute truth. No rhyme, no embellishment." In reprising Robbie's words, the film reinforces the single woman author's perceived commitment to authenticity and truthfulness.

Atonement however soon derails these expectations. The film's plot twist reveals that the novel Bryony has written is not, after all, a truthful account of what has happened to Cecilia and Robbie, but an *imagined*—and, crucially, happier—ending. The scene in Balham, Bryony explains, is pure fabrication: she never found the nerve to speak to her sister, and both Cecilia and Robbie died in 1940. Robbie's injunction for Bryony to "Write it all down, just the truth, no rhymes. No embellishments, no adjectives", is itself a fabrication. Though equally imaginary, Cecelia's declaration, "You're an unreliable witness", rings true. Arguing that the "effect of all this honesty was rather pitiless", Bryony justifies her turn to fiction as a kindness both to her readers and to her characters "What sense of hope could a reader derive from an ending like that? So, in the book, I wanted to give Robbie and Cecilia what they lost out on in life. I'd like to think this isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of

kindness. I gave them their happiness." Reversing the logic of autobiography-as-makeover, *Atonement* promises that it is in breaking from the truth that the single woman author can right/write the wrongs of her past. In acknowledging the constructed nature of Bryony's authoriality, the film implicitly acknowledges her authorship as a form of labour, rather than an act of passive remembrance *à la Little Women*. Demonstrating that Bryony's novel is *both* based on her life *and* distinct from it, the film ambivalently reinscribes and challenges the linkage between the single woman author's embodied experiences and her body of work.

Figure 32: Andie's typical features in How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days

Destabilising the trope further, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* and *Adult World* figure the imperative to adopt the autobiographical mode as limiting to the single woman author. In the former*,* Andie Anderson (Kate Hudson) is particularly frustrated with the restrictive affective and intellectual remit of *Composure* magazine. The film opens with a montage of *Composure* magazine content. Interspersed amongst Andie's features, including "How to get a better bod in 5 days", "How to feng shui your apartment" [See Fig. 32], and "How to talk yourself out of a ticket", are brief shots showing Andie at the gym, moving furniture around in her apartment, and sweet-talking a police officer who has pulled her over. The implication is clear: "how to girl" Andie writes from experience, or, more to the point, seeks out particular

experiences in order to write about them.[13] The montage is scored by The Beu Sisters' upbeat track "Catch Me If You Can" (2003), which fades out after the lines "if you want it/ you can get it". The music is therefore suggestive of Andie's authorship entanglement with girl power understandings of female agency as unconstrained by structural inequalities.
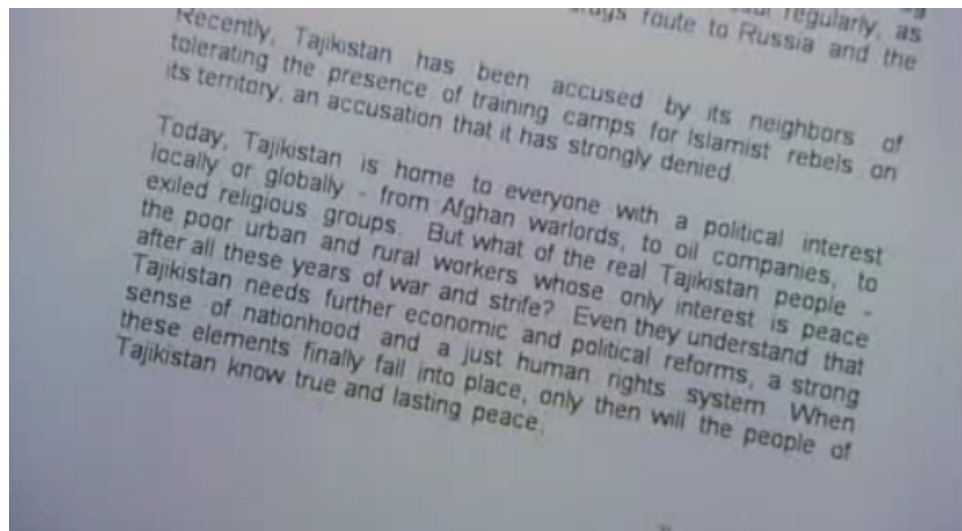
Figure 33: Andie's preferred journalistic genre in How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days

Contrasting with this upbeat opening sequence, the film then cuts to a shot of a Word document on a computer, panning upwards to reveal its title: "How to… Bring peace to Tajikistan" [See Fig. 33]. Unlike typical women's magazine fodder advocating neoliberal self-work as the route to "inner peace", this feature argues that "true and lasting peace" requires substantial structural reform. When her friend observes, "it's brilliant. It's really moving. But it's never going to appear in *Composure* Magazine," Andie responds, "God, I busted my butt in grad school to […] write articles like […] 'Do blondes, do they, like, really have more fun?' I want to write about things that matter, like politics and the environment, and foreign affairs, things I'm interested in." Andie's use of "like" and of an affected high-pitched voice when delivering the

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[13] This is a common trope both in both film and television. Hannah Horvath (Lena Dunham), the single woman author heroine of *Girls* for example decides to take cocaine as part of a writing assignment (Season 2, Episode 3). The heroine's singleness and whiteness, I argue, registers as an absence: her lack of experience functions as an ideal tabula rasa meaning she is perpetually "up for" fulfilling article briefs.

line "Do blondes, do they, like, really have more fun?" signals her frustration at having to perform a kind of "dumbed down" femininity through her authorship. Despite its ostensibly autobiographical content, then, Andie's columns do not authentically match up to her interests, suggesting, in turn, that gendered stereotypes damagingly constrain her authorial agency. In this way, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* disturbs the fantasy that Andie's choices are freely chosen, calling into question the neoliberal ethos that "if you want it/ you can have it."

Andie's editor Lana (Bebe Neuwirth) articulates *Composure* magazine's remit as "fashion, trends, diets, cosmetic surgeries, salacious gossip." Later, she tells Andie she can write about "whatever you want. Shoes. Laser therapy, dressing for your body type. Use your imagination. The sky is the limit". This scene consolidates the impression that the traditionally gendered agenda of *Composure* is selling both its authors and readers short in reproducing the assumption that all women care about is fashion and looks. Desperate to transcend her status as "how to girl", Andie dreams of engaging in "serious"—that is, male-coded—journalism. The requirement to convert personal experience into capital is finally too limiting, and she quits her job. Interestingly then, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* resists associating autobiographical writing with neoliberal self-improvement. Though her column eventually secures the forgiveness of romantic lead Ben Barry (Matthew McConaughey)—a trope I theorise as the "text of contrition" in the next chapter—it does not activate a makeover nor require Andie to recognise herself as broken some way. Rather, it is the postfeminist and neoliberal structure within which she operates which is broken, and in need of rewriting. Yet in the act of registering Andie's frustration with the restrictive gendering of her authorship, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* falls into another gendered trap: the devaluing of female authorship and of feminine culture.[14] As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, the dismissal of feminised mass culture as

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[14] Recent events have for example shown that publications aimed at young women such as *Teen Vogue* have been at the cutting edge of political critique (Gilbert 2016, Stern 2016). Engaging directly with this debate is the recent TV series, *The Bold Type* (2017-). Following the antics of three millennial best friends working for a women's magazine—including single woman journalist Jane Sloan (Katie Stevens)—*The Bold Type* repeatedly suggests that women's media can produce quality content on both fashion *and* politics.

frivolous is complicit in a sexist logic which the dichotomy serious/superficial is filtered through gender.

Figure 34: Amy contemplates suicide in Adult World

In *Adult World*, Amy's (Emma Roberts) attachment to an autobiographical mode is not just limiting: it is a form of cruel optimism. Her pursuit of a poetry career is shown to be materially and emotionally costly: she labours in her mentor's home for free, gets a job in a sex shop to subsidise her writing, and she cancels her car's anti-theft insurance to pay poetry competitions entry fees, meaning she is left out of pocket when her car is stolen. What's more, the film implies that Amy is not a very good poet—the only publication she secures is in a "toilet book" entitled *Shit Poetry: An Anthology of Bad Verse*. With her attachment to poetry simultaneously life-giving and life-threatening, Amy finds herself at an impasse. Bargaining with her situation, she briefly contemplates suicide [See Fig. 34]. But in the end, Amy is no Sylvia Plath (whose face tellingly appears on a poster in her room), and rather than detach from life, she detaches from poetry as a cruel genre of writing, and tries her hand at writing erotica instead. Where poetry has been costly, erotica is lucrative, earning her $500 for a single story. In a striking reversal of the *Little Women* plot in which Jo gives up sensation fiction to write a biographical novel, Amy gives up autobiographical poetry to write erotica. In both instances, one genre of writing is directly linked to the author's experience, while the other is imaginative and based in fantasy.

Like *Adult World, Young Adult* suggests that the single woman author's investment in fantasies of autobiographical authorship belie misplaced optimism. In the film, Mavis Gary's (Charlize Theron) authorship is depicted as laborious, dull, and lacking in spontaneity. The fact that she is commissioned, and chased by her editor, to write "Waverley 178" for example highlights the practice of writing as commercial transaction. What's more, the "Series Bible" formally dictates the terms of the writing itself, codifying the authorised storylines and characterisation. As such, Mavis' authorship directly conflicts with romantic views of self-actualising, spontaneous, autobiographical writing. Mavis' status as a ghost-writer, and the later revelation that she suffered a miscarriage troubles the "childbirth metaphor [that] has yoked artistic creativity and human procreativity for centuries" (Friedman 1987, 49). Although she works from home like the heroines of *Little Women* or *Never Been Kissed*, Mavis' desk is a professionalised, rather than domestic space. It is furnished with the accoutrements of mundane office work: notebooks, volumes of paperwork, a large file entitled "Waverley Prep Series Bible", and a printer. In the film's opening sequence, she sits at her desk and begins writing. As she types, Mavis' voiceover begins. After a few seconds, Mavis' happy facial expression quickly morphs into a grimace, deflating the illusion of effortlessness and pleasure. The film further breaks with convention as she immediately opens her email inbox and starts to procrastinate. Later, when she spits into an ink cartridge to fix her printer, writes in a branch of KFC, or titles her word document "pieceofshit.doc", it becomes clear that, in *Young Adult*, authorship is neither glamorous nor pleasurable.

Young Adult furthermore warns of the limitations of reading "the life" through "the works". In the following extract from Mavis's *roman-à-clef,* fictional protagonist Kendal Strickland stands in for Mavis: "Yes, Kendal Strickland was attractive; that was obvious. Other girls were so insecure, stressing about their faces and their figures. Not Kendal. Hers was a gracious, effortless beauty that glowed from within." As the voiceover celebrates Kendal's "effortless beauty", the film cuts from a scene with Mavis at her desk to Mavis laboriously using straighteners to curl her hair and wig, and then secure the wig into place with hairpins. The spillage of voiceover from the scene of authorship to the scene of beautification consolidates the identification the viewer is encouraged to make between Kendal and Mavis. That there is nothing

effortless about Mavis, creates a sense of dissonance between the voiceover and image depicted on screen, diffusing any possible fantasy of effortlessness. The final scene of the film deploys the same device, as the voiceover narration jars starkly with what is depicted onscreen:

> Kendal felt the weight of her high school years lifting off of her as she emptied out her locker. Sure, she'd think about Waverley from time to time; cheer squad, the debate team, sneaking into the woods for a drink after class. But her best years were still ahead of her. Kendal Strickland was ready for the world. It was time to look to the future: a new chapter. As she boarded the train to Cambridge, she took one last look at her small town and blew it a kiss, thinking, "life, here I come."

During this final voiceover, the film cuts from a shot of Mavis' wrecked Mini Cooper, to a medium shot of Mavis looking dishevelled and depressed, and, crucially, wearing the same outfit she wore at the start of the film. The contrast between the upbeat narration and the drab aesthetics, aural message of growth and the visual suggestion of stagnation or destruction create a sense of ambiguity and ambivalence. In this way, *Young Adult* reveals that Mavis' desire to read her authorial output as autobiographical, and by the same token, to read her own life through the generic codes of her teen novels has turned out to be "cruel". Reading "the life" through "the works" here requires a misrecognition of labour as effortlessness and stagnation as progress. Revealing the inherently contradictory character of cruel attachments, *Young Adult* demonstrates that as much as Mavis' devotion to postfeminist ways of living threatens her wellbeing, they nonetheless enable her to "add up to something". In this way, Mavis illustrates how "whatever the content of the attachment, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living and to look forward to being in the world" (Berlant 2011, 24).

In addition, recent texts complicate the single woman author film's entrenchment in neoliberal self-work rhetoric. *The Secret Life of Bees* for example deploys the trope of the diary as an instrument of self-forgiveness, rather than self-work. The film opens with a depiction of the accidental death of the protagonist's mother, Deborah

Owens (Hilarie Burton). Filmed from a low angle shot behind some clothing, the scene suggests an alignment with a child's gaze as that child sits and plays inside a wardrobe; we also catch a brief reflection of young girl in a hand-held mirror, confirming the origin of the point-of-view shot. Following a fatal gunshot, the film cuts to 14-year-old Lily Owens (Dakota Fanning), lying awake in bed, her voiceover flatly stating "I killed my mother when I was four years old. That's what I knew about myself. She was all I wanted and I took her away. Nothing else much mattered." Through editing and voiceover, the film implies that the opening scene is a traumatic and shameful memory which haunts and defines the single girl protagonist. Unlike texts like *Bridget Jones* or *Never Been Kissed* whose narrative structures require their heroines to be publicly humiliated in order to spur their self-growth, *The Secret Life of Bees* does not instrumentalise affects like guilt and shame as a springboard for neoliberal self-work. Rather, the film documents its young heroine's struggle to work through her shame and guilt, and eventually liberate herself from the burden of these emotions and memories.
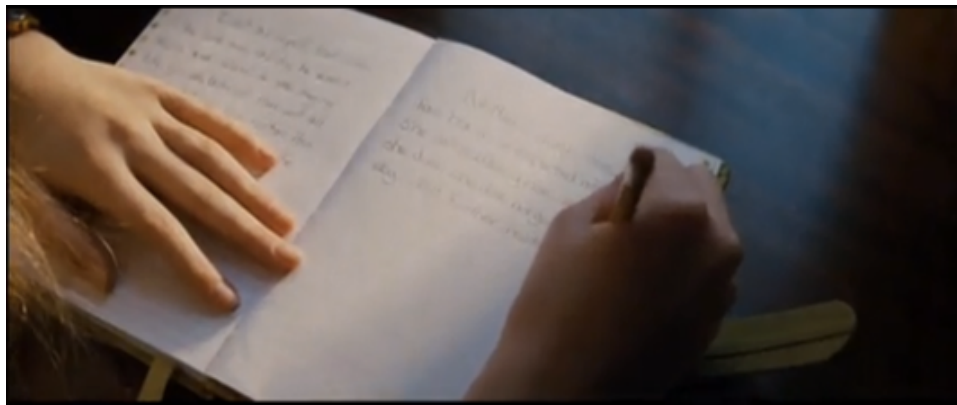
Figure 35: The autobiographical journal revealed as the source text for the film in The Secret Life of Bees

Importantly, Lily's self-forgiveness is authenticated through authorship. Toward the end of the film, her father T. Ray (Paul Bettany) agrees to let her live permanently with the Boatwright sisters, uttering "good riddance" under his breath. After T. Ray drives away, Lily turns away from him and toward her new home, and her voiceover resumes: "I still tell myself that when T. Ray drove away that day, he wasn't saying 'good riddance'. He was saying, 'Lily, you are better off there with all these mothers.'" After a brief montage, the film cuts to a shot of Lily sitting at a desk,

writing, as gentle sunlight streams through the window and illuminates her face and hair. The camera moves slowly forward and reveals Lily's journal, in which she is writing the very words we are hearing, suggesting the entire film has been an adaptation of this text [See Fig. 35]. Like Cobb, I see Lily's journal as signifying Lily's "need to write her own story, to self-authorize, and consequently, to assert her agency" (2015, 143). Lily's authorship indeed enables her to exercise agency: by "rewriting" her father's parting words into a validation of her new family arrangement with the Boatwright sisters.

Unlike *Little Women,* in which Jo's manuscript is eventually read and published, Lily's journal is not designed for public consumption. As Lily's narration stops, she is pictured putting down her pencil, closing her journal, and running down to the garden, where she carefully places her journal amidst the stones of the Boatwrights' "wailing wall". She briefly places her hand on the journal, and then stands and walks away. The camera pans upward, capturing Lily as she joyfully skips across the garden and back toward the house. The wall, we learn earlier on in the film, has been designed to help May Boatwright (Sophie Okonedo) deal with her heightened sense of empathy: she writes "all the heavy feelings [she] carries around" on small pieces of paper, and deposits them between the stones. It is described as the "only thing that helps her" to manage her emotions. As Cobb notes, putting Lily's journal in the wailing wall means that "what she wrote will become warped and faded in the rain and heat of the south, unreadable. The faded 'book' of her story will become unreadable" as has "happened to all of [May's] notes in the wall" (2015, 156, see Fig. 36). The promise of the wailing wall is to wash away the suffering that has been recorded in writing. To Cobb's observation, I add that Lily's disposal of the journal effectively bypasses the shaming elements of the self-work formula of *Never Been Kissed* and *Bridget Jones*. The journal's future illegibility safeguards the privacy of Lily's emotions, which need not (within the diegesis at least) become "public objects to be exposed, discussed, and argued over" (Illouz 2007, 52). The disappearance of Lily's text thus marks an important variation to the affective economy of the trope of autobiography as self-work, stripping some of its punishing, undertones. If her text is never read, there can be no shaming of the single woman author subject. Though she states she has forgiven herself, Lily admits that "sometimes, in the night, my dreams will take me back to sadness. I have to wake up and forgive again." Through this

voiceover, the film acknowledges the limitations of self-help rhetoric. In this way, *The Secret Life of Bees* both engages self-help rhetoric and registers ambivalence about its neoliberal underpinnings.
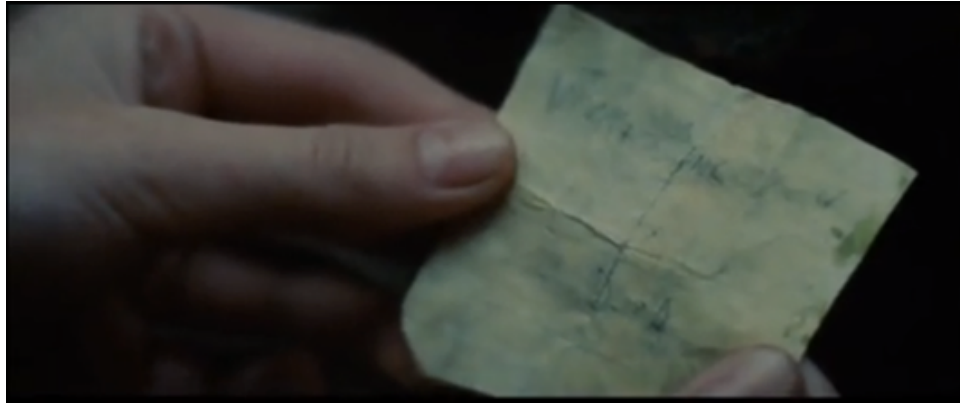
Figure 36: The destiny of illegibility reserved for texts deposited in the "wailing wall" in The Secret Life of Bees

The narrative trajectory of Olive Penderghast (Emma Stone) in *Easy A,* on the other hand, exposes the limits which postfeminism and neoliberalism impose upon women's autobiographical authorial agency. In the film, Olive colludes with gay classmate Brandon (Dan Byrd) to start a rumour about them having sex at a house party. This lie, designed to protect Brandon from homophobic abuse, is framed as an act of female authorship. Olive notably "directs" their sex scene by correcting Brandon's comically "incorrect"—read: queer—performance of masculinity. Despite her virginal status, Olive is able to use clothing to signify sexual experience and knowingness, thus authoring a "false" autobiographical text. As Katherine Farrimond observes, the "furious cutting and sewing montage" during which Olive constructs her new "slutty" outfits conveys the extent to which "sluttiness is heavily fabricated through costume" (2013, 52). Significantly, the montage is scored by the non-diegetic song "Bad Reputation" (1980), emphasising "the way that she is in the process of (bad) reputation-building" (Farrimond 2013, 52). Initially, then, *Easy A* figures the authoring of a sartorial text of sexual availability as "something that Olive has complete control over, echoing postfeminist discourses about the empowering nature of sexual display for young women" (Farrimond 2013, 53). In so doing, the film ostensibly engages the trope of authorship as a means of retooling the self.

Figure 37: Olive walks away from the slut-shaming picket line in Easy A

This moment of empowered authorial agency is short-lived, however, as Olive soon loses the ability to control the narratives circulating around her sexuality. In *Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives* (2017), Leigh Gilmore explores the various ways in which women's testimonies are routinely discredited. As Gilmore shows, this phenomenon is inextricably tied to gender: "Doubting women is enshrined in the law, represented in literature, repeated in culture, embedded in institutions, and associated with benefits like rationality and objectivity" (2017, 19-20). As a result, "women encounter doubt as a condition of bearing witness", and women's testimony is always already understood to be "messy, conflictual, and compromised" (Gilmore 2017, 20). *Easy A,* I argue, shows the ease with which Olive—despite her significant racial and class privilege—becomes a "tainted witness". The term itself, Gilmore shows, carries "both the physical properties of stain and impurity as well as the metaphorical suggestion of ruination" (2017, 19), so that "not only the testimony but the person herself is smeared" (2017, 2). For example, when she turns down Evan's (Jameson Moss) request to lie about him, he points out "I don't need your permission, you know. […] I just don't see how people will not believe it." In the next sequence, a seemingly uninterrupted take, the camera pans around the school at an accelerated rate, visualising the pace at which the "taint"—the rumour that Olive is soliciting sex for money—spreads. This moment exemplifies the insidious ways in which the "stain" of her sexuality is used to smear both Olive and her future testimonies, so that she will inevitably lose any "he said/she said" discussions. As a young, unmarried woman, with a reputation for

promiscuity, and a penchant for wearing corsets, Olive is the ideal subject of guilt: "sticky" affects like judgment stick to her, compromising her testimony.

Importantly, *Easy A* exposes the contradictions of postfeminism and neoliberalism's affective economies. Despite complying with the postfeminist dictate to present herself as a "sexually autonomous heterosexual young woman who plays with her sexual power and is forever 'up for it'" (Gill 2007, 151), Olive is publicly shamed. Her "slut-shaming" notably culminates in her classmates forming a picket line outside the school brandishing signs such as "slut", "tramp", "Jezebel", "school is 4 learning not 4 slutting", and "expel Olive" [See Fig. 37]. The picket line signs echo the film's poster, in which Olive is pictured in front of a blackboard full of derogatory annotations such as "tart", "tramp", "floozy", or "easy", both serving to visualise the torrent of verbal abuse reserved for women who dare to take control of their sexuality [See Fig. 38]. Like Farrimond, I see the film as "draw[ing] attention to the volatile and often hostile environments in which young women negotiate their own sexuality" (2013, 54).
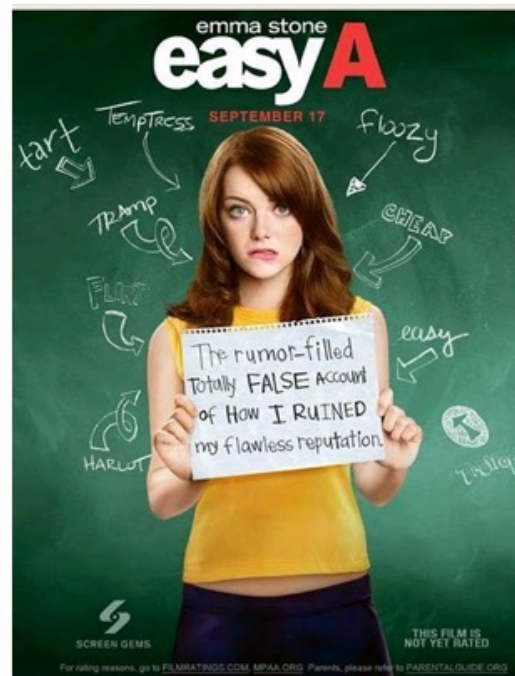
Figure 38: Easy A *poster and its evocation of slut-shaming*

In this way, *Easy A* reveals both the continuities and disjunctures within postfeminism as a "structure of feeling" characterising the contemporary moment. In

recognising the existence of structural inequalities (such as gendered double standards), the film for example calls into question the "postfeminist notion that performed sexuality is inherently empowering" for young women (Farrimond 2013, 54). Furthermore, in showing how Olive's status as a "tainted witness" decreases her agency within the narrative, the film points to the constraints within which women's autobiographical narratives operate, and the uneven gendered terrain within which they circulate. However, the film also tracks the intensification of neoliberal logics directed at female subjects. Olive is able to eventually regain her credibility through the vlog which frames the film; however, this newfound trustworthiness is predicated upon Olive complying with neoliberal ideas of "authenticity" as accessible through entrepreneurial self-branding. Under neoliberalism and postfeminism, Sarah Banet-Weiser explains, the girl subject "realises her individual empowerment through and within the flexible, open architecture of online spaces" (2011, 278). In this context, self-disclosure, or the "detailing of one's everyday life for others' consumption" ostensibly provides "viewers a complete view of one's 'authentic' self" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 60). Olive's confessional vlog indeed succeeds in "re-virginising" her and freeing her from the stickiness of judgment, but, crucially, this success is achieved through the commodification of her intimacy and femininity.

Like *Easy A*—but in a rather more surreal fashion—*Welcome to Me* explores the ambivalences and ambiguities inherent to life lived under neoliberalism. As in *Never Been Kissed*, *Girl, Interrupted* and *Bridget Jones*, self-help narratives operate in this film as a set of guiding affective principles with which the single woman author heroine Alice Klieg (Kristen Wiig) makes sense of her life. Alice's literal and metaphorical investment in narratives of self-growth and redemption is conveyed in the opening sequence in which she quotes an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986-2011) verbatim whilst watching it, and picks up her monthly copy of *O, The Oprah Magazine* (2000-) from her local newsagent. In fact, her apartment is cluttered with VHS tape recordings of old *Oprah* episodes. The figure of Oprah Winfrey functions in the film as a signifier for neoliberal self-help rhetoric promising to take "pain as material for self-transformation" (Gilmore 2010, 664, see also Illlouz 2003, Gill 2007, and Peck 2008). "The reproduction of redemption", through Winfrey's "endlessly renewable formula" Gilmore explains, "creates a preference for certain kinds of narratives that seem to substantiate through repetition the impossible

mobility promised by the American dream" (2010, 658). Alice's passionate attachment to such fantasies of "impossible mobility" is then vindicated as she wins $86 million in the California Stack Sweepstakes. Amazingly, she refuses to attribute her extraordinary lottery win to luck; instead she infers a causality between the kind of mindset promoted by Winfrey and her newly acquired wealth. "Winning has nothing to do with luck", she states, "It's all mental training. […] Oprah says that everything in our world is created on a DNA level by what we think. I thought I was a winner. I won $86 million."

With her newfound fortune, Alice decides to commission her own weekly talk show, entitled *Welcome to Me*. Alice summarises the focus of the programme as "My hopes, my dreams. What I like to eat. Who I think is a cunt. My spirituality. Me." With her involvement as financier, writer, subject, director, and presenter, Alice's work on *Welcome to Me* is figured as a form of autobiographical authorship. As part of the show, she writes, casts, and directs segments known as "re-enactments" in which key moments from her life are restaged. In one segment entitled "Jordana Spangler: My childhood 'friend'", two women act out a stilted picnic scene in which a young "Alice" and "Jordana" share secrets. The real Alice then interrupts the scene to speak to the actress playing Jordana and starts yelling at her: "You told everyone at school I was borderline! And when I asked you, you denied telling anyone. But every single person that I talked to told me that you said I was! Everything was different after that. And it really hurt me." She starts to cry, the actresses leave the stage, and the credits begin to roll. She then screams "Fuck you to death, Jordana!" and the episode abruptly ends. In a later episode, Alice is consoled by the actress playing "Alice" in the "Someone's been tampering with my makeup bag" scene. As these scenes indicate, Alice's authorship functions as a means of returning to the scene of suffering and of "talking back" to those individuals she perceives as responsible for her pain. The talk show is therefore obliquely figured as a form of autobiographical authorial labour enabling Alice to "right" the wrongs of her past.

Welcome to Me importantly nuances the self-help formulae which it activates. Alice's authoriality is somehow out of step with the world, makes others uncomfortable (for example, she neuters dogs live on television for weeks), and causes her to fall out with best friend Gina (Linda Cardellini). Unlike Susanna in *Girl, Interrupted*, Alice's

authoriality does not yield a miraculous recovery from Borderline Personality Disorder. Underpinning the film's ambivalence is the suggestion that Alice's attachment to neoliberal self-help rhetoric is a form of cruel optimism which simultaneously gives her life meaning, and yet impedes the very fulfilment it promises. Alice's awkwardness, with her flat and stilted speech, her jerky and theatrical movements, her bizarre ideas, I argue, signals her status as a heroine at an impasse: she is "overwhelmed, forced to change, but also stuck" (Berlant 2011, 21). Bargaining to keep Gina's friendship, for example, Alice donates the remainder of her fortune ($7 million) to Gina during her talk show's finale. This moment is framed as a recognition of Gina's importance in Alice's life: as such, it marks a departure from the kind of individualised rhetoric which Alice has subscribed to thus far. The film ends with Alice making two further small changes to her routine. Though her return to her apartment (after living in a reservation casino for the duration of the film) signifies continuity with the past, her decisions to sleep under her duvet (rather than inside a sleeping bag), and switch off her television (which has been on for 11 years) stand out as significant gestures of adjustment. When Alice turns the TV off, the film (having lost its diegetic lighting) goes completely black for a second, and then a small red light appears, signalling that Alice is now using the handheld camera she has been gifted to record her life [See Fig. 39].
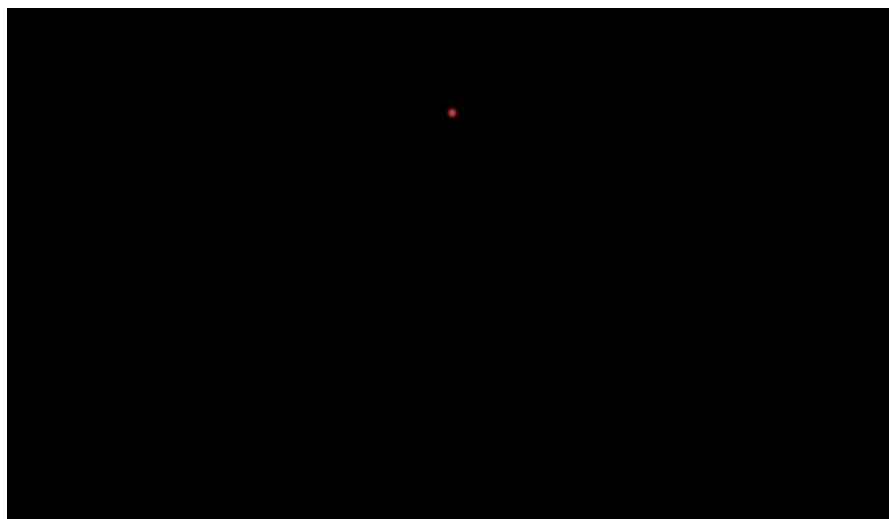
Figure 39: Alice's final gesture of adjustment in Welcome to Me

Welcome to Me nonetheless warns of the dangers of an intellectualised reading through the character of graduate student Rainer Ybarra (Thomas Mann). Rainer is

depicted as an engaged member of Alice's "intimate public": he phones into the show, attends recordings, interviews Alice for a paper. That Rainer's interest in her re-enactments relates to his class on memoir and performance signals the film's knowingness about its own availability for academic analysis, particularly in relation to research on memoirs and life-writing. Rainer sees Alice as a "genius", an "artist", and praises the "way that you play with gender and race and time and perception in your work." The film however problematises his intellectualising gaze. When asked, "I'm just wondering, what's behind the colour-blind casting for you?", Alice responds simply "Oh, you mean the skier in 'Someone's been tampering with my makeup bag'? She was the prettiest that day. I was prettier back then. Do you think I'm pretty now?" As Alice speaks, Rainer's body language shifts backward in disappointment, his facial expression suggesting surprise at Alice's answer. The casting of a woman of colour in the role of "Alice", he discovers, is not a self-conscious statement about gender or race, but rather a reflection of her narcissistic desire to be "pretty". In the final episode, Alice thanks Rainer for his interest: "I wanted to thank you for calling me an artist, because the moment you did, so many lost years had meaning." Despite its depiction of the dangers of intentionalist interpretations, *Welcome to Me* signals that the gaze of the male graduate student nonetheless authenticates Alice's authorship as a legitimate object of enquiry. In this way, the film acknowledges the struggles for gendered, embodied subjects like Alice to claim the identity of "author".

Conclusion

The controversy surrounding Italian novelist Elena Ferrante offers a fascinating "real world" intertext to the trope I have analysed in this chapter. Author of the best-selling Neapolitan novels, *My Brilliant Friend* (2012), *The Story of a New Name* (2013), *Those Who Leave And Those Who Stay* (2014), and *The Story of the Lost Child* (2015), Elena Ferrante famously protects her privacy by writing under a pen name, declining public appearances, and conducting interviews only through her publishers. Of her oft-cited need for anonymity, Ferrante writes, "I think authors should be sought in the books they put their names to, not in the physical person who is writing or in his or her private life. Outside the texts and their expressive techniques, there is only idle gossip" (Jobey 2015). This decision, Katherine Angel argues, has granted

Ferrante "a freedom ill-afforded to women writers in particular: a freedom from having their work's merit entangled with their public persona as women, a persona with little space to navigate" (2016). In opting out of literary celebrity, then, Ferrante seeks to dissociate her gendered body from her body of work, to evade the reduction of a text to its *female* author and her embodied experience. In other words, Ferrante's pseudonymous authorship is a means to avoid the fate that befalls the celluloid single woman author: the conflation of work with the text that bears their name, and vice versa.

However, just as the relative scarcity of information about Jane Austen's life has led to texts like *Becoming Jane* using Austen's novels to fill in the blanks, so speculation is rife regarding the autobiographical content of Ferrante's oeuvre. In particular, commentators note that Ferrante and her narrator Elena "Lenú" Greco, share both a first name (Elena) and a professional vocation (writer).[15] As novelist Jeannette Winterson notes, this phenomenon is particularly gendered:

> Henry Miller, Philip Roth, Paul Auster and Milan Kundera have all used themselves as their own aliases. When men do it, it is called meta-fiction and part of their playful experiment. When women do it, it is called autobiography. […] Karl Ove Knausgaard writes about himself with monomaniacal fixation. Yet this does not reduce him – it expands him, because his claim to be his own artwork is accepted. Antony Gormley uses his own body as the cast for his forms. Tracey Emin has determined her own space in much the same way – as subject and object – but her reception has been very different. Women who say, as Beckett did, I and Not I, this is me and not me, this is myself but it is someone else, are driven back from the larger open spaces of the artwork to the smaller spaces of the self. (2016)

Illustrative of this "driv[ing] back from the larger open spaces of the artwork to the smaller spaces of the selves" (Winterson 2016), is investigative journalist Claudio Gatti's exposé of Ferrante's "true" identity. In an article published in October 2016,

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[15] The *NPR* piece, "In New Neapolitan Novel, Fans Seek Clues About Mysterious Author's Past" (Livesay 2015) is exemplary of this trend.

Gatti identifies Ferrante as the Rome-based translator Anita Raja. The tone and content of Gatti's article reveals a desire to unearth a straightforward relationship between between "the work" and "the life", and a sense of disappointment when/if there is none.[16] I evoke Ferrante's struggle for anonymity as a parallel with the screened single woman author because the controversy crystallises the central assumption that I have explored throughout this chapter: that the woman author's life—her marital status, her family history, her experiences—cannot, in the end, be disentangled from the work that bears her name, and vice versa. The quest to "unmask" Ferrante sheds light on the ongoing difficulty of claiming the identity "woman writer". As Angel notes, "This persistent preoccupation is suggestive of the tendency to measure a writer's literary worth in relation not just to the work, but also to other markers: of gender, race, class. The urge to uncover the 'real' Ferrante enacts an imperative to locate her in these systems – and finally, perhaps, to decide on her literary significance" (2016).

Taking Angel's argument one step further, I trace this issue back to the "invention" of the woman author in 1970s feminist literary criticism which I recounted in the introduction to this thesis. Both the characterisation of the single woman author in film, and the understanding of the "real-world" woman author, I argue, are hugely indebted to this rich moment in feminist literary history. The gynocritics' notion that female-authored texts are marked by the subjective, embodied experience of their author (cf. Showalter 1977, Gilbert and Gubar 1979) indeed frequently recurs both in this thesis' corpus and in the contemporary reception of women writers like Ferrante. However, in drawing on gynocriticism's revolutionary construction of the woman author, films featuring the single woman author also reproduce its essentialist assumptions. Part of the gynocritical project was indeed to identify "distinctively feminine subjects in literature written by women" and thus to demonstrate the existence of "a distinctive feminine mode of experience or 'subjectivity'" (Abrams

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[16] For example, Gatti writes: "There are no traces of Anita Raja's personal history in Elena Ferrante's fiction. […] None of Ferrante's books gives any indication of the tragedies experienced by Raja's mother and grandparents and their extended family—pogroms in Poland, Nazi persecution in Germany, anti-Semitic laws in fascist Italy and the Holocaust, which took the lives of her great-grandparents and a dozen other members of her family" (2016).

2005, 96). Under the logic of postfeminism, so apt at "taking into account" feminist rhetoric and issues, the desire to make the female author an object of critical enquiry has paradoxically become complicit in her cultural denigration. In the films I have analysed in this chapter, these problematic assumptions are inflected in particularly postfeminist and neoliberal ways whereby autobiographical authorship emerges as an ideal form of gendered labour for the single woman subject. As I have argued in relation to *Little Women*, the depiction of the single woman author's autobiographical authorship as "feminine" or "natural", is complicit in the deprofessionalisation of women's labour. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how in texts like *Girl, Interrupted* autobiographical authorship is offered as a means of "righting" the flawed single woman subject. In both cases, autobiographical authorship functions to reify conventional gender scripts.

By contrast, recent films such as *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, Atonement, The Secret Life of Bees, Easy A, Young Adult, Adult World, Wild,* and *Welcome to Me* are characterised by a degree of ambivalence toward the above representational tropes. In these texts, there is an underlying suggestion that the emphasis on autobiography constrains and devalues the work of the single woman author. Depicting the figure as a victim of cruel optimism, these films register an intensification of existing ambiguities around assumptions of what forms of authorial labour are deemed appropriate for the single woman subject. Both invoking and complicating the trope of autobiographical authorship, these texts militate for a more nuanced understanding of gendered authorship. In this way, they are symptomatic of the ways in which postfeminism as a sensibility has undergone shifts whilst also intensifying its hold upon female subjects. Likewise, the fact that Gatti's exposé of Ferrante's identity was met with such fervent criticism, with numerous comment pieces identifying the investigation as a misogynistic violation of Ferrante's privacy,[17] suggests an increasing appetite to make patriarchy accountable for the ways in which it devalues and constrains women's authorial labour. In these gestures of revision, I read not a

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[17] See for example: "A Pound of Flesh" (Angel 2016), "The unmasking of Elena Ferrante has violated my right not to know" (Orr 2016), "The sexist big reveal" (Shane 2016), "The malice and sexism behind the 'unmasking' of Elena Ferrante" (Winterson 2016).

displacement of postfeminist ideology but rather a new kind of "taking into account" of feminism (McRobbie 2004). Answering Rosalind Gill's call for the development of "notions of postfeminism that can theorize both *continuity and change,* and that do not understand transformation in terms of simple displacement" (2017, 611), this chapter demonstrates that postfeminism has undergone an affective shift whilst also becoming hegemonic.

Chapter 3:
The Single Woman Author's Work as Relational Gateway

Introduction

The narrative of a woman journalist becoming romantically or sexually involved with the male subject of her investigations—as in *Message in a Bottle* (1999), *Never Been Kissed* (1999), *Van Wilder: Party Liaison* (2002), *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (2003), *Thank You for Smoking* (2005), *Scoop* (2006), *Crazy Heart* (2009), *Girls* (2012-2017), *House of Cards* (2013-), *Man of Steel* (2013), *Top Five* (2014), *Trainwreck* (2015), and *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* (2016)—has become something of a cliché in both film and television. Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the mainstream coverage on this subject focusses on the "inaccuracy" and inherent sexism of this narrative convention.[1] But there is a significance to this representational trope beyond its inaccuracy and egregious sexism. Indeed, when framed in the larger context of the ambivalent figuring of the single woman author, this representational pattern seems less exceptional than typical. Notable variations of the trope for example include single female protagonists who fall in love with rivals, colleagues, or mentors while performing authorial work, as in *Little Women* (1994), *Speechless* (1994), *I Love Trouble* (1994), *Mansfield Park* (1999), *Becoming Jane* (2007), *Music and Lyrics* (2007), *Letters to Juliet* (2010), and *Their Finest* (2016). Relatedly, single female protagonists form romantic relationships through e-mail correspondence in *You've Got Mail* (1998), *Cinderella Story* (2004), *A Perfect Man* (2005), and *Hateship Loveship* (2013). In *Down with Love* (2003), *Hitch* (2005), *The Holiday* (2006), *Becoming Jane*, *An Accidental Husband* (2008), *Letters to Juliet*, *Young Adult* (2011), *Begin Again* (2013), *Obvious Child* (2014), and *Authors Anonymous* (2014), meanwhile, the single female protagonist's authorial output is primarily concerned with romantic relationships. Authorship itself enables the single female protagonist to secure a heterosexual relationship in *10 Things I*

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[1] See comment pieces such as "Memo to Hollywood: Female Journalists Don't Sleep With Their Subjects" (Donnelly 2015), "Don't believe Hollywood's sexual fantasies about female journalists (Freeman 2015), or "We're So Over The Cliché Of Female Journalists Sleeping With Their Sources" (Todd 2016).

Hate About You (1999), *Never Been Kissed, Down with Love, How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, Obvious Child, The Girl in the Book* (2015), and *Their Finest*. While *Never Been Kissed, Possession* (2002), *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007), *Freedom Writers* (2008), *Letters to Juliet, The Help* (2011), *Austenland* (2013), and *Welcome to Me* (2014) figure the single female protagonist's authoriality as capable of engendering a range of relationships for those who consume her work. That multiple variations of the trope are sometimes engaged within a single text such as *Never Been Kissed* or *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* speaks to the prevalence of this representational pattern in contemporary Anglo-American Film.

The various iterations of this trope reveal a conflation of the personal and the professional in the imagined lives of the single woman author. Such an erosion of boundaries between "work" and "life" is consistent with the trope I examined in the previous chapter, whereby the heroine's body and body of work are figured as indissociable. These narratives moreover point to the neoliberal imperative within which these films have emerged. As outlined in this thesis' introduction, female subjects in particular are called upon to view work as "akin to a romantic relationship", something to be "passionate" about (McRobbie 2016). The neoliberal injunction to "do what you love" is importantly paralleled by postfeminism's own assumption that "women's self-realization comes from a combination of romantic fulfilment and professional, preferably artistic, success" (Ascheid 2006). In Chapter 1, I made the argument that, in the films explored in this thesis, happy endings are predicated upon a combination of heterosexual coupling and authorial success signified by publication. This chapter makes the further claim that, in these texts, heterosexual romance is frequently entangled with authorship. Broadening Shelley Cobb's observation that in *Little Women* "Authorship has brought [the heroine] romance and romance has brought her authorship" (2015, 90), this chapter contends that authorship brings the heroine relationships and, by the same token, relationships bring her authorship. To highlight this reciprocal process, I use the term "relational gateway." Exploring how films imagine the single woman's authorial labour as a means of forming attachments and relationships, this chapter reveals how authoriality is mobilised as a means of diffusing the anxieties provoked by both female singleness and female authorship.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine how the deployment of a "text of contrition" activates the relational gateway in romantic comedies such as *10 Things I Hate About You*, *Never Been Kissed*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001)*, Van Wilder: Party Liaison, Pitch Perfect* (2012), *Trainwreck*, and *The Girl in the Book*. I define the text of contrition as an authorial output such as a poem or a journalistic column which performs the dual function of exhibiting the heroine's penitence and declaring her love for the male object. In general, the text of contrition succeeds at securing forgiveness, while also resulting in the heroine's absorption into a heteronormative relationship. Crucially, I argue, such a deployment of female authorship functions to authenticate patriarchal authority. In the second section, I turn to *Freedom Writers, The Jane Austen Book Club* and *The Help* to consider the ways in which the single woman author's work functions as an indirect relational gateway yielding relationships amongst those who read her work. In particular, I draw attention to the formation of "intimate publics". As Lauren Berlant explains, "An intimate public operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires" (2008, 5). Through their shared consumption of cultural products such as books, members of an intimate public develop a sense of kinship with one another. With both the text of contrition and the intimate public, authorship emerges as a relational, and therefore feminised, form of labour, partly assuaging anxieties coalescing around the single woman author subject. In the final section of this chapter, I examine the ways in which *Young Adult, Austenland, Obvious Child, The Incredible Jessica James,* and *Their Finest* both invoke and complicate these interrelated tropes. These negotiations with the existing representational pattern, I conclude, signal subtle, but important shifts in postfeminism as a "structure of feeling" pervading contemporary Anglo-American film.

Texts of contrition

Throughout the genre's history, the gender politics of the romantic comedy's "happy ending" has been an object of critical preoccupation. In particular, the happy ending has been understood as signifying the heroine's submission to male authority. In 1930s and 1940s romantic comedies, for example,

> Love is associated with an embracing of 'normal' middle class marriage/ union, with, especially, an acceptance of the authority of the male and a rejection of the woman's economic independence. Although the union represents a masking of differences, an idealised homogeneity, this particularly involves placing the desires of the woman in regard to the authority of the hero (Neale and Krutnik 1990, 154).

Similarly, in *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (1993), Virginia Wright Wexman argues that "Hollywood's traditional stories of courtship and marriage have typically focused on the woman's resistance to romantic attachments" (18). In such a context "the kiss often represents a significant moment of change for her and documents her surrender to the erotic will of the man" (Wexman 1993, 18). Likewise, Mark Rubinfeld sees the "key kiss" as symbolising the female character's submission to the hero (2001, 6). Referencing the climactic end sequence of *L.A. Story* (1991), Rubinfeld argues that "the conventions of the love story ensure that when the key kiss finally occurs, it is interpreted by moviegoers as a sign of female desire rather than as a sign of female capitulation" (2001, 6). As such, the films succeeds in "naturalis[ing] romantic coupling while, in the process, dismissing the heroine's earlier declaration that 'this is everything I didn't want!'" (Rubinfeld 2001, 6). *L.A. Story*'s resolution, Rubinfeld concludes, epitomises both "the power of males in patriarchy to take females" as well as "the power of patriarchy to naturalise male dominance in order to neutralise female resistance" (2001, 4).

Building on these important accounts of the genre, this chapter argues that in contemporary romantic comedies, the naturalisation of patriarchal authority is frequently entangled with female authorship through what I conceptualise as the text of contrition. Written declarations of love doubling as gestures of submission circulate in print in *Never Been Kissed, Van Wilder: Party Liaison*, and *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, but texts of contrition are also variously figured as poems read aloud in class, as in 1*0 Things I Hate About You*, live broadcasts, as in *Easy A* (2010), blogs, as in *The Girl in the Book, acapella* performances, as in *Pitch Perfect*, or even as cheerleader routines, as in *Trainwreck*. Common to all these films is the use of female authorship to perform a self-abasing or embarrassing gesture in the

name of romance. In submitting herself to "public humiliation", the heroine proves "that love is more important than dignity" (Jeffers McDonald 2007, 13). Crucially, then, the text of contrition is a means for the heroine to recognise herself as flawed, and, in turn, to authenticate her male love interest's worldview or values. That acts of female authorship, which, I argue throughout this thesis, are recurrently associated with feminist agency, are thus deployed in the service of patriarchy is symptomatic of the postfeminist double entanglement which both "takes into account" and "repudiates" feminism (McRobbie 2004).

The reorienting of feminist agency in the service of patriarchal authority is particularly striking in *10 Things I Hate About You,* a reworking of the Shakespeare play *The Taming of the Shrew.* In the film, shrewish protagonist Kat Stratford (Julia Stiles) is "tamed" by her discovery of romantic love for Patrick Verona (Heath Ledger). At the start of the narrative, Kat's unruly feminism is conveyed through her refusal to perform the normative femininity embodied by girls like her sister Bianca (Larisa Oleynik). Whereas Bianca dresses in typically "girly" clothes and aspires to popularity, Kat favours camouflage tops and combat trousers, reads feminist classics such as *The Bell Jar,* plays football, listens to Riot Grrrl music, and explicitly rejects the pursuit of popularity [See Fig. 40]. The film's opening scene aurally captures this contrast by pitting two diegetic songs against one another. While a group of popular girls in a convertible listen to Barenaked Ladies' "One Week" (1998), Kat favours a beat-up Dodge and listens to Joan Jett's "Bad Reputation" (1981). Unlike the other girls, the film suggests, Kat simply doesn't "give a damn about [her] bad reputation". Drawing on the cliché of the shrill "feminazi", Kat's feminism is furthermore depicted as castrating. When she complains that "expressing my opinion is not a terrorist action," guidance counsellor Ms. Perky (Allison Janney) retorts: "the way you expressed your opinion to Bobby Ridgeway? By the way, his testicle retrieval operation went quite well, in case you're interested."

Figure 40: Kat and Bianca embodying competing models of femininity in 10 Things I Hate About You

Through its literary allusions, *10 Things I Hate About You* additionally mobilises female authorship as a signifier for feminism. In English class, Kat for example performs her feminist credentials by lamenting the "oppressive patriarchal values that dictate our education". In particular, she critiques the misrecognition of misogyny as romance: "Romantic? Hemingway? He was an abusive alcoholic misogynist who squandered half his life trying to nail Picasso's leftovers! […] I guess in this society being male and an asshole makes you worthy of our time. What about Sylvia Plath, or Charlotte Brontë, or Simone de Beauvoir?" Aligning herself with the rhetoric of popular works of second wave literary criticism such as *A Literature of their Own* (Showalter 1977) and *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Gilbert and Gubar 1979), Kat agitates for the inclusion of female authors in the canon. However, when Kat deploys her own authoriality, it is in (conflicted) service of heteropatriarchy through her tearful delivery of her titular poem in English class:

> I hate the way you talk to me, and the way you cut your hair.
> I hate the way you drive my car, I hate it when you stare.
> I hate your big dumb combat boots and the way you read my mind.
> I hate you so much it makes me sick, it even makes me rhyme.
> I hate the way you're always right, I hate it when you lie.
> I hate it when you make me laugh, even worse when you make me cry.
> I hate it when you're not around, and the fact that you didn't call.
> But mostly I hate the way I don't hate you,
> Not even close… not even a little bit…not even at all.
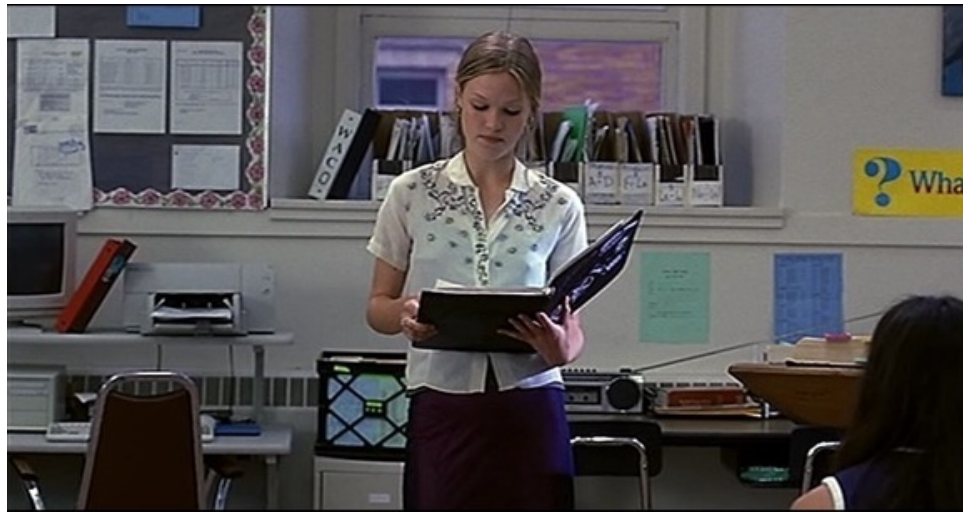
Figure 41: A (re)feminised Kat delivers her poetic text of contrition in 10 Things I Hate About You

In the scene, Kat's costume visually suggests a newfound adherence to feminine scripts: she has traded combat trousers for a blouse and skirt, and her hair is tamed in a simple plait [See Fig. 41]. Compared to previous scenes, Julia Stiles' performance strikes as subdued and submissive, and she eventually runs out of the classroom in tears. However, Kat's declaration of love for Patrick is deeply ambivalent: she does not say "I love you", but rather "I don't hate you", a statement which must be qualified as "I hate the way I don't hate you." Though it is similarly conflicted and resistant, the statement "I hate the way you're always right", nonetheless naturalises Patrick's male authority; or put another way, despite being "male and an asshole" Patrick is still "worthy of [her] time." Albeit ambiguous and contradictory, Kat's poem performs feminine relational work essential to her reconciliation with Patrick. After class, she discovers that he has bought her a guitar. Though she claims that "You can't just buy me a guitar every time you mess up, you know", Kat's acceptance of this gift cements her "inscription within the confines of heteronormative economic control" (Clement 2008). When Kat attempts to introduce further terms to their romantic relationship ("don't just think you can…") Patrick interrupts her protestations by kissing her into silence. Like Jennifer Clement, I see *10 Things I Hate About You*'s happy ending as "defined as the moment when Kat […] is finally silenced by her firm placement as the 'femininely' passive member of a heterosexual relationship" (2008).

Figure 42: Studious aspiring journalist Gwen Pearson at the start of Van Wilder: Party Liaison

Figure 43: Gwen transformed into a bikini-clad, relaxed beach babe at the end of Van Wilder: Party
Liaison

In much the same way, *Van Wilder: Party Liaison* sees uptight and ambitious college
reporter Gwen Pearson (Tara Reid) transform into a relaxed beach babe over the
course of her investigation into party legend Van Wilder (Ryan Reynolds). Like
Kat's, Gwen's transformation is conveyed through costume and performance: Gwen
starts out wearing blouses and jumpers connoting studiousness [See Fig. 42], and
ends the film clad in a bikini signalling her sexual availability [See Fig. 43]. That
Gwen's sartorial transformation indicates a broader shift in her worldview is

confirmed through her newspaper cover story which begins: "I have been grooming myself for the real world. I, like many, define the real world as what happens after graduation. I was wrong. It took a man, Van Wilder, to teach me that." Through her article, Gwen recognises her own flawed values ("I was wrong") and authenticates Van's influence in her life ("It took a man, Van Wilder, to teach me that."). It is also worth noting that Gwen's article performs key relational work, in enabling Van and his father to finally reconcile.
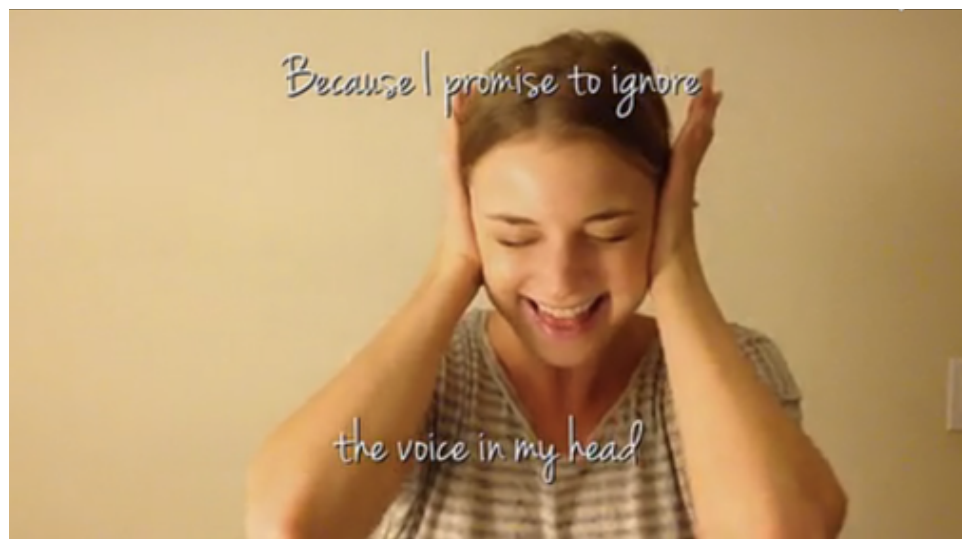
Figure 44: Alice performs her self-growth by authoring a blog in The Girl in the Book

Like *Van Wilder: Party Liaison,* texts such as *The Girl in the Book, Pitch Perfect,* and *Trainwreck* use female authoriality to signpost the heroine's newfound alignment with her love interest's taste or values. In *The Girl in the Book*, Alice (Emily VanCamp) makes amends to ex-boyfriend Emmet (David Call) through a blog entitled "100 Reasons Why You Should Forgive Me". Through the reasons she invokes, including "Because I'm ready to grow up", "Because I read the A section from cover to cover", "Because I started recycling", Alice performs and enacts her self-growth. When Alice posts "Because I promise to ignore the voice in my head" [See Fig. 44], it becomes clear that her "self-growth" is really a recalibration of her values and behaviours in compliance with Emmet's exacting expectations. Perhaps more tangential in terms of "authorship", but illustrative of the same logic, *Pitch Perfect* sees Beca (Anna Kendrick) integrate a reference to Jesse's (Skyler Astin) favourite film, *The Breakfast Club* (1985), into the Barden Bellas' final *acapella*

performance. In performing Simple Minds' "Don't You (Forget about Me)" (1985), Beca "makes up" for her previous dismissal of films as boring and predictable, and indicates her authentication of Jesse's worldview, including his status as her boyfriend.

In *Trainwreck*, meanwhile, Amy's (Amy Schumer) text of contrition involves her taking part in a surprise cheerleading routine following a basketball match. As Shelley Cobb and Diane Negra suggest, Amy's cheerleading performance marks her abandonment of "her old opinions" and her taking up "the views of Aaron [Bill Hader] whose softer outlook on the world is exemplified in his earnest appreciation for the work of professional cheerleaders" (2017, 760). In performing this routine, Amy certifies "her transition from 'badass' to an iconic image of enthusiastic, supportive and vulnerable womanhood" (Cobb and Negra 2017, 760). As Cobb and Negra note, "Because the cheerleader's conventional role is to exhort and glorify male achievement, Amy's performance indicates her awareness that to be eligible for coupledom she must move closer to such a position" (2017, 760). That Amy is not quite capable of performing the whole routine proficiently nonetheless speaks to the film's postfeminist ambivalence. Despite *Trainwreck*'s inversions of romcom tropes, Amy's "affiliation with patriarchal power structures is strikingly re-confirmed" through her cheerleading performance and subsequent reconciliation with Aaron (Cobb and Negra 2017, 764). The film, Cobb and Negra conclude, "illustrate[s] how postfeminism's scrambling of feminist precepts is increasingly functioning to symbolically redress/ mask other forms of inequality" (2017, 764). To this astute analysis, I add that it is often through the invocation of female authorship that postfeminism "scrambles" feminist ideology and "redress[es]/ mask[s] other forms of inequality".

In *10 Things, The Girl in the Book, Pitch Perfect,* and *Trainwreck*, the heroine's reluctance or inability to commit to a monogamous heterosexual relationship is depicted as symptomatic of her disordered personality. Her text of contrition therefore signals her rejection of her flawed former views, as well as her readiness to accept the authority of her male love interest through coupledom. In films like *Never Been Kissed, Bridget Jones's Diary*, and *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009), on the other hand, the heroine's recognition and repudiation of her formerly flawed

selfhood is executed through the renunciation of a prized object connected to her authoriality. Rather than using female authorship to authenticate patriarchal values, these texts require the female protagonist to symbolically relinquish her authorship in the service of romance.

Never Been Kissed, a teen adaptation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, epitomises this trend. As Eleanor Hersey argues, *Never Been Kissed* can be read as tracking heroine Josie Gellar's (Drew Barrymore) efforts to find her voice (2007, 152). In addition, I contend that Josie's struggle for a voice is also a struggle for authorship and authority. At the start of the film, she is a talented, but shy copy-editor at the *Chicago Sun-Times* who dreams of making it as a reporter. Her lack of voice, authoriality, and authority are each signalled early on: when asked her name in an editorial meeting, Josie can barely speak above whisper, her story pitches are assigned to other reporters, and her own assistant refuses to give her the time of day. Over the course of the film, she gains confidence and authority and eventually publishes her debut feature, entitled "Never Been Kissed". Following the logic of the makeover, Josie's internal transformation is conveyed through costume, hair, and makeup, as she emerges beautifully coiffed and impeccably dressed in a feminine pink dress in the final scene [See Fig. 45-46]. The article's publication marks the fulfilment of her professional ambition for authorship, while the use of a voiceover narrating her piece establishes her success in finding a voice. Josie's transformation is authenticated by the microphone she clutches in the final scene. As a device designed to amplify one's voice, the microphone reminds us that Josie's story has powerfully resonated with her readers. As a phallic instrument, the microphone also signifies her increased authority in the diegesis: she now confidently commands attention and exercises agency in her own life. However, when love interest Sam Coulson (Michael Vartan) fails to show up at the appointed time, Josie drops the microphone in disappointment [See Fig. 47]. It is only after she has relinquished this authorial object that Sam finally arrives. In Richard Burt's view, "the film equates romantic success for a woman with losing her voice, at best allowing her to gain it only in order to lose it" (2002, 221). Like Burt, I see this as a crucial moment: it signifies not just Josie's loss of voice, but also her implicit forfeiture of the authorial and authoritative connotations associated with the microphone.

Figure 45: Josie as a shy and nerdy copy-editor in Never Been Kissed

Figure 46: Josie as a well-dressed, and confident reporter in Never Been Kissed

Figure 47: Josie drops the microphone, symbol of her authoriality in Never Been Kissed

In the climactic scene of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, on the other hand, Bridget (Renée Zellweger) must renounce her titular diary. While at Bridget's flat, love interest Mark Darcy (Colin Firth) discovers diary entries in which she calls him "rude" and "dull", and states, "I hate him! I HATE HIM!" Mark then leaves Bridget's flat without a word. Half dressed—in a vest, leopard print pants, a cardigan, and a pair of

running shoes—she runs out into the snowy London streets in pursuit. The reprise of the non-diegetic song "Ain't no Mountain High Enough" (1970) signals that this is the final obstacle on the way to Bridget and Mark's happy ending. (That the song is also used in an earlier scene in which Bridget hurriedly drives her family through the snow en route to the Darcys' ruby wedding anniversary, where she apologises to Mark and professes her feelings for him, confirms that there ain't no street snowy enough to keep Bridget from repeatedly apologising to Mark.) Given her attire, she naturally attracts curious looks from passers-by. When she finally catches up with him, she immediately begs for his forgiveness (glossing over the fact that he has violated her privacy by reading her diary in the first place): "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean it. I mean, I meant it, but I was so stupid, I didn't mean what I meant. For Christ's sake, it's only a diary, everyone knows that diaries are just full of crap."

Through this speech, Bridget declares her own unworthiness ("I was so stupid"), disavows her authority as a storyteller (she is not a reliable narrator since she didn't mean what she meant) and authenticates gendered hierarchies of taste which dismiss women's writing as "full of crap." Only once Bridget has performed her remorse does Mark step in: "I know that. I was buying you a new one. Time to make a new start perhaps." Bridget nods her head to signal her acceptance of the new red leather-bound notebook which Mark has purchased for her—which, we presume, will not be "full of crap" because it will contain the male-authorised version of Bridget's text. In *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction* (2005), Mary Eagleton argues that "finding, owning and controlling the texts are […] intrinsic to establishing one's position as 'Author'" (2005, 2). Likewise, the woman author's loss of authority over her work, Eagleton contends, "results not in a dispersal of power and a liberating deposing of 'The Author' but in a redistribution of power which confirms existing hierarchies of gender, class and race" (2005, 5). In much the same way, Bridget's renunciation of her original diary and her acceptance of a replacement notebook amounts to a submission to Mark's authority. Naturalising the unequal distribution of authority along various axes of difference, the scene functions to authenticate traditional structures of authority associated with whiteness, maleness, and class privilege as embodied by Mark.

Bridget's reward for submitting to patriarchal authority is to be folded into a warm embrace, as the romantic song "Someone Like You" (1987) begins to play. This track is also a reprise: originally played during Mark's revelation that he likes Bridget, just as she is, its repetition marks the film's happy resolution: "someone like you makes it all worthwhile." The power disparity between the two characters is enhanced through clothing, with Bridget semi-naked, and Mark in a long winter coat, turtleneck and scarf. Only after Bridget has signalled her submission to patriarchal authority does Mark wrap her in his own weather-appropriate clothes, cementing their respective roles as benevolent patriarch/submissive woman. Although this is only one of Bridget's (many) humiliating moments, the scene is nonetheless framed as a desirable romantic scene as suggested by the falling snow, the two love songs, and the extended kissing sequence. While Bridget has one more line after the kiss ("wait a minute, nice boys don't kiss like that"), it is Mark who has the last word of the film (excluding the end credit sequence) riposting "Oh yes they fucking do", and kissing Bridget into silence. Like *10 Things I Hate About You*, then, *Bridget Jones's Diary* locates its happy ending in its heroine's silencing.

In the case of *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, Rebecca Bloomwood (Isla Fisher) must renounce a fashion accessory synonymous with her authorial identity. From the start, Becky's green scarf is associated with her disordered personality: it becomes a shortcut for both her shopping addiction and the pathological lies she tells in the service of it. When she first meets love interest Luke Brandon (Hugh Dancy), she falsely claims "it's a desperately important scarf […] it's for my great-aunt, she's very sick, and she's in the hospital." Eventually, Becky starts to work for Luke at *Successful Savings Magazine* where he fashions her authorial identity by suggesting she publish her personal finance columns under the pen name "the girl with the green scarf." When Luke eventually discovers the truth about Becky's shopping addiction and credit card debt, he distinguishes between her two identities:

> Rebecca Bloomwood […] lived a lie. We know that now. But what she wrote in her columns was the truth. She had a voice. She spoke to people who never believed that they could understand, and who loved it when they found that they could. And I loved it. Rebecca Bloomwood let me down. But the girl in the green scarf never did.

Since she cannot embody the identity "girl with a green scarf" without being fiscally responsible, Becky clears her debts by auctioning off her entire wardrobe—scarf included. Just as the heroines of *Pitch Perfect* and *Trainwreck* authenticate their self-growth through a performance which attests to their shift in worldview, so *Shopaholic*'s auction expresses Becky's newfound commitment to financial responsibility. Paradoxically, it is in the act of selling the scarf, that she finally becomes worthy of possessing it. In a reversal of fortune, it turns out that Luke is the scarf's buyer, which he then re-gifts to Becky, reprising the phrase, "it's a desperately important scarf." As Becky accepts the gift, she implicitly returns to the fold of Luke's male-authorised narrative. Just as Bridget's diary will no longer be "full of crap", the expectation here is that she will no longer be Rebecca Bloomwood, shopaholic, but rather, that perfect male invention, the girl in the green scarf.

The romantic climaxes of *10 Things I Hate About You, Never Been Kissed, Bridget Jones's Diary, Van Wilder: Party Liaison, Confessions of a Shopaholic, Pitch Perfect, The Girl in the Book,* and *Trainwreck* revolve in some way around the heroine's authoriality. Regardless of whether she uses her authorship, or conversely, renounces it, the heroine's authoriality somehow serves to disavow her past. In particular, the heroine's singleness or her reluctance to enter into a monogamous heterosexual relationship signifies as a symptom of her disordered feminine self in need of "self-work". The silencing kisses with which these films end thus validate her growth into a mature postfeminist subject who, in accepting heterosexual romance, capitulates to traditional gender scripts and patriarchal authority. While the female protagonist's authorship and singleness signal feminist-inflected forms of agency, these moments of capitulation do not necessarily mark a wholesale rejection of that agency. Rather, these texts suggest that postfeminism accommodates *precisely* those acts of female agency which ultimately leave undisturbed the normative gendering of authority and power as male. With its recurrent links to romance and to "acceptable" forms of female agency which reify patriarchal authority, female authorship therefore emerges as an ideal form of labour for the postfeminist single woman subject whose singleness is a problem authoriality promises to fix.

Intimate publics

Continuing my exploration of authorship as a relational gateway, I now turn to the
ways in which the single woman author is imagined to perform emotional labour by
enabling connections and relationships between those who read her works. In the
texts studied in this thesis, the single woman author is recurrently figured as a
woman at the centre of a web of readerly relations best described as intimate publics.
In *The Help* for example, the book collaboratively produced by unmarried authors
Aibileen (Viola Davis) and Skeeter (Emma Stone) is read aloud amongst
communities of female readers for shared—but strictly raced—delight. While Yule
Mae (Aunjanue Ellis) and a group of Black women are shown reading *The Help* in
prison, laughing raucously at the "rude" bits, the white elderly Mrs Walters (Sissy
Spacek) censors the text as she reads it aloud to her fellow white nursing home
inmates [See Fig. 48-49]. Though these readerly communities remain racially
segregated (young black women in prison, old white women in nursing homes) they
nonetheless "relate" to one another through the shared experience of reading the
book.

Figure 48: Racially segregated readerly communities in The Help

Figure 49: Racially segregated readerly communities in The Help
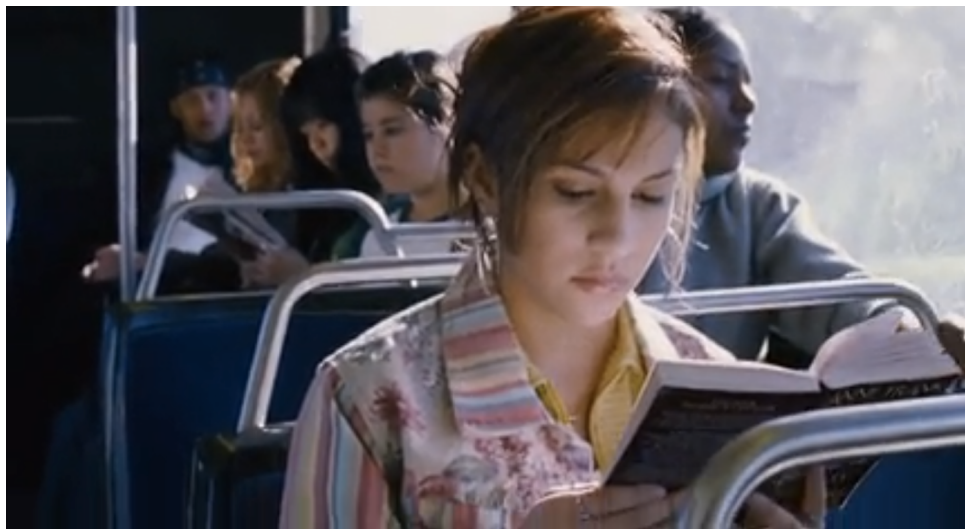
Figure 50: The diverse teens of Freedom Writers united in the act of reading
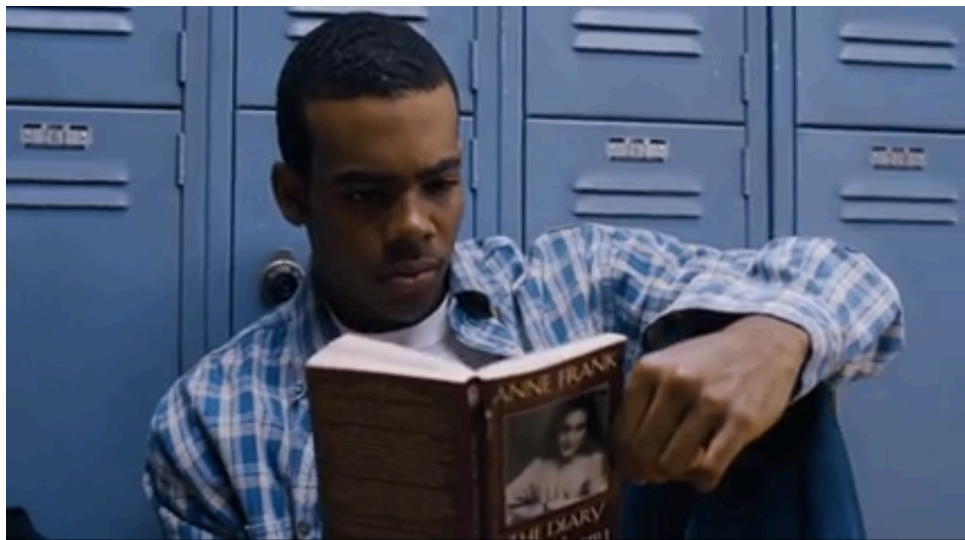
Figure 51: The diverse teens of Freedom Writers united in the act of reading

In *Freedom Writers*, on the other hand, a racially diverse group of high school pupils set aside their rival gang affiliations as a result of their shared experience of reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947). In a prolonged montage, individual students are pictured looking absorbed while reading on the bus, at school, in their bedrooms, and under bridges [See Fig. 50-51]. Although they are each depicted as somehow isolated, the act of reading weaves the individual Black, Latino and Asian teens together, as they read from the same edition of the book, and their voiceovers pick out key passages from the diary. As black male student Marcus (Jason Finn) says to his Latina classmate Eva (April L. Hernandez): "Anne Frank understands our situation, *my* situation." Reading the *The Diary of Anne Frank* enables Marcus to understand his own experience of oppression as a young black man as something which is shared with other marginalised groups. His comment thus resonates with Berlant's observation that,

> One of the main jobs of the minoritized arts that circulate through mass culture is to tell identifying consumers that "you are not alone (in your struggles, desires, pleasures)": this is something we know but never tire of hearing confirmed, because aloneness is one of the affective experiences of being collectively, structurally unprivileged. This is barely a paradox. You experience taxonomic saturation ("labels") personally, but they are not about you personally. They are bigger than the both of us. (2008, ix)

Intimate publics, Berlant argues, offer to "women or other non-dominant people" a sense of belonging, an "affective scene of identification among strangers that […] provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live as an *x*" (2008, viii). For both the women of *The Help* and the teens of *Freedom Writers* their chosen reading material "expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions" (Berlant 2008, 5). In this context, the intimate public "enact[s] a fantasy that my life is not just mine, but an experience understood by other[s], even when it is not shared by many or any" (Berlant 2008, x). The intimate public thus yields a space in which the marginalised protagonists of *The Help* and *Freedom Writers* are able, first, to forge relationships with one another, and second, to articulate their discontent. In this way, these reading communities

engendered by the work of the single woman author register important traces of collective identity and burgeoning political consciousness.

Despite its gestures toward collective identity, *Freedom Writers* eventually retreats from collective action. Such a manoeuvre is typical of intimate publics, which Berlant characterises as "juxtapolitical" since they "thrive in proximity to the political" (2008, x). Rather than engage directly with politics, they act as a "critical chorus that sees the expression of emotional response and conceptual recalibration as achievement enough" (Berlant 2008, x). In *Freedom Writers*, this "recalibration" is achieved through the teenagers' authoring of their own diaries under the collective name "The Freedom Writers". As in texts such as *Girl, Interrupted,* which I analysed in Chapter 2, diary-writing is mobilised here as a neoliberal instrument designed to rewrite the self. Participation in the intimate public created by the girl author Anne Frank similarly enables the teen protagonists of *Freedom Writers* to articulate the hardships they face as members of marginalised communities, and then transcend their raced and classed positionalities by taking responsibility for their own success as self-managing neoliberal citizens.[2] Trysh Travis' study of women readers of Rebecca Wells (author of *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* book series) captures the same ambivalence. On one hand, Travis argues, "Wells's readers long for a gender-specific community and see her fiction […] as a way to achieve it" (2003, 154). In particular,

> Women are buying Wells's books and telling their friends and families about them. They are coming together to read and discuss them in person and over the Internet. They are using the books, and the communities that form around them, to register dissatisfaction with their lives, to exercise their imaginations, and to bond with one another across the impersonal vastness of the modern American landscape. (Travis 2003, 135).

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[2] Rather than challenge racism or make whiteness visible and accountable, the Freedom Writers enact neoliberal fantasies of "postracist" meritocracy. As such, the text-within-the-film bears much resemblance to what Leigh Gilmore theorises as the "American neoconfessional" (2010, 659).

On the other hand, that dissatisfaction is "rerouted" into "unthreatening forms", as Wells' readers "distance themselves from feminism" (Travis 2003, 154-155). In the end, then, the intimate public "is a space of disappointment, but not disenchantment" (Berlant 2008, 2), meaning it finds crucial synergies with postfeminism's own simultaneous "taking into account" and "repudiation" of feminist politics.

Readers are likewise bound together by the shared affective experience of reading in *Never Been Kissed*. In the final scene, countless fans turn up to a baseball match to support Josie's attempt to secure her love interest's forgiveness after the publication of her feature "Never Been Kissed". As Josie's colleagues take their seats in the stadium, her editor appreciatively observes "*Sun-Times* readers out here en masse, relating personally to one of our reporters!" Moments later, her best friend Anita (Molly Shannon) says "they're behind you, they feel like they know you." As the words "personally" and "know" suggest, Josie's readers feel they share a personal connection with her as an author thanks to their consumption of her autobiographical narrative. Josie's intimate public yields more than community, however: her readers also connect romantically with one another: her friends Gus (John C. Reilly) and Anita share a kiss after Josie's own happy ending is secured. To an extent, then, *Never Been Kissed* reproduces gendered ideas of labour. The emphasis on the "feminine" and "relational" dimensions of Josie's journalism (its personal and romantic content, its potential to perform relational work in her readers' lives) serves to characterise her authorship as appropriately feminised. Depicting Josie in this way not only dissipates the threat implicitly posed by the figure of the female author as a working woman (See Negra 2009, 87), but also counters the unruliness of the single woman as an aberrant female subject whose singleness signifies a failure to appropriately "relate". As such, *Never Been Kissed* contributes to an understanding of authorship as an ideal form of labour for the single woman subject.

Like *Never Been Kissed*, *The Jane Austen Book Club* depicts the single woman author's work as a gateway toward meaningful relationships. In its opening montage, the film depicts the frenetic pace of modern life and its reliance on failing communication technologies, such as mobile phones and laptops. Suggesting something of the elusiveness of community in the twenty-first century, the montage emphasises the "increasingly mechanized nature of society, and its narrative implies

that this mechanization has also wreaked havoc on romantic relationships"
(Schreiber 2014, 63). In this context, to read "all Jane Austen all the time" is
presented as "the perfect antidote to life." Crucially, in order to access the
transformational power of Austen's novels, readers must adopt feminised forms of
engagement. *The Jane Austen Book Club* thus tracks the transformation of a "bad"
reader whose disavowal of academic reading is rewarded by romance and intimacy.
This conversion narrative focusses on the character of Prudie (Emily Blunt), a severe
high school French teacher. Prudie's academic approach, the film suggests, impedes
upon her ability to reap the benefits of Austen's work as a relational gateway. Her
alignment with pretentious intellectualised reading strategies is conveyed through
dialogue, in particular her use of academic language ("I am increasingly drawn to
[*Persuasion*'s] elegiac tones"), and her deployment of French phrases ("sans passion
l'amour n'est rien"). Her clothes (tight Chanel-inspired high-collared black dresses)
and hair (straight, black, cut in a sharp bob) further contribute to her characterisation
as uptight and emotionally repressed. Her book club interventions are characterised
as obstructive, shutting down insightful avenues of discussion, as she polices other
readers' interpretations: "Actually what Austen is writing about is two sisters",
"Austen's entire thesis is that none of these things are real", or "I think Jane is being
ironic there, I think some readers might miss that." Prudie's academic snobbery
moreover damagingly filters into her personal life. She incorrectly "reads" her
husband's lack of Austen knowledge as a boorish character flaw: "he thinks Austen
is the capital of Texas", she drunkenly exclaims one evening.

In the logic of *The Jane Austen Book Club*, Prudie must stop reading Austen like an
intellectual, and instead allow herself to connect with the author at a personal level.[3]
This affective connection is eventually made in the final arc of the film. As Prudie is
about to rendezvous with one of her students in a motel and cheat on her husband,
she finds herself at a metaphorical and literal crossroads. She looks up at the traffic
lights as they flash from "DONT WALK" to "WHAT WOULD JANE DO". "The
result of this surreal moment in a generally straightforward romantic comedy",

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[3] This conversion narrative also recurs in *Possession* in which academics Roland
Michell (Aaron Eckhart) and Maud Bailey's (Gwyneth Paltrow) commitment to
analytical reading impedes both their professional and personal fulfilment.

Shelley Cobb writes, "is that Prudie abandons the idea of having an affair and reconciles with her husband" (2015, 125). Importantly, the act of walking away from the affair also marks a shift in Prudie's reading of Austen: from this point onward, she embraces literature as an affective experience, rather than as an object of study. Having returned home, she tearfully asks her husband Dean (Marc Blucas) to read *Persuasion* (1818). When he opens the book and finds Prudie's flashcards, he immediately dismisses the idea of reading Austen as being set "up for a test you don't want me to pass". In turn, Prudie fishes the cards out of the book and insists, "they don't matter […] this is not a test, this is something to share." Prudie's disavowal of the academic object (the flashcards "don't matter") and her emphasis on *Persuasion* as a story with direct pertinence to her and Dean authenticates her readerly transformation. That *Persuasion* has relevance in their lives is signalled by Dean fiddling with his wedding ring as Prudie explains the plot of the book: "it's about two people who used to love each other… who don't anymore… and how they persuade themselves to give it another try." In the act of sharing the Austen text with each other—reading the book aloud while maintaining close physical contact—Dean and Prudie enact the *Persuasion* plot and "persuade themselves to give it another try." Unlike previous scenes in which Prudie is pictured reading in long shot within the school perimeter, Dean and Prudie's reading of *Persuasion* is depicted through close up shots that emphasise their renewed intimacy and closeness [See Figs. 52-53]. That their reconciliation has been successful is confirmed in the film's final scene, a year later at the library dinner, in which Prudie is pregnant.[4]

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[4] In its prioritising of intensely personal and emotional ways of engaging with literary texts, *The Jane Austen Book Club* is aligned with "middlebrow" reading practices. Middlebrow readers are indeed understood to privilege a reading experience which is "emotional and absorbing", and to seek out "the affective delights of transport, travel, and vicarious social interaction" (Radway 1997, 72). In her foundational work, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (1997), Janice Radway relays middlebrow's readers' accounts of "the visceral pleasures of being immersed in a book" (10), the "tactile, sensuous, profoundly emotional experience of being captured by a book" (13), the sensation of "being carried off and made to feel intensely" (117). Both the study's title, and its repeated references to being absorbed, captivated, overwhelmed—in a word: affected—by books make it clear that middlebrow reading is primarily about emotion. Other important works in the study of middlebrow reading practices include Long (2003), Aubry (2011), and Driscoll (2014).

Figure 52: Prudie's dry academic reading captured in long shot The Jane Austen Book Club

Figure 53: Prudie's intimate, affect-led reading captured in close up The Jane Austen Book Club

Ironically invoking the 1990s bracelets marked with the letters "WWJD" (meaning "What Would Jesus Do?"), the "What would Jane do?" cross-walk moment furthermore signals the film's endorsement of Austen's novels as a rule book or self-help manual to be closely followed by her readers in relationship matters. As Cobb notes, this is consistent with the "popular understanding of Austen as a romance novelist" whose works are commonly believed to provide a blueprint for finding love, as "evidenced by the advice books on the subject that invoke her name" (Cobb

2015, 125).[5] This attitude importantly mirrors the real-life readerly behaviours Timothy Aubry discusses in *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans* (2006). In Aubry's account, middlebrow readers notably "approach literature in the same way they approach self-help books", that is, in search of "practical guidance" (353). They "often seek out role models who can offer lessons in how to navigate—or how not to navigate—particular emotional challenges" (Aubry 2006, 370). In much the same way, in the scenes that follow the cross-walk moment, the characters of *The Jane Austen Book Club* "make Austenesque moves, such as reading aloud, reading recommended books, and writing confessional love letters, to reconnect with the one they truly love" (Cobb 2015, 125). The question "What would Jane do?" (or perhaps more accurately, "what would some of Austen's characters do?") implicitly guides the members of the book club into devoting time and effort to their romantic relationships.[6] Doing (or not doing) what Austen would do validates one's membership of the Austenian intimate public and its shared value system. For example, Daniel (Jimmy Smits) leaving his wife Sylvia (Amy Brenneman) for his mistress at the start of the film is expressive of his status as an outsider to the community: "No man who's read Austen would ever dump his wife because it's better for the other woman", quips Bernadette (Kathy Baker). Conversely, at the end of the film, Daniel's letter to Sylvia—inspired by Darcy's letter to Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and Wentworth's to Anne in *Persuasion*—signals his newfound compliance with the Austen rule book, and, with it, his status as a desirable partner worthy of forgiveness.

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[5] Typical titles in this vein include: *Dear Jane Austen: A Heroine's Guide to Life and Love* (Hannon 2005), *Jane Austen's Guide to Dating* (Henderson 2005), *Finding Mr Darcy: Jane Austen's Guide to Dating & Relationships* (Hooton 2012), *Finding Mister Darcy: Jane Austen's rules for love* (Hayden 2012), *Jane Austen's Rules of Romance: The Necessary Refinements and Situations for the Successful Procurement of the Marriageable Man* (Blackburn and Keane 2012), *The Jane Austen Guide to Happily Ever After* (Kantor 2012), *Mr Darcy's Guide to Courtship: The Secrets of Seduction from Jane Austen's Most Eligible Bachelor* (Brand 2013), *The Jane Austen Rules: A Classic Guide to Modern Love* (Murphy 2014). As this non-exhaustive survey suggests, it is common for these titles to use the possessive form "Jane Austen's", or to allude to her characters (Darcy especially, who is figured as the prototypical eligible bachelor), to authorise the circulation of dating advice.
[6] Sinead Murphy, author of *The Jane Austen Rules: A Classic Guide to Modern Love* (2014), echoes this rhetoric, claiming that asking oneself "what would Jane Austen do?" is "the best [dating] rule I can think of nowadays" (Garvey 2014).

However, *The Jane Austen Book Club* also works to expose the blind spots and shortcomings of Austen's novels as a relational gateway. Like Cobb, I read Allegra's (Maggie Grace) exclusion from the film's happy ending (she is the only one not partnered up in the final scene) as an "inability" to "access Austen's magic" related to her sexuality (2012, 224). "The specialness of being an Austen reader-fan and the happy endings it offers to the heterosexual white women" is simply not available to Allegra as a lesbian woman (Cobb 2012, 224). Allegra's fate, Cobb persuasively argues, reveals "The limits of postfeminist media's insistence on taking feminism into account by embodying 'feminist success' in the independent, white woman who chooses heterosexual romance, marriage and family" (2012, 224). This "choice" is unavailable to Allegra, exposing "the discursive deception that feminism has been superseded by a universally accessible neoliberal postfeminism" (Cobb 2012, 224). In other words, Allegra's storyline lays bare the narrow constraints within which the Austenian intimate public operates, and those subjectivities postfeminism works to exclude. Moreover, it is worth stating explicitly that what Cobb terms "Austen's magic" is little more than feminine emotional labour. Her "magic" is circumscribed to resolving relational issues: it is *woman's* work, and as such, it is simultaneously naturalised *and* yet devalued.[7] In the first part of the chapter, I suggested that authorial work can remedy the single woman's disordered subjectivity by facilitating her romantic coupling. Here, I suggest that Austen's authorship compensates for her own infamous singleness by equipping her *readers* to form or maintain heterosexual relationships. It is Austen's work, after all, which facilitates the two marital reconciliations (Dean and Prudie, Daniel and Sylvia). In this way, *The Jane Austen Book Club* cannily manages the anxieties relating to women's singleness and the threats they potentially pose to heterosexuality and motherhood: although Austen never married, her works function as a disciplinary mechanism reproducing heterosexuality both in their plots and in their impact on readers.

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[7] As Beverley Skeggs notes, "Feminists have known for a long time, via the 1980s domestic labour debate and its developments, that women's labour (in its many permutations: care, parenting, aesthetic, domestic, affective) has been central to the reproduction of capital, but that it has been made invisible, surplus and naturalised, and is not counted in theories of value" (2010, 30).

It may seem counter-intuitive for a thesis primarily preoccupied with authorship to examine the figure of the reader at such length. Indeed, why should we care how the works of Anne Frank or Jane Austen are consumed onscreen? Though a text like *The Jane Austen Book Club* is rather more concerned with reading/consumption rather than with writing/production, I argue that it sheds light on the figuring of the single woman author in contemporary culture. Discerning the reading practices contemporary films endorse or, conversely, disavow, reveals the gendered dimensions of the work the single woman author is understood to perform in postfeminist media culture, in particular its prioritising of "feminine" ways of writing and reading. In *Never Been Kissed, Freedom Writers* and *The Jane Austen Book Club,* the single woman author's work indeed promises to heal the fractures of modern life. It is Anne Frank's diary that inspires the diverse group of Long Beach pupils to come together into their own authorial collective, the "freedom writers". In *The Jane Austen Book Club,* it is Austen's novels that binds people together in romantic relationships and creates sustaining communities of readers. In emphasising the single woman author's work as a relational gateway yielding supportive intimate publics, these films contribute to the gendering of authorship as a feminised form of labour suited to single women.

Gestures of bargaining

This chapter has hitherto investigated two interrelated narrative conventions, which, in entangling acts of female authorship with romance and relationships figure the single woman's authorship as a relational gateway. Firstly, I explored how the single woman's leveraging of authorship in the text of contrition serves to naturalise patriarchal authority. Secondly, I examined the relational function of the single woman's authorship and its role in reproducing and enforcing gendered affective norms. In this final section, I analyse how recent texts such as *Music and Lyrics, Young Adult, Begin Again, Austenland, Obvious Child, Their Finest,* and *The Incredible Jessica James* work to revise these conventions, making ambivalent modifications to the narrative trope of the relational gateway.

Texts such as *Music and Lyrics* and *Begin Again* for example overturn the gendered logic of the text of contrition. Where the heroines of *Trainwreck* or *Pitch Perfect*

perform their conversions to the hero's worldview, in *Music and Lyrics* and *Begin Again* it is the male character who must validate the heroine's taste through a public performance of a song she has written. *Music and Lyrics* sees washed up pop star Alex Fletcher (Hugh Grant) authenticate lyricist Sophie Fischer's (Drew Barrymore) taste by performing her favoured orchestration of the song they have co-authored, while *Begin Again* depicts Dave (Adam Levine) performing Gretta's (Keira Knightley) song "Lost Stars" as a ballad. (It's worth noting that Dave's act of contrition is ultimately unsuccessful: Gretta walks out of the gig when the song turns into what she derisively terms "Stadium Pop". In the logic of the film, having compromised Gretta's artistic vision, Dave cannot finally secure her forgiveness.) On one level, the male character's act of contrition endorses the female lyricist's claim to authoriality. However, this revision of the trope sits uneasily alongside both films' depiction of Gretta and Sophie's labour as "natural" or "pleasurable" and therefore in some way amateurish; a sleight of hand which, I argued in Chapter 2, prioritises male subjects as bearers of authorship. As such, *Music and Lyrics* and *Begin Again* remain ambivalent about the heroine's ability to claim the professional identity of "author."

Their Finest, Obvious Child and *The Incredible Jessica James* likewise wrestle with the gender politics of the text of contrition. Specifically, these recent texts interrogate whether or not it is necessary for the heroine to renounce her unruly authoriality (*à la* Bridget Jones) for her to secure a romantic happy ending. In the WWII-set film *Their Finest*, Catrin Cole (Gemma Arterton) gets hired to "write the slop" (the female dialogue) in a film designed to boost morale on the home front. While shooting the film on location in Devon, Catrin and her collaborator Tom Buckley (Sam Claflin) get into an argument after she rejects his advances. Back in London, Buckley becomes sullen and withdrawn and struggles to finish writing the script. Having read Buckley's pages, Catrin declares them "not very good." Through a montage sequence, Catrin is then shown spending the night working at Buckley's desk, annotating the script and typing up her own version of their film's ending. As she writes, bombs are heard detonating outside, and plaster chips rain down on the desk, but neither succeed in derailing Catrin's focus. Once finished, Catrin lays down the revised pages on Buckley's desk and walks over to her own, smaller desk. As the camera slowly pans toward Catrin, we hear her voice narrate another scene she is now rewriting.

Figure 54: Buckley and Catrin have a quarrel in Their Finest

Figure 55: Catrin's imagined version of the scene, the fictional status of the images indicated by the altered grading and tilt shift effect in Their Finest

"A full moon, a clear sky. A man sits by the shore. There has been a quarrel, a woman is walking away from him." The film then cuts to a shot of Buckley sitting on the beach in Devon. Save for an altered grading, the shot is identical to the earlier scene of Catrin and Buckley's argument, suggesting that Catrin is now "rewriting" their argument. When the fictional Catrin and Buckley later sit side by side, a tilt shift effect conveys the imaginary status of the images [See Fig. 54-55]. As Catrin narrates, "Now she turns back", the imaginary Catrin is depicted turning back and sitting down with Buckley once more. In this imagined version of the scene, Catrin responds to Buckley's awkward declaration of love with her own: "What I'm trying to say is that if all of this stopped—the sparring and the jibing and the insults and the arguments—I'd miss it. Even if I were dead, I'd still miss it." As Buckley playfully asks her to "lose half" of the dialogue, she concludes "I'd miss you." The film then

cuts back to the real Catrin at her desk, adding softly "I'd miss you more than I could say." Through her authorship of a fictional scene, Catrin is therefore able to return to the scene of her disagreement with Buckley and articulate those feelings she had left unsaid. Catrin's written declaration of love then leads to her reconciliation with Buckley the next day. In eschewing the need for the single woman author to perform a gesture of self-abasement or renounce her authorship, *Their Finest* thus revises the gender politics of the text of contrition, while still figuring female authoriality as a relational gateway.

In *Obvious Child,* meanwhile, stand-up comedian Donna Stern (Jenny Slate) reveals in a set that she is about to have an abortion. Love interest Max (Jake Lacy), the father of her unborn child, watches Donna's performance in a state of shock and leaves the venue without a word. At this point, conventional romantic comedy expectations dictate that this incident require Donna to reify Max's authority over both her body and her body of work by disavowing her authorship of the set and/or her decision to terminate her pregnancy. Instead, Max turns up at Donna's house with flowers the next day, and asks to accompany her to the abortion clinic. To Max's apology, "I'm sorry I took off last night", Donna responds "I also made an extreme move last night", which he counters with "yeah, but it was an asshole move on my part." Implicit in Max's comment is that his own decision to leave, rather than Donna's choice to discuss the abortion on stage without first telling him she was pregnant, was "an asshole move." When Donna thanks Max for coming along to the clinic, he reciprocates: "thanks for letting me." Crucially, then, these exchanges never call into question Donna's entitlement to authorial or bodily autonomy: neither her decision to have an abortion nor include it in her comedy routine are challenged here. Instead, the film emphasises Donna's decisions as her own: it is up to her whether or not to have the procedure, who may or may not come along to it, and whom she shares her abortion narrative with.[8] *The Incredible Jessica James* features

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[8] As I showed Chapter 2, the single woman's body and body of work are imagined to be inextricably linked. In some ways *Obvious Child* reifies this link: Donna's autobiographical stand up is notably affected by her breakup at the start of the film. However, what is striking here is that Donna's decision to share her abortion story with an audience marks a turning point in her work: it is a creatively regenerative moment, as indicated by the success of an otherwise risky set. Disclaiming

a similar apologetic exchange reifying female autonomy. Toward the end of the film, app designer Boone (Chis O'Dowd) comments on Jessica's (Jessica Williams) plays saying "you're a very complicated person." In line with the assumption explored in Chapter 2, Boone sees Jessica's authorship as revelatory of an essential truth about her as a person. Her response, "I know, I'm sorry", might then be interpreted as a flippant disavowal of her flawed selfhood/authorship. Boone, however, does not accept this: "No, don't. You never need to apologise for that. There are so many other things you could apologise for." Like Max who validates Donna's autonomy, Boone jokingly validates Jessica's claim to being "complicated" and exploring this through playwriting. These two apologetic moments thus explicitly steer clear of undermining the heroine's authorship or authority.

In their final arcs, *Obvious Child* and *The Incredible Jessica James* furthermore revise the terms of the romantic comedy genre's happy ending. In showing up armed with flowers, asking to come along to the abortion clinic, and watching *Gone with the Wind* (1939) with Donna after the abortion procedure, *Obvious Child* thus reclaims the signifiers of "romance" (flowers, going out on a date, watching a romantic film), in a way which ultimately respects and supports women's agency. Similarly, in the final sequence of *The Incredible Jessica James*, we learn that Boone has used his frequent flyer miles to pay for two roundtrips to London so that Jessica's best friend Tasha (Noël Wells) and student Shandra (Taliyah Whitaker) can come along to a workshop at the Donmar Warehouse, where Jessica's play will be staged. While on the plane, Tasha exclaims "this is like the most romantic gesture I have ever seen". Jessica however rejects the term "boyfriend": the acceptance of such a gesture does not guarantee Boone's status in her life. Like Donna, she retains her independence and autonomy. That the film ends with the three female friends flying to London together to support Jessica's authorial work offers a revision to the typical postfeminist entanglement of authorship with romance. Exemplified by the final scene of *Little Women* in which "Bhaer's delivery of the novel is also the novel's delivery of Bhaer to Jo" (Cobb 2015, 90), films in this thesis typically end with the

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metaphors of female creativity as "birthing"—it is the "killing" of the foetus which allows her to "kill it" on stage—*Obvious Child* thus also complicates the relationship between the woman author's body and body of work.

dual success of the heroine as an author securing publication, and as a woman securing a boyfriend/husband. With Boone visually absent from the film's happy ending, *The Incredible Jessica James* suggests Jessica's authorship is entangled with female friendships rather than heterosexual romance. Although this is an important adjustment to the trope, female authorship still very much functions as a relational gateway, albeit one which does not prioritise heterosexual romance.

However, that is not to say that patriarchal authority or heterosexual romance are somehow disavowed; rather, through the characters of Max and Boone these recent texts present a revised formulation of desirable postfeminist masculinity. In the world of *Obvious Child*, to be an eligible male romantic lead is to champion women's right to both bodily and authorial autonomy, and in that of *The Incredible Jessica James* it is to financially support the sisterhood. These male feminist interventions echo that of Robert DeNiro's Ben in *The Intern* (2015) who tells his boss Jules (Anne Hathaway), "I hate to be the feminist here … but you should be able to have a huge career and be brilliant without having to accept your husband is having an affair as some kind of payback." Like Cobb and Negra, I detect in these scenes evidence of recent "postfeminist cultural developments" such as "the rise of the male celebrity feminist" (2017, 763). "[I]n stark contrast to the female celebrity feminist who is typically sized up and judged for her (un)worthiness", the male celebrity feminist's "declarations of feminist ideals are widely praised and left uncritiqued" (Cobb and Negra 2017, 763). In much the same way, male characters like Max and Boone, who champion female authorship and self-determination, or refuse apologies they deem unnecessary, emerge as "better" (liberal) feminists than their female counterparts. As such, they both embody a benevolent postfeminist patriarchal authority imagined to enable the thriving of the heroine.[9]

Austenland, on the other hand, suggests a recalibration of the intimate public. Where *The Jane Austen Book Club* figures the Austen readerly community as a supportive space, and the experience of reading Austen's novels as yielding heterosexual romance, *Austenland* depicts both as disappointing and unfulfilling. In fact, the film

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[9] I explore the trope of the male character as mentor to the single woman author heroine in depth in the following chapter.

portrays its heroine's attachment to Austen as a sign of feminine aberration. At the start of the film, Jane's (Keri Russell) obsession with romance is conveyed through her compulsive hoarding of Austen and Regency-related commodities: from a prized china tea-cup which she brings to diners, to the letters "DARCY WAS HERE" hanging above her bed. The sign, in inferring that no other man has (recently) shared her bed, thus also infers sexual immaturity. This is further suggested in the scene depicting Jane and a date watching the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) serial. When she ignores her date's kisses, he leaves and punches a life-size cut-out of Colin Firth as Darcy on his way out. Tending to her fictional lover, Jane repairs the cut-out and chastely places a kiss on the cardboard Darcy's lips. In this scene, the heroine's sense of kinship with Austen's fictional world hinders her access to romance in the "real world".[10] Austen fandom here signifies a longing for a "lost" era of romance, manners and courtesy, suggesting Jane is somehow "misplaced in time" (Cobb 2015, 114). Her collection of dolls and dollhouses and her sexual immaturity moreover signal a different kind of temporal displacement: a state of arrested development. In the neoliberal context of *Austenland*, it is the heroine's personal responsibility to grow up and let go of naïve romantic fantasies, and, conversely, her failure to detach from such scripts, and enter into a mature heterosexual relationship, signals her failed femininity.

Destabilising the trope further, Jane's trip to Austenland, an immersion into the intimate public, turns out to be unexpectedly traumatic. While there, she experiences first-hand the vast inequalities and injustices of lives lived in the Regency period, and is the victim of an attempted sexual assault. Spotlighting power disparities to do with class and gender, *Austenland* exposes uncomfortable truths obscured from postfeminist "Austenmania". The dream of the Janeite good life, then, is a damaging fantasy impeding the flourishing of those attached to it. In being animated by, and yet suffering because of, her Austen fandom, Jane suffers from what Berlant terms

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[10] The mini-series *Lost in Austen* (2008) similarly figures the twenty-first century woman's attachment to Austen as an obstacle to modern romance that can only be resolved through time-travel. For analyses of the serial, see Cobb's "What Would Jane Do? Postfeminist Media Uses of Austen and the Austen Reader" (2012), and Alice Ridout's "*Lost in Austen*: Adaptation and the Feminist Politics of Nostalgia" (2010).

"cruel optimism" (2011). At the end of the film, she returns home and proceeds to de-Austenify her apartment. That she is finally ready to enter a mature (sexual) relationship is suggested by the removal of childish objects such as dolls from her bedroom [See Fig. 56-57]. The non-diegetic song lyrics "all these teenage dreams/ cast them all aside" reinforce the impression that Jane is letting go of her immature fantasies. Jane's disavowal of Austen is then authenticated when she performs her newfound scepticism at Henry Nobley's (JJ Feild) declaration of love: "see, people don't do this, this is my fantasy."

Figure 56: Jane's sexual immaturity signified through Austen paraphernalia in Austenland

Figure 57: Jane's internal "makeover" signified through de-Austenification of her bedroom in Austenland

Despite eschewing Austen-based fantasies, Jane nonetheless secures an Austen hero of her own: Henry. The actor JJ Feild previously played the role of Henry Tilney in the 2007 ITV serial of *Northanger Abbey*. Casting Feild thus intertextually invokes Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a novel whose central concern is the heroine's (in)ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. As in *Northanger Abbey,* the

heroine's fantasy, though challenged, turns out to be, on some level, true. Having restored the Darcy cut-out's head (thus establishing that unlike Jane's previous boyfriends, he does not feel threatened by Darcy) Henry expresses that he shares Jane's values and "fantasy" of what romantic love entails. In this way, *Austenland* reifies Austen's ability to yield romance in her readers' lives. Despite Jane's repudiation of Austen, the canonical single woman author's relational "magic" nonetheless enables the heteronormative coupling of the postfeminist subject. Jane and Henry's happy ending is then cemented in the film's final shot, in which they place their heads in life-size cut-outs of Darcy and Elizabeth from the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice* serial [See Fig. 58]. Unlike time travelling romances like *Kate and Leopold* (2001) or *Lost in Austen* (2008), *Austenland* locates its heroine's fulfilment firmly in the present.[11] Although Henry and Jane return to Austenland, they now wear twenty first century clothing, and through the cardboard cut-out, their insertion into the *Pride and Prejudice* narrative is coded as a knowing, winking allusion. Modifying the trope of the relational gateway, *Austenland* simultaneously challenges and reinscribes the postfeminist linkage of Austen and romance.

Figure 58: Jane and Henry authenticate their Austen ending by placing their faces in a Pride and Prejudice cut-out in Austenland

In texts such as *Young Adult*, and *Their Finest*, the entanglement between romance and the single woman author's authorship is further called into question. In particular, these recent texts draw attention to the constructed (and therefore *authored*) status of romantic scripts and, in turn, to the single woman author's

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[11] For a detailed account of time-travelling romances see Negra (2009, 55-59).

complicity in reproducing these scripts in her own authorial output. *Young Adult*, on the other hand, for example features a heroine whose passionate investment in romantic scripts (both in the fiction she authors and in the life she leads) is depicted as toxic and cruel. In an early scene, protagonist Mavis Gary (Charlize Theron), stumbles out of a bar to explain to former high school classmate Matt Freehauf (Patton Oswalt) the "real" reason behind her return to their hometown of Mercury, Minnesota. "Alright, here's the deal," she slurs, "Buddy Slade and I are meant to be together, and I'm here to get him back." Unfazed by the fact that Buddy (Patrick Wilson), has a newborn baby, and is by all accounts happily married, Mavis exclaims: "Don't you get it Matt? Love conquers all. Have you not seen *The Graduate?* Or, like, I don't know, anything?" Contrasting with the naïve assertion that "love conquers all", the setting, a dingy parking lot behind a bar, as well as Theron's performance of drunkenness, create of sense of tonal dissonance. Mavis' reference to *The Graduate* (1967) moreover feels strained given the film's ambiguous ending as Elaine (Katharine Ross) and Ben (Dustin Hoffman) sit on the bus looking increasingly uneasy about their actions. As this vignette indicates, the desire to fulfil romantic platitudes that "love conquers all" is what animates Mavis, but this longing for romance turns out to be damaging to herself and to others, suggesting she has fallen prey to cruel optimism. The film's title, *Young Adult*, further problematises her connection to the generic scripts of romance. One on level, the title refers to Mavis' authorship as a ghost-writer of the young adult series *Waverley Prep.* Like *Sweet Valley High* (Pascal 1983-2003), *Waverley Prep* is a long-running series of highly formulaic genre fiction books. In some ways, this genre is characterised by a kind of stasis: the heroines of *Sweet Valley High*, Jessica and Elizabeth Wakefield, were aged 16 for 20 years. Likewise, never having outgrown her teenage self who was the most popular girl in school, Mavis enjoys a disordered relationship to time. On another level, then, the title figures Mavis' attachment to romantic tropes (which she repeatedly enacts through her authorship of romantic fiction) as a symptom of her failure to grow up into a mature adult. As such, Mavis' singleness is linked to her authorship, which has failed in its postfeminist promise to function as a relational gateway.

Despite its failures, Mavis' authorship is essential to her good life fantasy and her sense of "adding up to something". In her hometown she is for example fêted as a

success. "You're the only person in Mercury who could write a book, or wear a dress like that. Everyone here is fat and dumb […] Everyone wishes they could be like you" concludes a former classmate in whose eyes, Mavis' authorship signifies her specialness. Yet Mavis' relationship to her own authoriality is far from straightforward: it is characterised by ambivalence. As I suggested in Chapter 2, her work is neither "effortless" nor "pleasurable". That she titles her draft novel "pieceofshit.doc" on her laptop flags her contempt for the waning *Waverley Prep* series, for her own complicity as a writer reproducing romance as an aspirational genre of living, and for her own writing more broadly. At the end of the film, however, Mavis attempts to revise the very scripts which both her life and writing rely on. Having recognised her attachment to romance as cruelly impeding upon her wellbeing, Mavis finally rejects it by symbolically throwing Buddy's green hoodie into the bin. This rejection is then also enacted through her authorship. As she packs up her belongings and prepares to leave town, we hear the following voiceover indicating progress in her final *Waverley Prep* novel:

> Graduation turned out to be a bittersweet ceremony for Kendal. While honoured to be the valedictorian of her class, there was an unmistakeable air of sadness over the sudden death of Ryan Ashby. Who could have imagined when Ryan and his girlfriend set sail that day that it would be the last time anyone ever saw them. Poor Ryan, lost at sea.

Given the novel is a thinly disguised *roman-à-clef* in which Mavis stands in for Kendal, and Buddy for Ryan, killing off Ryan consolidates her intention to eschew her attachment to Buddy. The film thus ultimately figures Mavis' authorship as the opposite of a relational gateway.

While *Young Adult* contents itself with the metaphorical death of the male love interest Buddy, *Their Finest* take this one step further. Indeed, in the film, professional authorship saves single woman author Catrin, but kills her lover Buckley. Spending the night at the office, it turns out, saves Catrin from the worst night of the Blitz and from her apartment building's collapse. Buckley, on the other hand, is killed on set the next day by a falling lighting rig. With Buckley's death, however, comes Catrin's professional flourishing and her ability to revise reductive

gendered scripts—in particular those which Buckley was attached to. In the end, it is Catrin's original idea of having the female protagonists of their film save the day which gets filmed (albeit because of other actors' unavailability). This particular suggestion is one which Buckley had dismissed early on: "girls don't want to *be* the hero, they want to *have* the hero, they want to be had *by* him." The war, then, grants Catrin—as well as her fictional characters—opportunities normally reserved for men. In the final scene of the film, Parfitt (Paul Ritter) and Catrin are depicted brainstorming their next screenplay. As Catrin sits down at Buckley's old desk, she pauses a moment, and lovingly caresses his former typewriter. She then begins to type as hopeful non-diegetic music starts to play. The film then cuts to a long shot of Catrin typing happily, captured from the other side of the glass door of Catrin and Parfitt's office. The camera pans backward and reveals the word "SCRIPTWRITING" on the door, positioned just above Catrin's head.

With this final image, then, *Their Finest* suggests that it is Buckley's disappearance that has made it possible for women like Catrin to be given a shot—to be given *this* shot [See Fig. 59]. Or as Ambrose Hilliard (Bill Nighy) puts it: "you and me are given opportunities only because young men are gone."[12] In highlighting the difficulties of female film authorship, *Their Finest* draws attention to women's ongoing struggle to break through the "celluloid ceiling" (Lauzen 2018), as well as its own status as a film in which a number of key production roles were held by women. The film was directed by Lone Scherfig, edited by Lucia Zucchetti, and adapted by Gaby Chiappe from a novel by Lissa Evans. As statistics from the Calling the Shots project reveal, this makes *Their Finest* something of an anomaly in the British film industry since women are under-represented in key production roles such as directors (13%), screenwriters (20%), and editors (17%). Unlike many of its predecessors, *Their Finest* does not feature a happy ending combining or conflating the heroine's personal and professional success, or figuring female authorship as a gateway to heterosexual romance. In fact, Catrin is one of a handful of author

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[12] *Their Finest* here implicitly recalls the "curious contradiction in intellectual history" whereby the (male) author was being declared "dead" at the same time as "another group, from varying feminist positions, was looking for the 'birth' of the author" (Eagleton 2005, 3).

heroines in this thesis whose singleness is consolidated rather than remediated at the end of their story. *Their Finest* thus adjusts the postfeminist romance script to emphasise the joy of Catrin's professional flourishing. *Their Finest,* like other recent texts such as *Music and Lyrics, Young Adult, Begin Again, Austenland, Obvious Child,* and *The Incredible Jessica James* thus makes ambivalent gestures of revision to the trope of the single woman author's text as a relational gateway.

Figure 59: The death of the male author marks the birth of the (single) woman author in Their Finest

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the recurrent entanglement of female authorship with romance and relationships. Tracking two salient iterations of the trope, the text of contrition and the intimate public, I have uncovered a key postfeminist assumption. With its ability to yield relationships in either the single woman author's own life, or in the lives of her readers, female authorship is understood as performing a relational function. Underpinning this portrayal of women's authorship as a relational gateway is a need to "feminise" the single woman author in order to manage anxieties surrounding the figure of the working woman (see Negra 2009, 87). In prioritising forms of professional authorial labour which either authenticate unequal distributions of power and authority along gender lines, or naturalise the gendering of relational work, texts in this thesis contribute to the figuring of authorship as an ideal form of feminine labour for the single woman subject, whose singleness signifies a failure to appropriately relate.

The onscreen stereotyping of the single woman author as a purveyor of romance and relationships furthermore inheres a cultural devaluation of female authorship which is mirrored in the contemporary publishing industry. As numerous women writers have noted, female-authored fiction is frequently marketed in perniciously feminised ways regardless of the book's generic allegiances or even its author's wishes. In the last five years, both the "coverflip" challenge,[13] and the controversy surrounding the cover of a collection of Sylvia Plath letters featuring a photograph of the poet in a bikini,[14] have drawn attention to the gendered iconography associated with the marketing of women's books.[15] The best-selling author Jennifer Weiner has been particularly critical of the publishing industry, arguing that although male authors such as David Nicholls and Nick Hornby write "humorous, highly commercial fiction, often about relationships," they, unlike her, "are widely reviewed and highly regarded" (quoted in Mulkerrins 2014). Despite sharing the same thematic concerns (relationships) and formal characteristics (humorous commercial fiction) as Weiner, these male authors, she notes, enjoy an elevated cultural status. "When a man writes about family and feelings," she concludes "it's literature with a capital L, but when a woman considers the same topics, it's romance, or a beach book - in short, it's something unworthy of a serious critic's attention" (quoted in Pinter 2010). In other words, women authors' interest in relationships is mediated and understood in particularly gendered ways which tally with the historical devaluation of female authorship.[16]

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[13] In May 2013, Young Adult fiction writer Maureen Johnson challenged her Twitter followers to reimagine book covers by "flipping" the gender of the author. See Pahle 2013.

[14] See Conway 2017.

[15] Elsewhere, I have also commented on the use of the colour pink to market "feminist" books (Thouaille 2014).

[16] Women authors moreover suffers from their association with the "commercial." Highbrow male writers like Jonathan Franzen—who has been especially critical of "Jennifer Weiner-ish self-promotion" (Franzen 2013)—advocate a kind of authorship characterised by the retreat into one's own world, a retreat that "has long been the provenance not just of the wealthy, but of men in particular" (Petersen 2017, 205). As Anne Helen Petersen notes, "To retreat with your own thoughts and words is a privilege that few women, no matter their class can afford—even, if like Weiner, they're paid millions for their books" (2017, 205). However, "women's relation to writing has long been shaped by different forces", so that for many, "part of the joy of writing was how its profits enabled, and continue to enable women to determine their own destiny—untethered to a man. Writing in other words, as a form of

Elaborating on the publishing industry's gendered double standard, Weiner observes that "What men produce is deemed art; what women produce is deemed craft. Women make quilts and people say, 'That's adorable, let's put it on the bed.' Men make a painting and people want to hang it in a museum" (quoted in Mulkerrins 2014). Weiner's defence of female-authored fiction here invokes the work of feminist art historians Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock cited in the introduction to this thesis. As they have shown, the hierarchising of art vs. craft relies on the gendering of the public and domestic spheres and the conditions of production they authorise: "What distinguishes art from craft in the hierarchy is not so much different methods, practices and objects but also where these things are made, often in the home, and for whom these things are made, often for the family" (Parker and Pollock 1991, 70). In much the same way, the onscreen figuring of woman's authorship as fundamentally "feminine"—through its imagined execution within a domestic space, or in its presumed relational subject matter and function—works to culturally devalue the work of women authors.

Weiner's account of sexism in the publishing industry chimes with the findings of empirical research. The VIDA count, which produces annual statistics on the publishing industry reveals major imbalances in gender representation in prestigious literary journals. In 2016, 74% of the authors reviewed in *The London Review of Books* were male, 82% of the book reviewers were male, and men made up 78% of the bylines. Since 2016, the VIDA count has broadened the scope of the survey to paint a more intersectional picture of the publishing landscape, including a broader account of gender identity, as well as considerations of other axes of difference such as race and disability. Importantly, the VIDA count has seen considerable change at the level of individual publications. In 2010, 65% of the books covered by *The New York Times Book Review* were authored by men, by 2017, this had decreased to 56%. Recent films likewise suggest that change may be afoot in the popular

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metaphorical and financial independence" (Petersen 2017, 205-206). Ironically then, female authorship "as a form of metaphorical and financial independence" has become another facet of its own cultural dismissal by male authors like Franzen.

conceptualisation of the woman author. Indeed, recent releases reveal attempts to recalibrate tropes associating the single woman author with romance and relationships. In particular, I have shown how texts such as *Music and Lyrics, Young Adult, Begin Again, Austenland, Obvious Child,* and *The Incredible Jessica James* attempt to revise to the retrograde affective economy which characterises an earlier film like *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Taken together, changes in the publishing industry and in the representation of the single woman author in film are suggestive of a broader cultural shift likely linked to the putative emergence of a "fourth wave" of feminism. However, the fact that *The New York Times Book Review* has increased its coverage of female authored fiction does not mark the end of inequality, just as the fact that a film like *The Incredible Jessica James* ends with an image of friendship rather than heterosexual romance does not mean romance and relationships no longer play a central role in popular culture's understanding of female authorship. Rather than signify the supplanting of postfeminism as a dominant discourse in contemporary culture, or the end of postfeminism's preoccupation with romancing the single woman subject, I read recent texts' engagement with the trope of the relational gateway as "a gesture or undramatic action that *points to* and *revises* an unresolved situation" (Berlant 2011, 199, emphasis mine). Even though recent texts "point to and revise" the entanglement of female authorship with relationality, that entanglement is neither displaced nor resolved. As such, recent texts demonstrate postfeminism's shape-shifting ability, and its capacity to "take into account" the resurgence of feminist rhetoric in the public sphere.

Chapter 4:
Male Mentoring and the Single Woman Author

Introduction

In *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction* (2005), Mary Eagleton notes that novels featuring a woman author protagonist recurrently depict her losing "authority over her work, in terms of content, form and legal ownership" (5). That such a loss "results not in a dispersal of power and a liberating deposing of 'The Author' but in a redistribution of power which confirms existing hierarchies of gender, class and race" exposes the ways in which the woman author functions as a "key figure for exploring problems of authorial power" (Eagleton 2005, 5). Such an observation certainly extends to the films considered in this thesis. With the heroine's claim to self-determination through singleness compounding the woman author's appropriation of masculine literary authority, the single woman author's access to power is repeatedly depicted as problematic, disordered, or compromised. As in Eagleton's corpus, films featuring a single woman author protagonist repeatedly stage the heroine's loss of authority over her work at the hands of a white, male figure whose access to power is securely rooted in traditional structures of authority. In *Josie and the Pussycats* (2001) and *Begin Again* (2013), for example, a female lyricist's song is re-arranged by a male collaborator without her consent. In *The Life of David Gale* (2003), *Blood Diamond* (2006), and *State of Play* (2009) male characters control female journalists' texts. In *Not Another Happy Ending* (2013), the heroine's male editor changes the title of her novel, and her screenwriter boyfriend changes the ending of her story in his screenplay adaptation. In both *Music and Lyrics* (2007) and *The Girl in the Book* (2015), an aspiring female writer's likeness is appropriated as the subject of a best-selling book by a former male mentor and lover.[1] Spanning the awkward to the traumatic, these scenarios are all characterised by unequal relations of power.

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[1] Such a trope also recurs in texts in which the heroine's authorship is primarily visual. In *Reality Bites* (1994), for example, aspiring filmmaker Lelaina Pierce (Winona Ryder) finds that her generation-defining documentary has been re-edited. In *The Governess* (1998), the protagonist's crucial contribution to a crucial

Drawing on Eagleton's insights, this chapter moves beyond specific scenarios of loss to consider gendered power relations. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which patriarchal figures, such as the mentor, lover, or father, casually—and sometimes cruelly—exercise control over women's lives. Drawing out the patriarchal implications of mentorship as a relational mode between male and female characters, the first section of this chapter explores how costume films such as *Little Women* (1994), *Mansfield Park* (1999), and *Becoming Jane* (2007) frame the mentor's patriarchal authority as a benevolent force in the heroine's life. In light of the male mentor's ability to facilitate the heroine's success, it becomes clear that the single woman author's access to power is compromised by her gender and marital status. Next, I show how traditional regimes of authority are rehabilitated through mentoring relationships in romantic films *I Love Trouble* (1994), *Music and Lyrics, Crazy Heart* (2009), and *Begin Again,* as well as in journalism thrillers *Blood Diamond*, *The Life of David Gale*, and *State of Play*. That the male mentor's controlling behaviour is imagined as a social good works to smooth over the ambiguities of the trope, and, in turn, to naturalise the unequal, gendered circulation of power. As such, these films reveal postfeminism's investment in forms of female agency that tacitly support patriarchal authority. In the final two sections of this chapter, I turn to recent films which, in refusing such a "smoothing over" of the damage caused by the male mentor's abuse, register an affective shift within the trope of mentoring. Texts such as *Albatross* (2011)*, Girl Most Likely* (2012)*, Not Another Happy Ending, In A World…* (2013)*, Adult World* (2013)*, Saving Mr Banks* (2013)*, The Girl in the Book* (2015)*, One More Time* (2015)*,* and *Their Finest* (2016), I argue, increasingly characterise these relationships as instances of "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) which simultaneously enable and disable the fulfilment of the single woman author mentee. In doing so, however, recent texts also gesture toward new subjectivities negotiated by detachment from toxic forms of patriarchal authority.

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technological innovation in the field of photography is erased by her male lover following a quarrel. In much the same way, Margaret Keane (Amy Adams) has her paintings appropriated by her husband Walter (Christoph Waltz) in *Big Eyes* (2014).

Benevolent postfeminist mentors

Perhaps most obviously deployed in the costume film, the mentoring trope sees a young, naïve, and inexperienced single woman author paired with an older, seasoned, male authority figure. In general, this character takes on a mentor/lover role, and enables the heroine's professional success. While such a mentorship may appear benevolent or benign, I contend that it serves to recuperate the disruptive potential of the single woman author as signifier of feminist-inflected agency whilst also reifying patriarchal authority. Indeed, in the costume film, the heroine's resistance to marriage reads as a disruptive absence: in lacking a husband, the single woman author lacks a formal (and, crucially, compliant) relationship with a patriarchal authority figure. By the same token, her authorial ambitions register as potentially subverting masculinist literary power. In this context, male mentorship emerges as a symbolic means of fixing the single woman author's disordered and ambiguous relationship to patriarchy. In these films, then, the heroine's amenability to being both mentored and romanced facilitates her eventual absorption into patriarchal structures through heteronormative marriage. The frequent slippage of the mentor character into a lover figure can thus be understood as remedying the single heroine's evasion of patriarchal authority. This slippage importantly belies a romanticising of gendered power disparities; a sleight of hand which naturalises and eroticises the unequal distribution of power under patriarchy.

Such a romanticising of patriarchal authority mobilises postfeminist masculinities. As I argued in Chapter 1, films such as *Little Women* and *Mansfield Park* deploy the character of the unsuitable suitor to disavow the heroine's feminist-inflected rejection of marriage. Through this manoeuvre, these films locate the problem of sexism not in heteropatriarchy or marriage as institutions, but in individually "bad" patriarchs or marriages. In contrast to Laurie (Christian Bale) and Henry Crawford (Alessandro Nivola), Friedrich Bhaer (Gabriel Byrne) and Edmund Bertram (Johnny Lee Miller) respectively emerge as suitable partners to Jo March (Winona Ryder) and Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor) in *Little Women* and *Mansfield Park*. A key marker of their worthiness is that their access to male privilege is in some way compromised by their family circumstances or that they exercises his authority differently from "bad" patriarchs. In *Little Women*, Friedrich is a German immigrant whose "hands are

empty" because of his lack of fortune to offer Jo. In *Mansfield Park,* Edmund is the second son who does not stand to inherit property and intends to make a living as a clergyman instead. His sweet temperament is a stark contrast to the other male characters: the sexist, racist, and violent Sir Thomas Bertram (Harold Pinter), the profligate first-born son Tom (James Purefoy), cuckold/fool Mr Rushworth (Hugh Bonneville), and rake/adulterer Henry Crawford. Likewise, In *Becoming Jane*, Tom Lefroy (James McAvoy) works to feed his poor family, and both his personal and professional life are precariously dependent upon his rich uncle Judge Langlois (Ian Richardson).

The hero's status as a desirable spouse is moreover underpinned by his willingness to take on the mantle of mentor and deploy his male privilege in ways that benefit the single woman author heroine professionally. In differentiating between "good"—new, young, benevolent—and "bad"—old, cruel, retrograde—patriarchs these texts cannily distinguish postfeminism from sexism. In films such as *Mansfield Park* and *Becoming Jane,* the conflict is also generational (Edmund vs Sir Tom, Tom vs Judge Langlois), recalling the typical postfeminist strategy of relegating sexism to the past (McRobbie 2004). While the "bad"/sexist patriarch's authority is an obstacle to the heroine's personal and professional fulfilment, the "good"/postfeminist patriarch uses his privilege to the material or intellectual benefit of the female protagonist's project, a facilitative practice which is often subsumed into a romantic plot. Consequently, "good" patriarchs function to authenticate the norm of male authority as a benevolent force in individual women's lives. The enabling patriarch's distance from the cruel exercise of male authority hints at postfeminist media culture's undercurrent of dissatisfaction with oppressive forms of authority. Rather than disavow patriarchal authority altogether, these texts suggest that those who choose to exercise their power "malevolently" do so because of personal character flaws—not because of the nature of structural oppression. As Jade Thompson argues in "Becoming What Women Want: Formations of Masculinity in Postfeminist Film and Television" (2012), masculinities represented in contemporary film and television belie "the intensification of postfeminist discourses and their increasing application to masculine formations of identity" (24). While postfeminist femininity requires assimilation, postfeminist masculinity requires that the hero make gestures toward

feminism, and toward the fulfilment of the heroine.[2] In the end, these texts are less dissatisfied by the existence of male authority than with its misuse.

In *Little Women*, benevolent patriarch Friedrich is figured as Jo's privileged reader and critic. Friedrich not only champions her authorial vocation, but also enables Jo to access culinary experiences (coffee, wine) and spaces (male-dominated political gatherings, the opera) otherwise out of bounds due to her gender, class, and transcendentalist family background. Generously mediating experiences for his mentee, Friedrich translates songs into English at the opera, makes a point of asking Jo's opinion on women's suffrage when she is being spoken over at a party, and brokers introductions with some of his contacts in the publishing industry. Friedrich however disapproves of Jo's chosen genre of sensation fiction and of her use of the male pseudonym "Joseph March". Reading her published story "The Sinner's Corpse", he asks sceptically, "Lunatics… vampires… this interests you?" Later, he didactically states that: "You should be writing from life, from the depths of your soul. There is nothing in here of the woman I am privileged to know." Equating the sensational elements of Jo's writing to a lack of artistic integrity, Friedrich urges Jo to author a more authentic text: "there is more to you than this, if you have the courage to write it." Toward the end of the film, Jo finally heeds Friedrich's advice and authors an autobiographical novel. As she sits down to write once again, the red velvet cap which she has worn during other scenes of authorship is conspicuously absent, signalling her repudiation of inauthentic writerly affections. Instead, Jo appears to be writing directly "from life" as indicated by the audio track featuring the March sisters' voices narrating key episodes from the film. As I suggested in Chapter 2, the implication of this particular scene is that Jo now functions as an instrument of autobiographical truth. Both the ease with which the finished manuscript is produced, and the fact that it is later titled *Little Women* thus underwrite its status as the authentic project Jo was always destined to author.

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[2] For more detail on the distinctiveness of postfeminist masculinities see Sarah Projansky's *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (2001), Thompson's "Becoming What Women Want: Formations of Masculinity in Postfeminist Film and Television" (2012), and Hannah Hamad's P*ostfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary US Film: Framing Fatherhood* (2013).

Figure 60: In Little Women*, Friedrich asserts his spatial dominance over his mentee Jo*

In the logic of the film, however, Jo's fulfilment as a writer hinges upon her submission to patriarchal authority. The shift from sensation fiction to autobiography indeed registers as a shift toward an "authorised" text; a text compliant with Friedrich's exacting expectations of authenticity. In other words, Jo's manuscript signifies as a "text of contrition". As I argued in Chapter 3, in authoring such a text, the single woman author publicly recognises herself as flawed and performs her newfound alignment with her male love interest's values. In *Little Women*, Jo's submission to Friedrich's ideas about authorship thus necessarily reads as a disavowal of her own conceptualisation of authorship as masculine and sensational. Tellingly, Jo now signs her work "Josephine March", denoting her conventional (re)gendering as female. Jo's compliance with normative femininity is further consolidated by her romantic reconciliation with Friedrich. The film therefore figures the heroine's success in postfeminist terms as her ability to combine personal and professional fulfilment through her achievement of the coveted dual status of published author and wife. Crucially, both her authorship of *Little Women* and her marriage to Friedrich communicate Jo's submission to patriarchal authority; in the end, her authoriality is one which leaves undisturbed hegemonic forms of authority as represented by the white, male mentor, Friedrich.

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny's cousin Edmund takes on the enabling role of mentor/lover. When they first meet, he physically supplies and prepares Fanny's paper. The cross-fade rich sequence emphasises the ceremonious materiality of

nineteenth century writing and positions Edmund as a key possessor of literary agency [See Figure 61 and 62]. In parallel with Friedrich in *Little Women*, Edmund is depicted as Fanny's privileged reader, often pictured in her room reading her stories or listening to her read aloud. He explicitly validates her opinions and defends her writing to other men, claiming that "Fanny has a voracious mind, Father, as hungry as any man's, and her writing is remarkable, in a style entirely new." However, the male-granted literary privileges of Mansfield Park risk being withdrawn at any moment. When Edmund first falls under Mary Crawford's (Embeth Davidtz) charm, and gives her a riding lesson, she is pictured atop Fanny's horse, Mrs Shakespeare. That the horse, previously identified as Edmund's gift to Fanny and her favoured "refuge", can be reappropriated by Edmund at any time makes it clear that Fanny's control over her property, and indeed her access to safe spaces of refuge is at best precarious, and at worst, illusory. Later in the film, Fanny is sent home to Portsmouth as a punishment for refusing a marriage proposal and is scolded for her wasteful use of paper, and with it her literary pursuits, "Who's to pay for all this paper, Fanny?" asks her mother. The implication is clear: Fanny's access to authoriality is dependent upon the goodwill of her male mentor, Edmund.

Figure 61: The arduous and sensual male task of paper preparation in Mansfield Park

Figure 62: Edmund hands over paper to Fanny in Mansfield Park

In the end, it is Fanny's amenability to Edmund's authority, which allows her to become both a wife and published author. Edmund thus becomes her literary agent, announcing he has arranged for her stories to be published. However, his proposed title for the collection, "Effusions of Fancy by a Very Young Girl", works to infantilise Fanny by highlighting her youth and femininity through the word "girl". Mary Crawford, in comparison, is punished for her transgressiveness. Sinning against patriarchy by daring to imagine a future which involves the social acceptance of an adulterous couple, the death of the family's heir, as well as her own social advancement, Mary is cast out of Mansfield Park. The film's final sequence nods to imagined alternative endings with a series of tableaux. The knowing, ironic repetition of Fanny's voiceover phrase "It could all have turned out differently, I suppose. But it didn't," emphasises that in *Mansfield Park*, as in *Little Women*, postfeminist success requires the heroine's willingness to authenticate patriarchal authority.

In the logic of *Becoming Jane*, it is Tom Lefroy's broadening of Jane's (Anne Hathaway) literary and affective horizons which transforms the writer of naïve juvenilia into the authoress of the canonical *Pride and Prejudice*. The film connects Tom's judgement, his literary mentoring, and their love affair to changes in Jane's authorial output. After Jane overhears Tom state that he is not impressed by her writing's "juvenile self-regard", for example, she tears up and burns the manuscript of the speech in question, and later literally cuts adjectives out of a letter to Cassandra (Anna Maxwell Martin) using a pair of sharp scissors. These moments of

violent excision mark Tom's early influence upon Jane's work. In a series of encounters in the woods and the library, Tom critiques her writing as "accomplished" but tragically circumscribed by the rules of feminine conduct: "[propriety] condemns you to [ignorance] and your writing to the status of female accomplishment," he argues, "If you wish to practise the art of fiction, to be the equal of a masculine author, experience is vital." Importantly, Jane's authorial ambition to transcend the "status of female accomplishment" does not read as a threat to the masculinist canon. Rather, she wishes to be considered on par with male authors. In the postfeminist terms set by the film, then, the single woman author's success amounts to her assimilation into literary history rather than its radical rewriting. While Edmund provides Fanny with the physical material necessary to write in *Mansfield Park*, Tom provides Jane with experiential material—firstly, by lending her a copy of Henry Fielding's racy *Tom Jones,* and later through their aborted elopement. As Jane reads *Tom Jones*, her voiceover is replaced by Tom's disembodied voice. Tom's aural presence, as though he were reading the novel aloud to her, signals his role as the mediator and authoriser of Jane's risqué experiences.

The film is furthermore bookended by two reading scenes in which Tom functions as Jane's privileged audience, his reactions the barometer of her literary prowess. In the reading scene that concludes the film, Jane looks at Tom as she finishes her performance. The film cuts to Tom's aged face, which softens into a smile, as he starts to clap. The composition of the scene, in particular Tom and Jane's relative positions within the frame—she, sitting, he, standing—consolidate the characters' power relations, so that Jane has to literally look up to Tom to seek his approval [See Fig. 63]. This composition is moreover reminiscent of the power dynamic embedded in both *Little Women* and *Mansfield Park* in which the male mentor expresses his symbolic dominance over the single woman author by towering over her writing desk [See Figs. 60 and 62]. Unlike the first reading, during which Tom falls asleep, and eventually joins in the clapping out of condescending politeness, Tom's applause here authenticates Jane's success as an author. No matter that Jane has already successfully published her work, this scene, the film suggests, marks her greatest success: she has finally met Tom's exacting literary standards. Jane's chosen passage from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) provides an additional authentication of Tom's influence on Jane's work.

She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance. But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was. (Austen [1813] 1996, 295)

Figure 63: Jane looks up at Tom seeking his approval in Becoming Jane

With *Becoming Jane*'s configuration of Tom and Jane's relationship as the source material for *Pride and Prejudice* ("their love story was her greatest inspiration" claims one promotional paratext, see Figure 64), this excerpt, in which Lizzie Bennet comes to the realisation that her and Darcy are well-matched after all, functions as a coded message to Tom. In suggesting that from Tom's "judgment, information, and knowledge of the world," Jane has "received benefit of greater importance," the film frames her authorship as not fully her own. Perhaps the film's biggest blow to Jane's authorship, however, is that Mr Wisley (Laurence Fox), a character previously referred to as "a booby", should be responsible for coming up with *Pride and Prejudice*'s memorable opening words, "it is a truth universally acknowledged." In this way, the film seems to suggest that it is a truth universally acknowledged that a

single woman in possession of a writerly ambition must be in want of a mentor to authorise her work.

Figure 64: Becoming Jane *film poster claiming that "their love story was her greatest inspiration"*

Mentors in crisis

Having established that in costume films the male mentor is an example of desirable postfeminist masculinity who enables the success of the single woman author, I now turn to texts in which the male mentor is initially figured as a patriarch in crisis. In romantic films such as *I Love Trouble*, *Music and Lyrics, Starting Out in the Evening* (2007), *Crazy Heart*, and *Begin Again*, for example, the mentor is a single male author whose inability to produce original material marks him out as a "has been". In

these texts, the female author mentee functions to throw into relief, and eventually reinvigorate, the male mentor's disordered authoriality through a sexually-charged relationship. *I Love Trouble* thus sees Peter Brackett (Nick Nolte) recover his passion for journalism after years spent lazily recycling old columns thanks to a rivalry/mentorship/love affair with Sabrina Peterson (Julia Roberts). *Music and Lyrics* tracks the collaboration between quirky Sophie Fisher (Drew Barrymore) and former pop star Alex Fletcher (Hugh Grant) to write a song entitled "Way Back Into Love." As a result of their collaboration/romance, Alex's career is relaunched; not only is he no longer reliant on gigs at high school reunions or appearances on humiliating reality TV shows like "Battle of the 80s has beens", but he is now capable of writing lyrics of his own. The opening verses of Alex's solo-authored song, "Don't Write Me Off" thus signal that Sophie has restored Alex's authorial agency:

> It's never been easy for me
> To find words to go along with a melody
> But this time there's actually something, on my mind
> So please forgive these few brief awkward lines
>
> Since I met you, my whole life has changed
> It's not just my furniture you've rearranged
> I was living in the past, but somehow you've brought me back
> And I haven't felt like this since before Frankie said relax

Reprising much the same plot, *Crazy Heart* depicts music journalist Jean Craddock's (Maggie Gyllenhaal) rehabilitation of faded country singer Bad Blake (Jeff Bridges). Putting a new twist on the convention, the film's title refers to Blake's own authorship of the song "Crazy Heart" which he writes once he has pieced his life back together after his breakup with Jean. As with *Music and Lyrics* and the subsequent *Begin Again*, the single woman author restores the failing mentor's authorial powers. Such an instrumentalising of the single woman author importantly reinscribes gender scripts. As I argued in Chapter 2, *Music and Lyrics* and *Begin Again* prioritise the single male author's authorial labour by depicting female authorship as somehow "natural" or "pleasurable." As with the costume film, the

repetition of these narratives naturalises and authenticates the unequal distribution of power along gender lines. These films are also suggestive of postfeminism's recurrent need to place femininity at the service of patriarchal authority.

By contrast, in political thrillers such as *Life of David Gale*, *Blood Diamond*, and *State of Play*, the mentoring narrative authenticates patriarchy as a force for *social* good. In these films, the male mentor enables the single woman journalist to write and publish impactful articles on the death penalty, the conflict diamond trade, and political corruption. In line with the genre's concern for socio-political issues and activism, the heroine's publications are imagined to trigger timely social change. In these texts, the reporter heroine not only rehabilitates the mentor's tarnished reputation, but in doing so, she authenticates patriarchy itself as a benevolent social force. On the face of it, the Bitsey Bloom (Kate Winslet)/David Gale (Kevin Spacey) and Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly)/Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio) pairings, respectively found in *The Life of David Gale* and *Blood Diamond,* do not signify as mentorships as obviously as Della Frye (Rachel McAdams)/Cal McAffrey (Russell Crowe) in *State of Play*. However, I contend that all three male characters function as mentors insofar as they provide access to essential information and resources which are otherwise inaccessible to the single woman author character. With their gendered distribution of power, these texts therefore draw on and reproduce the trope of male mentorship.

In both *The Life of David Gale* and *Blood Diamond,* the rehabilitation of tarnished patriarchal authority occurs posthumously. In the former, magazine reporter Bitsey Bloom is hired to interview disgraced philosophy professor and anti-death penalty campaigner David Gale during his last days on death row. During the course of the film, Gale recounts how a former student's (false) rape allegation resulted in him being fired from his job, and losing custody of his son, and how he was wrongfully convicted of the murder of his close friend and fellow DeathWatch activist Constance Harraway (Laura Linney). Bitsey eventually uncovers video evidence exonerating Gale, but is too late to stop his execution. Bitsey then releases the video online causing media uproar. As conclusive evidence that the state of Texas has executed an innocent man, the video calls into question the death penalty itself. A montage of TV reporters concludes that "the ultimate irony is that David Gale, the man who became

an unwitting martyr, may achieve in death what he worked for, but could not accomplish, in life." Bitsey's authorship therefore works to clear Gale's name, establishing him as simultaneously a victim of a fundamentally flawed system, and a potential hero in the history of the abolition of the death penalty. Crucially, however, what underpins Gale's rehabilitation is Bitsey's loss of authority over her work. The start of the film establishes Bitsey as a reporter wedded to the protection of her sources, and to principles of on/off the record. It is precisely her willingness to go to jail in the service of her journalistic integrity which Gale exploits. Via a videotape labelled "off the record", the film's final moments reveal Gale's complicity in his own framing: he is not an "unwitting" martyr after all, but the architect of his own death and of Bitsey's reporting thereof. Though this revelation suggests that Gale has been an unreliable narrator throughout and calls into the question the narrative that Bitsey has published, she is constrained by the tape being "off the record," to keep this secret. No more than a pawn in an elaborate political game, Bitsey was always already designed to glorify Gale.

Blood Diamond similarly places the single woman journalist's authorship at the mercy of the white male mentor. One of the film's key conflicts is whether or not diamond smuggler Danny is willing to go "on the record" and provide journalist Maddy access to the facts she needs to substantiate her claims that illegal diamond trade is used to finance civil war in Sierra Leone. Having no interest in threatening the very business which guarantees his livelihood, Danny repeatedly withholds information leaving Maddy unable to transform an emotive story into an article capable of effecting real change. As she angrily tells him:

> I am sick of writing about victims, but it's all I can fucking do. Because I need facts. I need names. I need dates. I need pictures. I need bank accounts. People back home wouldn't buy a ring if they knew it cost someone else their hand. But I can't write that story until I get facts that can be verified, which is to say, until I find someone who will go on record. So if that is not you and you're not really gonna help and we're not really gonna screw, then why don't you get the fuck out of my face and let me do my work?

Figure 65: Mentor Danny asserts his spatial dominance over mentee Maddy in Blood Diamond
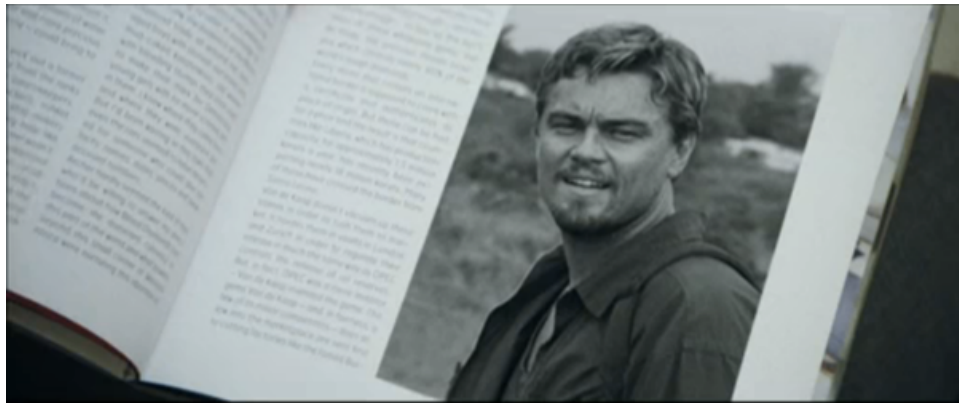
Figure 66: Danny lives on, immortalised in print, in Blood Diamond

Tellingly, during this exchange, Danny towers over Maddy's workspace: a composition which visually conveys his control over her authorship [See Fig. 65]. While he eventually has a change of heart, and enables Maddy to finally write the story, this decision is ultimately self-serving. His own death being imminent, Danny has no more reason to protect the diamond trade. Their final exchange over the phone consolidates his power over her authorship: "I'm saying it's a real story now. And you can write the hell out of it." Maddy is only allowed to write this transformative piece once Danny provides explicit authorisation. Furthermore, in enabling Maddy's authorship, he is also enabling his own legacy to live on, immortalised in print. The article notably features a half-page black and white portrait of Danny, suggesting his central role in the story [See Fig. 66]. The film's editing then makes the link between Maddy's article and an international conference seeking to block the sales of conflict diamonds. While *Blood Diamond* cannot quite "forget" Danny's racism, his guilt-laden positionality as a white South African, nor his exploitation of black men such as Solomon (Djimon Hounsou) in the pursuit of profit, the film nevertheless

positions Danny as a martyr. In portraying the "sacrifice" of a white man as effecting political change which will largely benefit black men, Maddy's authorship reifies white male privilege as a force for good.

On the other hand, *State of Play*'s masculinity crisis is represented as a journalism crisis. Structured around the opposition between online and print journalism, the film is concerned with the threat which blogging poses to newspaper reporting. While print stands in for endangered objectivity, and disinterested truth, blogs are depicted as relying on sensational speculation, unverified facts, and unsolicited opinions. As such, blogs symbolise the evils of the commercialised press—whereby business interests pollute the "truth" of the story. Youthful blogger Della Frye thus represents the new media threatening the integrity of ageing old school journalism as embodied by the middle-aged Cal McAffrey. Crucially, this conflict between print and online journalism is not just generational, it is also gendered, with blogs re-imagined as a feminised medium while print journalism represents a traditional old boys' network. Cal's female editor-in-chief Cameron Lynne (Helen Mirren)—embodied evidence of the feminisation of the press—furthermore stands in for the newspaper's new corporate owners, giving a taste of how commercial interests work to compromise the publication of the "truth."

The film's crisis of masculinity is eventually resolved through the assertion of the primacy of print, and with it, the authentication of male authority itself achieved through mentoring. Under Cal's tutelage, Della is transformed from a blogger into a *bona fide* journalist with a by-line in print. In the logic of the film, blogging is unsubstantial—both because the texts themselves are lacking well-researched, substantiated facts, and because of the immateriality of the digital text. Just as the female body is characterised by its "lack", so the feminised digital text is characterised by its physical absence. Cal's cubicle is therefore depicted as a "substantial" space of creativity and authorship, cluttered with piles of clippings, while Della's workstation is never shown on screen [See Fig. 67]. By the end of the film, having been mentored by Cal, Della is primed to recognise the superiority of the printed page. A story like this, Della states, cannot be broken online, it requires the materiality of print, the physicality of leaking ink, the potency of phallic

authority: "Well, you know, a piece this big, people should probably have newsprint on their hands when they read it, right?"

Figure 67: Cal's paper-strewn workspace, a legitimate and substantial site of authorship in State of Play

Figure 68: The Della Frye Nubian princess pen necklace in State of Play

Following this renunciation of blogging, Della is rewarded by being formally recognised by Cal as a journalist whose gender is ostensibly irrelevant: "when I look at you, I don't see a girl, I see a reporter." This newfound status is consolidated by Cal's gift of "the Della Frye Nubian Princess 'I'm never without a pen' celebratory necklace" [See Fig. 68]. By gifting Della a string of pens, Cal grants her the phallic instrument necessary to carry out her male-authorised reporting. Della's

authentication of the primacy of print journalism (by choosing not to blog about their story, and in accepting the necklace: "I always wanted one of those") reads as a disavowal of blogging and of its democratic power to open up journalism to those outside the old boys' network. This authentication of male authority furthermore reifies hierarchies of taste which grant low cultural status to "feminised" forms such as blogging, perpetuating the cycle of devaluation of women's cultural production.

Bad mentors

Modifying the affective expectations of the mentoring trope explored thus far, recent films such as *Albatross, Girl Most Likely, Not Another Happy Ending, In A World…, Adult World, Saving Mr Banks, The Girl in the Book, One More Time,* and *Their Finest* abound with examples of unreliable, disappointing, or even abusive mentor figures. The portrayal of mentorship as a failing model is not so much a departure from the representational pattern I have analysed above, but, rather, an intensification of a latent discomfort with patriarchal authority. As I've suggested, earlier texts invoke the spectre of the "bad" patriarch, but typically dissipate this underlying disappointment with patriarchal authority through the introduction of a "good" postfeminist male mentor/lover. Recent films, on the other hand, uncomfortably dwell on the male authority of the mentor, lover, or father as a bad object. These scenarios of failing mentorship, in which male characters either abuse their power over the female character, or simply withhold support, are no longer able to sustain the illusion that patriarchy has women's best interests—and in particular creative, self-determining women's interests—at heart. In depicting mentoring as a site of abuse, recent texts make explicit what was implicit all along: mentoring as a relationship is predicated upon, and indeed perpetuates, gender inequality, since mentoring preserves male privilege by teaching women to be compliant feminine subjects of heteropatriarchy.

In *Their Finest*, for example, Catrin Cole's (Gemma Arteton) two mentors/lovers, Ellis Cole (Jack Huston) and Tom Buckley (Sam Claflin) are variously shown to be neglectful, jealous, and bullying. As a young woman, Catherine meets Ellis, a bohemian artist, and, unmarried, they run away to London. In a bid to maintain a façade of respectability, she adopts the name Mrs Cole, and buys herself a wedding

ring. Through the course of the film, Ellis comes across as controlling (he refashions Catherine as "Catrin" to emphasise her Welshness,[3] wants to send her away from London during the Blitz against her wishes), jealous and petty (he resents her ability to earn more money than him), but also fickle (he cheats on her while she is away for work). His painting of Catrin as a tiny figure on his canvas crystallises his attempts to contain her agency and force her to take up as little space in the world. Buckley, meanwhile, acts as her unwilling screenwriting mentor as they collaborate on a Ministry of Information film script. He is dismissive, verbally abusive, and generally unwilling to help. His feedback is notoriously cryptic: when he asks Catrin to "lose half" of a scene she has written, she enquires as to "which half", to which he responds "the half you don't need."

In *Adult World*, the female protagonist's expectations of productive, creative exchanges with her mentor are similarly thwarted. The film's bathetic motif relies on the awkwardly uneven power dynamic between poetry graduate Amy (Emma Roberts) and her "favourite living poet", Rat Billings (John Cusack), whom she attempts to recruit as mentor. From the start, Rat's attitude toward Amy is unpromising: he is dismissive, sarcastic, and patronising. The film's indie aesthetic, characterised by muted, washed out colours, naturalistic makeup, hand-held camera, and inconsistent cutting, contributes to the sense that Amy's foray into the "adult world", and her pursuit of Rat in particular, is equally unpromising. Their unequal, gendered, power dynamic is visually inscribed through composition as Rat literally looks down at Amy when she suggests he could read some of her work. He initially rejects her request to become his "protégée" but agrees to have her clean his house free of charge, deliberately calls her by the wrong names, and employs patronising diminutive nicknames like "kid", "bizarre little creature", "little snick-snack", or "snicks", illustrating some of the salient ways in which Rat casually abuses his power over Amy. This poor exercise of authority is then taken one step further, as he

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[3] In *Grace of my Heart* (1996), male mentor Joel (John Turturro) similarly renames his songwriting protegée Edna Buxton (Illeana Douglas). *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009) likewise sees Luke Brandon (High Dancy) transform Rebecca Bloomwood (Isla Fischer) into the "girl with the green scarf". Like *Their Finest,* these films reveal the power that male mentors have in naming and fashioning the woman author.

offers to publish one of her poems in a "little anthology, a little, shitty, little, shit-filled, shit-stained anthology of new work." What Rat deliberately omits to clarify is that his anthology is, in fact, a "Toilet book" entitled *Shit Poetry: An Anthology of Bad Verse*. Metaphorically shitting all over Amy's celebrations, he gifts her the book at her birthday party. Likewise, in *Not Another Happy Ending,* heroine Jane Lockhart's (Karen Gillan) relationships with male characters are depicted as violating her autonomy as both woman and author. At the start of the film, her editor Tom Duval (Stanley Weber) changes the title of her novel from *The Endless Anguish of my Father* to *Happy Ending* without her knowledge. Later, her boyfriend Willie Scott (Henry Ian Cusick) changes the ending of her story when writing the screenplay for the film adaptation of her novel. The film explores other, more tangible ways in which men abuse their authority. Her autobiographical novel notably reveals the lasting effects of her father's abandonment in early childhood. Meanwhile, in a misguided effort to cure Jane's writer's block, Tom decides to make her deliberately unhappy by interfering with her life. Such interventions register as explicit abuses of power which highlight the limited access to authority Jane enjoys as a woman.

Saving Mr Banks—in part because it resists being read as a "mentoring" narrative—exposes the ways mentoring is predicated upon an unequal distribution of power and authority. While Walt Disney (Tom Hanks), a generous, talented, experienced, successful businessman and animator in his sixties, comfortably fits the bill as mentor, P.L. Travers (Emma Thompson) does not easily read as "mentee". Not only is she also in her sixties, but she is a successful (albeit penniless) author of a cherished book series. Given her age, and her assumption of the name "Mrs Travers" (despite being unmarried), the subject position of the naive, young, *ingénue* is simply unavailable to her, and as such, she cannot be mentored. Where Jo, Fanny, or Jane's unruly desire for self-determination reads as "feisty", P.L. Travers signifies as a "difficult woman": uncooperative, unreasonable, paranoid, cold, severe. However, it is precisely her status as not-quite-mentee, which makes Disney's various abuses of patriarchal power so visible, and, in turn, unpalatable. Disney refuses to respect her acts of self-naming, and calls her by her first name despite her protestations, controls her movements while she is in California, and encroaches into the spaces she inhabits. His refusal to accommodate acts of female self-determination is matched by

his desire to control her fictional creation. "You've come to change my mind, beat me into submission" she observes when he turns up uninvited at her Chelsea home, her word-choice hinting at the threat of physical violence which underpins patriarchal authority. Disney eventually breaks every promise made to the author regarding the film adaptation of *Mary Poppins,* and deliberately fails to invite her to the movie premiere. *Saving Mr Banks* thus makes explicit Disney's gendered access to power.

Albatross further problematises the patriarchal figures' privileged position by suggesting the male mentor is unworthy of, or squanders, his unearned privilege. In an early scene, the married writer Jonathan Fischer (Sebastian Koch), is pictured in his attic office. He sits in a large leather chair at a writing desk cluttered with books, pens, papers, a prize for "Author of the Year", a MacBook, but also a typewriter. The office itself, with its shabby chic interior, significant library, and IT devices (laptop, typewriter, printer, but also radio) suggests the material resources and cultural comforts of the middle class. The various prizes and certificates on display, as well as the framed posters of Jonathan's successful first novel *The Cliff House*, and its multiple translations, meanwhile, signify his professional cachet as an author. Nonetheless, the film makes it clear that it is women's labour which makes Jonathan's authorship possible: his wife looks after their younger daughter Posey, his daughter Beth (Felicity Jones) manages the front desk of the Cliff House bed and breakfast, and single woman author heroine Emilia (Jessica Brown Findlay) works there as a cleaner. Instead of working on his manuscript, however, Jonathan uses his significant resources (an expensive laptop, the internet, freedom from domestic obligations) to look up "Turkey Ham" in an online encyclopaedia. Emilia, on the other hand, possesses none of these classed writerly accoutrements: to Jonathan's surprise, she does not even own a laptop. Coming from a working class, "no-parent family" and living with her ageing grandparents, Emilia works several gendered service jobs (cleaner, waitress)—leaving little leisure time to look up "Turkey Ham" on the internet.

Emilia first meets Jonathan when she walks in on him masturbating to online porn in his office. If the male author derives his creative power from the phallus, then Jonathan's non-generative masturbatory act symbolises its wasted potential—a

failure which prefigures much of what is to come. The film goes on to reveal that Jonathan is suffering from writer's block and unable to reproduce the success of his first novel, published some 21 years before. Likewise, his mentoring of Emilia in creative writing turns out to be ineffectual. Tellingly, during their first lesson, Jonathan's authoriality is depicted as condescending posturing. As Emilia steps into his office, he pretends to be in the middle of an important creative moment and asks her to wait: "Sorry about that", he says "A moment of inspiration can be lost in far less time if you don't indulge it" he takes his reading glasses off to emphasise the point, adding, "But I... caught it." With studied nonchalance, he then throws his glasses onto the desk and concludes "So, hello." When pressed, Jonathan eventually admits that he faked this moment of inspiration, his posture immediately shifting as he loses face to a high school dropout. Toward the end of the film, Emilia confesses that half of her writing samples were lifted from famous novels: "[you've] had your head so far up your own ass, you can't have seen daylight in years. Do you even know that you questioned *The Great Gatsby*? You idiot. You told Truman Capote he need not to be so obvious with his metaphors." Despite Jonathan's reliance on literary allusions and quotations to bolster his authoritative status as mentor—"I quite often think of a quote by Tolstoy, 'In a writer, there must always be two people, the writer and the critic'", he says—Jonathan is, in fact, unable to identify or even appreciate canonical literature such as *The Great Gatsby*. He may have accumulated cultural capital through his first book, but capital alone is not enough: his mentoring is little more than an empty performance of authoriality. This poor mentoring is also sexual, as Jonathan conducts an affair with Emilia despite their significant age gap and his position of authority as her employer and mentor. The sexual relationship itself is portrayed as unsatisfying for Emilia and she eventually breaks things off. In effect, Jonathan is an obstacle to her authorship, suggesting that mentorship, and indeed the slippage of mentorship into a romantic relationship, is damaging to the single woman author heroine. In the end, Jonathan fails as a writer, a mentor, and a lover. In the world of *Albatross,* the failing male mentor thus stands in marked contrast with the figure of the female muse as an enabler of creativity.

The fallout of an abusive mentorship is significantly more serious in *The Girl in the Book*. In the film, aspiring novelist Alice Harvey (Emily VanCamp) is tasked with working on the e-book release of *Waking Eyes,* a novel by renowned author Milan

Daneker (Michael Nyqvist). Through flashback, the film reveals that Milan mentored a teenaged Alice in creative writing, a relationship which eventually became controlling and sexual. In a darker retelling of a subplot of *Music and Lyrics,* Milan appropriates her likeness and some of her writing as material for *Waking Eyes*. Through further flashback, we also learn that when Alice finally told her parents, Milan convinced them—her father in particular—that she had an overactive imagination. In working on the book's re-issue and its associated marketing activities, Alice is forced to repeatedly revisit the scene of her childhood trauma. Other mentor figures in her life misuse their positions of authority in other ways: her father in insisting on ordering for her in restaurants, or her manager in making false promises of professional advancement to convince her to take on work she does not want. Common to all three male authority figures is a tendency to coerce Alice into doing things she does not want to do. Connecting her failure to commit to lasting romantic attachments to the trauma of abuse and the consequences of poor fathering, the film mobilises singleness as a signifier of a disordered feminine psyche. Alice's writer's block is likewise figured as a fear of commitment, inextricably linked to her singleness and extended girlhood. Through her status as the titular "girl the book", (in other words, the protagonist of *Waking Eyes*) Alice indeed signifies as an overgrown "girl" subject. The film's pared down indie aesthetic, close framing, and sparing use of non-diegetic music feels claustrophobic. Laying bare the lifelong traumas of female lives lived under patriarchy, *The Girl in the Book* powerfully conveys Alice's inability to escape the control of "bad" patriarchs.

As *The Girl in the Book* suggests, the disenchantment with the figure of the male mentor marks a concomitant disenchantment with the father. While costume films and romantic films see a frequent slippage of the mentor into a lover figure, certain recent films invoke fathering as a site of failed mentorship. In *Girl Most Likel*y, for example, aspiring playwright Imogene (Kristen Wiig) grows up believing that her father is dead. During the course of the film, she finds out that her father Maxwell (Bob Balaban) is alive, and living out the very fantasy of the upper class good life to which Imogene, ashamed of her low-culture New Jersey upbringing, aspires. Despite his impressive credentials—he is highly educated, lives in a townhouse in Manhattan, and has connections to prestigious institutions such as the Guggenheim— Maxwell turns out to be a bad mentor: he is cold, distant, and does not particularly

regret abandoning his children. *Saving Mr Banks* similarly portrays P.L. Travers' father, Travers Goffs (Colin Farrell) as a failed, alcoholic, mentor. In both *In a World…* and *One More Time* the father's inadequate parenting is furthermore connected to the daughter's arrested development, a state signified by the fact she is unmarried, living with her father as an adult. Through her singleness, living arrangements, and lack of professional achievements, the single woman author heroine here registers as a "girl" subject still under the patriarchal authority of the father.

Importantly, both *In a World…* and *One More Time* connect the father's deficient parenting to his failure to mentor his daughter into successfully breaking into the very field he once succeeded in. Crucially, both fathers are revealed to be misogynists whose ideal protégé is a young white *male* who can be mentored in how to continue the seedy cycle of male objectification of women. It is therefore the daughter's gender, and the threat which women somehow pose to the father's profession, which precludes her from being professionally mentored by her father. *In a World…* and *One More Time* thus reprise the theme of masculinity in crisis explored by texts such as *David Gale* and *State of Play* with one crucial variation: the emphasis is not on rehabilitating the ageing patriarch, but rather on exposing his failures, and his potential to do damage to those who love him. In *In a World…* voiceover legend Sam (Fred Melamed) agrees to "pass the torch" to younger male voiceover artist Gustav (Ken Marino) but actively stands in the way of his own daughter Carol (Lake Bell) by competing for the same voiceover gig despite having previously retired. Although he contends that "The industry does not want a female voice. I'm not being sexist, it's just the truth," Sam's career is in crisis precisely because of women—like his daughter—gaining professional recognition: "Nowadays they're flying planes and taking jobs."

The father's causal misogyny is similarly striking in *One More Time*, in which former crooner Paul (Christopher Walken) gives his young grandson old issues of *Playboy* magazine and teaches him aphorisms such as "playing it safe is for pussies." His poor mentorship of daughter Jude (Amber Heard), on the other hand, is economically conveyed in the scene in which they sing together at the piano. Starting out at an equal volume, Jude's voice gets progressively quieter, as Paul's gets louder.

Their body language echoes this shifting power dynamic as Jude retreats into herself, shoulders hunched over and head bent, and Paul glows with confidence and enjoyment at being the centre of attention. *One More Time*'s masculinity crisis plays out over Paul's most recent failed marriage. His wife Lucille (Ann Magnuson) claims that she has written the lyrics to his new song in a bid to get back at Paul for cheating on her. The case hinges on Lucille providing a napkin with the song written in her handwriting, Paul claiming that she took dictation of the lyrics while he was driving. Although the dictation genders creativity as male, and the mundane task of recording as female, Lucille's court case threatens to disrupt this gendered hierarchy, threatening, with it Paul's generative masculinity.[4] In both cases, the father's failure is triple: he has failed as a husband, as a parent, and as a mentor, and as such he functions as an obstacle to his daughter's personal and professional fulfilment.

To various extents, then, the mentors of *Albatross, Girl Most Likely, Not Another Happy Ending, In A World…, Adult World, Saving Mr Banks, The Girl in the Book, One More Time,* and *Their Finest,* function as obstacles to the personal and professional fulfilment of the single woman author heroine. Importantly, the figuring of the mentor as an "enabling object which is also disabling" (Berlant 2011, 25) signals an affective shift toward what Lauren Berlant describes as scenarios of "cruel optimism", whereby "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant 2011, 1). That the single woman author remains attached (for a time) to her abusive male mentor despite her lived reality makes for an occasionally puzzling viewing experience. For example, a viewer may wonder how Amy can so consistently miss the drift of Rat's sarcastic putdowns in *Adult World*. When Rat flatly notes that "I was thinking you'd be the kind of muse I'd get," Amy actively disregards his clarification that "I meant that sarcastically" and instead repeats the

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[4] This episode anticipates the 2017 controversy surrounding male academics' use of their wives as unpaid typists, transcribers, translators, editors, and even research collaborators. Led by literary scholar Bruce Holsinger, the Twitter hashtag #ThanksForTyping uncovered the prevalence of male authors thanking their nameless wives in their acknowledgements. As Camilla Nelson notes, "#ThanksForTyping is not a practice that's confined to academics" (2017). Using male authors such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Nabokov, Wordsworth or Fitzgerald, Nelson demonstrates how "A considerable portion of the western canon is built on the unpaid labour of women" (2017).

word "muse" in delighted disbelief. *Adult World* prompts the question we are all primed to pose about women in scenarios of abuse: why doesn't she "just leave"? Or, as Berlant asks of scenarios of cruel optimism: "Why is it so hard to leave those forms of life that don't work? Why is it that, when precariousness is spread throughout the world, people fear giving up on the institutions that have worn out their confidence in living?" (2012, 1). But recent films are particularly ambiguous: their ambivalent tone defies a straightforward reading precisely because of their cruel optimism:

> What's cruel about these attachments and not merely inconvenient or tragic is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the content of the attachment, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living and to look forward to being in the world. (Berlant 2011, 24)

In other words, to detach from that which is cruel is to detach from that which is paradoxically also life-giving, explaining why Amy contemplates suicide after Rat betrays her through the publication of *Shit Poetry,* or why Catrin is so devastated by Buckley's death in *Their Finest.* Though Buckley is by Catrin's own admission a "drunken squalid bully", his death threatens her sense of "what it means to keep on living and to look forward to being in the world" (Berlant 2011, 24), substantiating Berlant's claim that in detaching from what is cruel "massive loss is inevitable" (2012, 1). The fear of having embarrassingly misplaced one's optimism furthermore illuminates why subjects persevere for so long in damaging attachments—justifying why Imogene needs to track down her father despite the fact that he abandoned his family years before, or why Amy is so keen to be Rat's protégée that she offers to clean his house for free. As such, the recent single woman author heroine is caught in an impasse, attached to scenarios of benevolent patriarchy, even though they are "already not working" (Berlant 2011, 263)

Detaching from mentorship

Though they expose mentoring as a mode of relating cruel to women, recent films also offer a potential blueprint for revising damaging attachments, or better yet, detaching from them altogether. *Not Another Happy Ending,* notably shows the heroine protesting and moving beyond the failures of mentoring as a genre of relating. What differentiates Jane's loss of authority over her work from earlier iterations of this plot device, is its aftermath. Following each textual violation, Jane terminates her relationship with the male author character who has undermined her autonomy and authority as an author. She vows to find a new publisher after Tom changes her title, and she breaks up with Willie after he changes her ending. Rather than confirming "existing hierarchies of gender, class and race" (Eagleton 2005, 5) these episodes reassert Jane's authority over her text. In the scene in which Jane angrily confronts Tom for interfering in her life, the mise-en-scène and editing conveys Jane's position of power in their relationship. While Tom sits awkwardly in the arm chair, left of frame, Jane stands her ground to the right. Her spatial dominance, with Tom literally looking up to her, signals her occupation of the metaphorical moral high ground. This is consolidated in the dialogue as Tom admits, "I was wrong." "Of course you were wrong," she responds, before laying out her literary methodology: "you don't have to be miserable to write. You do it because you have to. Because it gnaws away at your insides if you try to ignore it. Because if you don't write then you might as well be dead." It is only after Tom's admission of guilt that Jane sits down, suggesting a return to an equal footing in their relationship. In fact, Tom reveals that he has sold his company, Tristesse Books, to the Pandemic Media corporation. Later on, we find out that his commercial activities are now overseen by his former relationship manager Anna (Kate Dickie), who describes herself as "someone disciplined, hard lined" and "who wouldn't let you get away with your usual extravagance". That Anna—a woman—embodies Tom's corporate owners, suggests a reversal of the normative gendering of authority. It becomes clear that Tom's characteristic bad temper and misguided management of authors will now be contained in accordance with Pandemic Media's wishes.

Figure 69: The contract as proposal in Not Another Happy Ending

In the final scene of the film, Jane agrees to a new two-book deal with Tristesse books, thus agreeing to continuing working with Tom. What is striking about the scene is how it is aesthetically framed as a marriage proposal. The two characters talk privately in front of a picturesque view, Tom nervously "proposes" a new contract, a copy of which he takes out from his breast pocket [See Fig. 69], Jane awkwardly responds "I do", and the characters kiss. In this way, *Not Another Happy Ending* suggests possible revisions to models of mentorship which have proved to be cruel and damaging to the single woman author. Central to the mechanism of revision is the opportunity for the single woman author to register and critique the abuses of patriarchal authority. However, part of what makes this critique possible, is that Jane relinquishes her singleness by agreeing to continue her romantic and professional relationship with Tom. Following this critique, the pair proceed with a revised working relationship predicated on a premise of equality and collaboration, rather than an unequal mentorship. While this scene revises certain aspects of the trope of mentoring, it nonetheless also reads as a consolidation of postfeminism's intertwining of women's personal and professional success, and of neoliberalism's gendered interpellation for women to pursue passionate attachments to work. The scene indeed mirrors the twin manoeuvre of *Little Women* whereby the heroine secures a publication contract at the same moment as she loses her single status, thus marking the resilience of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses within an evolving cultural context.

Figure 70: Amy and Rat achieve awkward balance in Adult World

Adult World similarly gives Amy the opportunity to register her anger and disappointment with poor mentorship. In the immediate aftermath of her discovery of the publication of her poem in *Shit Poetry*, Amy turns up furious at Rat's house and starts to destroy his private property. Later on, she once again visits Rat, and calmly rebukes him: "It's too bad you're such a colossal asshole. […] Thank you for saving me a lot of time and agony, but you didn't have to be so terrible just because I suck." Their conversation is conducted through Rat's office window, Amy on the outside, Rat on the inside, both slouched over to see each other through the open sash window. This composition—albeit strange—suggests the characters have achieved some semblance of (awkward) equality in their relationship [See Fig. 70]. They no longer look up or down at each other, and instead operate at the same, equal level. They are also now able to feedback and critique each other honestly, with Rat finally explaining his poetry worldview: "You don't suck, Amy. You don't anything yet. That's the point. You might be a great writer someday. I don't know. You haven't even lived yet. Go to jail, you know? Become a nun. Right now you're just a suckling little piglet. Just go out and live your life and get your heart broken and... Get out of mine! For a little while." Amy then follows suit, suggesting Rat need not take himself so seriously, thereby signalling that she no longer unquestioningly accepts his authority. This conversation marks the end of their mentoring relationship, as well as the end of Amy's cruelly optimistic attachment to poetry as a writing genre. Poetry is indeed depicted as materially costly: Amy labours in Rat's home for free, gets a job in a sex

shop to subsidise her writing career, and, as previously noted, cancels her car's anti-theft insurance to pay poetry competitions entry fees, meaning she is left out of pocket when her car is stolen. In the course of the film, however, Amy successfully transitions to another writing genre: erotica.

Adult World's movement from one genre to another is crucially enabled by Amy's transfer of attachment from one model of masculinity, as embodied by Rat, to another, kinder, more supportive version, embodied by Alex (Evan Peters). *Safety Not Guaranteed* (2012) similarly suggests that the discontented single woman author can escape in another genre, as Darius (Aubrey Plaza) swaps her unsatisfying job as an intern in a newspaper office with a seedy exploitative male editor, for a time-travelling adventure. In a striking generic shift, this "realist" indie dramedy suddenly veers into science-fiction: it may not be possible to heal from the traumas of living under patriarchy in a realist mode, but perhaps it is possible in fantasy. Yet, similar to Amy in *Adult World*, this escape into a different generic territory is enabled by a male love interest, Kenneth (Mark Duplass), who acts as an alternative bearer of postfeminist masculinity. In *The Girl in the Book*, Alice eventually overcomes her disordered personality by writing her own account of the abusive mentorship in an autobiographical novel entitled *The Girl in the Book*. Through the act of writing her story, she is able to transcend her "girl" status: when asked in the film's final scene, "you're the girl in the book, aren't you?" Alice tellingly answers "not anymore." In finally deciding to grow up, Alice simultaneously commits to a monogamous romantic relationship with Emmet (David Call). Kenneth, Evan, and Emmet's kindly masculinity is moreover reminiscent of the "good" patriarchs of *Little Women, Mansfield Park* and *Becoming Jane*, suggesting, in turn, that postfeminist formulations of benevolent masculinity are still imagined to contribute to the thriving of the heroine in recent films. While *Safety Not Guaranteed*, *Adult World,* and *The Girl in the Book* are cautiously hopeful about the possibility of revising toxic scenarios of mentorship, the narrative realignment of romantic attachment betrays an unwillingness to represent the heroine as fully detached from patriarchal figures; she cannot be presented as definitively single.

Their Finest, by contrast, consolidates, rather than undermines, its female protagonists' singleness. Following the accidental death of her writing mentor/lover

Buckley, a bereaved and lost Catrin refuses to return to work. Ageing actor Ambrose Hilliard (Bill Nighy) eventually steps in and manages to convince Catrin to resume her work as a scriptwriter. To an extent, Ambrose's benevolence marks him out as mentor figure, but as in *Adult World*, the introduction of a mentor whose masculine vitality is somehow symbolically compromised (in this case, by his age) serves to subtly revise mentoring as genre of relating. Importantly, unlike Evan, Kenneth, or Emmet, Ambrose is not figured as a love interest. Though Catrin starts the film as ostensibly married to artist Ellis, the revelation of her unmarried status allows the film to flirt, but not quite follow through with, the possibility of a Buckley/Catrin romance, as he dies in the final act. When Buckley appears as a ghostly presence after his death, his ghost spurs Catrin on, kindly whispering "you're mustard these days". Dead Buckley is far more encouraging than his living counterpart ever was, suggesting that the best male mentor is the dead male mentor. In killing off Buckley and daring to imagine a future in which Catrin thrives in spite of this loss, *Their Finest* affirms female authoriality differently from those texts in which the heroine becomes coupled.

In *Albatross,* on the other hand, it is by rejecting male authority, and embracing a female tradition that Emilia can finally come into her own as an author. Having called out Jonathan's authorship as pretentious posturing, and broken off their affair, Emilia detaches from Jonathan's ineffectual mentorship. However, she also needs to detach from the mistaken belief that her father was a descendant of Arthur Conan Doyle. This false parentage, the film suggests, acts as the titular albatross around her neck: believing she needs to "live up" to her famous literary ancestor indeed disables Emilia's creativity. Following an emotional conversation with her grandfather, who confirms that her father was not a descendant of the famous author, Emilia comes to the realisation that "the foundation my life is built on is a lie […] I need to rewrite myself". That Emilia feels the need to "rewrite" herself shows the extent to which her false ancestry functioned as an "idealising theory" (Berlant 2011, 2). Without Conan Doyle to bolster her claim to authorship, how can Emilia "add up to something" (Berlant 2011, 2)? In her effort to "rewrite" herself, she clears her desk. She slowly and gently places an old copy of *A Study in Scarlet* in a cardboard box, and then considers an elegant gilded frame containing a black and white portrait of the author. As non-diegetic violins play, she lifts the frame's backing, the reverse side

of the photograph becoming exposed: it is not, after all, a photograph, but a thin piece of newspaper, a false memento of a false ancestry. The film then cuts from a close-up of Emilia's face to a shot of a frame-less photograph of her and her late mother. She strokes the photograph (whose materiality, unlike the Conan Doyle portrait, is not in question) and slides it into the gilded frame. This is both a touching moment of personal forgiveness, marking Emilia's acceptance of her mother's suicide, and a political statement about authorship. In placing a photograph of her and her mother pride of place on her writing desk, and consigning Conan Doyle paraphernalia to a cardboard box, the film signals that Emilia is casting aside male authors, and privileging a female tradition instead. A tradition, which, in turn, the film figures as generative, as Emilia is depicted as writing for the first time in the diegesis. At this point, Jonathan gifts his MacBook to Emilia with a note stating "you'll put this to better use than me. I did see something special in your writing, don't waste it." Whereas Fanny's authorship in *Mansfield Park* is forever framed by Edmund and his paper-preparation, Jonathan's gifting of the MacBook authenticates Emilia's talent, and attempts to compensate for their unequal access to technologies of authorship. It is not so much a mentor that Emilia needs, but a laptop. The final scene of the film strikes a note of triumph, as she happily cycles through town, her printed manuscript—tellingly titled *Albatross*—featuring prominently in her basket.

In much the same way, in *Girl Most Likely,* it is Imogene's reconciliation with her mother Zelda (Annette Benning) which enables her professional success as a playwright. As in *Albatross*, this reconciliation hinges on the rejection of, and detachment from, a fantasy of fatherhood as mentorship. The film thus tracks Imogene's emotional journey from claiming her father was "the Clooney of fathers" to validating her mother's view of him as a "deadbeat". In admitting that "Dad's a piece of shit. It was underwhelming, as you predicted," Imogene authenticates and gives credence to motherly authority. The film ends with a production of Imogene's new play, entitled *Exo-Life*, which receives a standing ovation from the audience. The play features only two characters, a mother and daughter, and ends with them hugging on stage. The actresses' costumes, which mirror Imogene and Zelda's own clothing from the start of the film, gesture to the play's autobiographical elements. As Imogene's early work dealt with embodied experiences of girlhood, notably through a play entitled *Imogene's Period, Exo-Life,* with its central mother and daughter pair,

marks her return to a feminist inflected, autobiographical literary tradition. In their reach for a female tradition and their desire for an authorial sisterhood, *Albatross* and *Girl Most Likely* recall *The Madwoman in the Attic* ([1979] 2000): "The woman writer […] searches for a female model […] because she must legitimize her own rebellious endeavors […] The son of many fathers, today's male writer feels hopelessly belated; the daughter of too few mothers, today's female writer feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition which is at last definitively emerging" (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 50). In these films, the turn away from patriarchy is simultaneously emotionally healing and professionally enabling, and points to a broader cultural shift: the contemporary resurgence of feminist discourse in 2010s popular culture.

However, as *In a World…* and other recent texts would suggest, such a resurgence does not mark the end of postfeminism. Like Emilia and Imogene, Carol eventually detaches from her father's failed mentorship by detaching from his chosen genre: in this case, she quits the male dominated trailer voiceover industry in order to work with other women. At the end of the film, she sets up a new voice coaching service called "voice over" which offers women vocal "makeovers". Within the diegesis this is presented as a feminist act of sisterly mentorship, with women helping other women to be taken seriously as professionals. Carol's targeting of her pet peeve, the "sexy baby voice", signals an attempt to counter the problematic sexualisation of women in all spheres of life. That this plot device contributes to the shaming of women's voices by activating the makeover formula,[5] and resolves Carol's professional impasse through an entrepreneurial endeavour crucially complicates *In a World…*'s gestures of feminist revision. Rather, the film demonstrates the ways in which postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies resiliently continue to take feminism "into account" within a changing political context.

Conclusion

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[5] See Grose, "Why is Lake Bell dissing women's voices?", 2013.

On October 14 2014, pop star Kesha Rose Sebert, known as Kesha, filed a lawsuit alleging sexual assault, sexual harassment, and emotional abuse against her producer and former mentor, Lukasz Sebastian Gottwald, known as "Dr Luke".[6] Kesha's claims painted an alarming picture of an unequal relationship between a young (unmarried) female performer and her controlling producer, whose alleged abuse relied precisely on his position of authority over her body, career and family. The suit thus claimed that "For the past ten years, Dr Luke has sexually, physically, verbally and emotionally abused Ms Sebert to the point where Ms Sebert nearly lost her life" (Sebert 2014, 2). Kesha's complaint alleged that Dr Luke's actions constantly threatened her bodily autonomy, repeatedly "instructing her to stop eating and lose weight" and calling her "a fat fucking refrigerator" (Sebert 2014, 9), but also coercing her to use drugs and alcohol in order to "take advantage of her while she was intoxicated" (Sebert 2014. 6). In addition to emotional and sexual abuse, Dr Luke is alleged to have exercised complete creative control over her career as an artist: dictating the content of Kesha's albums irrespective of her feelings on the matter, releasing songs without her consent, exclusively controlling her services as a songwriter, and ultimately trapping her into "long term contracts which were one-sided, extortive and devastating to her health, sanity and career" (Sebert 2014, 9-10).

As Leigh Gilmore's *Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives* (2017a) makes clear, women's testimonies are routinely "discredited by a host of means meant to taint it: to contaminate by doubt, stigmatize through association with gender and race, and dishonor through shame, such that not only the testimony but the person herself is smeared" (2017a, 2). Using Anita Hill's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee in October 1991 as a key case study, Gilmore demonstrates how "sticky judgements" such as "he said/she said" frequently circulate "in response to claims by women of sexual violence" (2017a, 6). Importantly, she argues, such a framework "misrepresents a cultural bias against women's testimony as the false equality of rational skepticism and objectivity" (45). In other words, "He said/she said thrives in the presence of unequal power, unequal credibility, and unequal doubt" (Gilmore 2017b, 2). In 1991, the response to Hill's

[6] See Sebert, "Complaint for damages", 2014.

testimony "revealed huge gaps in public knowledge about sexual harassment, a workplace dynamic that was coming into view as women were challenging discriminatory practices and everyday sexism in the workplace" (Gilmore 2017a, 40). Whereas Hill's experience exposed the glaring "lack of an available public and feminist discourse through which to make the significance of this widespread harm knowable" (Gilmore 2017a, 40), Kesha's case, by contrast, demonstrated the ready availability of feminist rhetoric and solidarity in the mid 2010s. Pitting themselves against the logic of "he said/she said", the voices of feminist activists such as Laura Bates, founder of the Everyday Sexism project, as well as celebrities such as Lena Dunham and Taylor Swift fought for prominence in media coverage of the case.[7] Bates notably argued that "that this case is not just about one woman", but rather exemplified the mechanisms underpinning and perpetuating what is known as "rape culture" (2016). As the high-profile show of support for Kesha suggests, the tide was finally turning in the public discourse surrounding sexual harassment. In October 2017, four years after Kesha's initial claim, and more than twenty-five years after Hill's testimony, the conversation dramatically shifted. Following the widespread reporting of accusation of sexual harassment and sexual assault against film producer Harvey Weinstein, millions of women took to social media to say "Me Too." This particular form of survivor speech, Gilmore argues, "has disrupted the routine minimization of women's accounts of harm into the he said/ she said pattern" (2017b, 1). The collective nature of the #MeToo movement has crucially made visible the insidious ways in which unequal relations of power structure everyday encounters between men and women, particularly in the workplace.

In the context of this thesis, the allegations levelled against powerful men in the entertainment industry crystallise the struggles of creative women to achieve self-determination under patriarchy. In this chapter, I have sketched out the patriarchal implications of mentoring as a mode of relating between a single woman author mentee and an older male mentor. I have argued that the male mentor often works to authenticate patriarchal authority as a benevolent force in women's lives, and to obscure the very inequalities upon which his own power is predicated. However,

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[7] See Bates 2016, Dunham 2016, Newman 2016.

recent texts temper this representational pattern by increasingly depicting mentorships as sites of "cruel optimism", in which the male mentor is portrayed as simultaneously enabling *and* damaging the thriving of the single woman author mentee. In unravelling the promises of heteropatriarchy, these texts, in turn, pose the thorny question: how do we turn away from toxic attachments when they have, paradoxically, also been life-giving in helping to create and sustain the fantasy of "adding up to something"? By way of an answer, these texts open up the possibility of the single woman author detaching from toxic patriarchal authority by detaching from the figure of the toxic male mentor. These revisions of the mentoring trope, I suggest, mark a significant shift not just in the representation of the single woman author, but indeed in postfeminist media culture more broadly. Like the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, recent films demonstrate the filtering of feminist critiques of patriarchal structures into popular culture; at the same time, however, these cultural artefacts also make evident the continued resilience of postfeminism and its ongoing ability to take account of feminism.

Conclusion

Authorship and the "stickiness" of embodiment

I started this thesis by invoking Jane Austen; coming full circle as I draw to a close, I now return to her. As I argued in my introduction, Austen is in some ways the prototypical single woman author: feminist yet feminine, a ground-breaker yet a member of the canon, an unmarried woman and yet an author of romances (Cobb 2015, 135). Rebellious yet safe: as a doubly entangled sign, Austen holds particular appeal for postfeminism. Her centrality in the cultural representation of the single woman author is felt in films such as *Mansfield Park* (1999), *Becoming Jane* (2007), *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007), and *Austenland* (2013) reverberating throughout this thesis.[1] A film like *Becoming Jane* for example encompasses the four key tropes I have theorised: the heroine's linkage to discourses of "girl power", her connection to a male mentor figure, and the representation of her work as both autobiographical and preoccupied with romance.

However, Austen also importantly demonstrates the limitations placed on embodied subjects like the single woman author. The parallels between Austen and fellow canonical author William Shakespeare illustrate the gendering of the figure of the author. In a special issue of the journal *Shakespeare*, Rachel Wifall describes the two authors as "twin icons" whose treatment in popular culture "bear striking similarities, most immediately visible in the recent proliferation of film adaptations" (2010, 403). One such "striking" resemblance is the depiction of a transformative encounter between the author and his or her reader. Just as Austen's novels work their transformational magic in *The Jane Austen Book Club*, so do Shakespeare's plays in texts such as *Renaissance Man* (1994), *In the Bleak Midwinter* (1995), *Never Been Kissed* (1999), and *The King is Alive* (2000). Crucially, however, the kinds of transformations they each authorise correlate with the gender of the author. On one hand, the act of reading or performing Shakespeare is depicted as universally

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[1] To this list, one might also add *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), which borrows liberally from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). The parallels are furthermore cemented through the casting of Colin Firth in the role of Mark Darcy.

uplifting, rehabilitative, and as contributing to the betterment of humanity as a whole.[2] On the other, Austen's power, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, is limited to relational matters. For all their status as "twin icons" (Wifall 2010, 403), the differing uses of "Shakespeare" and "Austen" in popular culture reveal deeply engrained ideas about what distinguishes "men's work" from "women's work". While Shakespeare's "magic" is his *universal* insight into the human condition, Austen's distinctively *feminised* "magic" is her insight into romance.[3] In this way, Shakespeare and Austen demonstrate the stickiness of gender to the figure of the author: despite her canonical status, Austen is invoked as a bearer of feminised imagination and expertise. The signifiers "woman" and "single" relentlessly qualify Austen's authorship, so that she is remembered primarily as a *woman* author, as well as an *unmarried* woman. These enduring identifiers, I argue, doubly preclude Austen's authorship from achieving the "universality" so readily available to a male author like Shakespeare.

At stake in this thesis, then, is a broader question about embodiment and authorship. The insistence on characterising the single woman author's work as feminised and as relating to her experiences as a single woman discounts her from accessing that which is neither gendered nor raced. Universality is indeed predicated upon damaging assumptions of whiteness and maleness as default subjectivities. As

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[2] This discourse of "uplift" can be traced back to the early days of Shakespearean adaptations: *The Moving Picture World'*s review of *Twelfth Night* (1910) notably suggested that the film "elevates and improves the literary taste and appreciation of the greatest mass of people" (cited in Buchanan 2009, 138). Performing "an educational service", this adaptation, and, by extension, the wider phenomenon of Shakespeare-on-film, was understood to contribute to "the improvement of humanity" (cited in Buchanan 2009, 138). This rhetoric persists to this day, extending beyond fictional portrayals: the documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (2005) for example explores the rehabilitative effects of performing Shakespeare in a medium security US prison.

[3] In comparison to the veritable cottage industry of dating self-help books bearing Austen's name (Cobb 2015, 125), "Shakespeare" is seldom invoked to market or legitimise self-help—*Shakespeare's Guide to Parenting* (Andrews 2015) is one of the few books available in this genre. By contrast, a text such as *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy: Retracing the Bard's Unknown Travels* chronicles an attempt to "find the locations in which Shakespeare set his ten Italian plays" (Roe 2011). While the Austen conduct books vow to transform their readers' personal lives, *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy* promises to "irrevocably alter our vision of who William Shakespeare really was" (Roe 2011).

Richard Dyer demonstrates, "There is no more powerful position that that of being 'just' human" (1997, 2). In the context of white privilege and the invisibility of whiteness, Dyer elucidates how "The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that - they can speak only for their race" (1997, 2). By the same token, the white male author is imagined to be "just human" and to "speak for the commonality of humanity" through his art. Conversely, those marked as bodies by their gender, race, class, disability, or sexuality, are construed as illegitimate bearers of universality who can "speak only for their" own circumscribed lived experience. Under this model, women authors cannot transcend their corporality, so that if and when they are included in the literary canon, it is primarily as *women* authors. Multiply burdened individuals—women of colour for example—are further ghettoised.[4] First emerging in the context of the "Death of the Author" (Barthes 1967)*,* the woman author has, from the beginning, carved out a space of resistance to disembodied—white, male—authorship. Mary Eagleton evocatively writes that "for the female author the problem may not be the need for 'death' but the fact that she has barely lived and, thus, the critic should not help with her euthanasia" (2005, 23-24). In identifying and theorising the single woman author—or, more specifically, the *white, heterosexual* single woman author—as a distinctive figure in contemporary film, this thesis has staked a claim for specificity, for intersectionality, for embodiment.

Contribution to knowledge and pathways for further research

In the introduction to this thesis, I posed the question: how is the single woman author figured in contemporary film, and what does she signify? Beginning with *Little Women* (1994) and ending with *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (2018), I have tracked this figure over time and across genres. In doing so, I have demonstrated that despite her absence from the critical literature, she has been a staple of postfeminist media culture, appearing in over 100 films in the last 24 years.

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[4] This ghettoisation has implications beyond literary criticism. This phenomenon was particularly striking in the 2008 democratic primaries in which Barack Obama ran against Hilary Clinton. Running for office as "the 'black' or the 'woman' candidate," symbolically cuts individuals off from the "'universal', the general category, and hence imprison them in their gender (or race)" (Moi 2008, 265).

In addition, I have shown that her presence recurrently raises broader questions of gender and power. As I have argued, the identities "single woman" and "woman author" are mutually constitutive, each carrying connotations of female self-determination with the potential to upend traditional structures of power. However, as much as the single woman author is mobilised as a sign of female agency, she is also recurrently portrayed as that which can be assimilated into patriarchy. As such, she is an inherently contradictory and ambiguous figure suggesting both a fascination with, and an anxiety about, female autonomy. As is typical of postfeminism, the "shared meanings" circulating around the single woman author are particularly polysemous. Her singleness, for example, variously signifies an agentic subjectivity aligned with "girl power" (Chapter 1), a disordered form of selfhood requiring neoliberal self-work (Chapter 2), an availability for heterosexual romance and/or a failure to relate appropriately (Chapter 3), or even a lack of a formalised relationship to patriarchal authority (Chapter 4).

I have moreover shown that the representation of the single woman author is characterised by four key tropes. While each trope comprises a number of variations, and is inflected differently in accordance with generic terrain, they remain broadly recognisable. These representational patterns respectively suggest that the single woman author is an agentic subject (Chapter 1), that her work tends to be autobiographical (Chapter 2) and relational (Chapter 3), and that her success is enabled by a kindly, benevolent male mentor (Chapter 4). Chapter 1 and 4 notably established the figure as a symbol of "safe rebellion" (Ascheid 2006). In other words, her singleness and authorship signify as forms of female agency which ultimately do not disrupt traditional structures of power, in part because her success is framed by the patriarchal authority of a male mentor. Chapter 2 and 3 explored how authorship is imagined as an ideal form of feminine labour for the single woman subject. The autobiographical character of the single woman author's work for example is seen as an expression "of women's essential femininity" (Negra 2009, 87) working to diffuse anxieties relating to the figure of the working woman. The relational character of female authorship, on the other hand, compensates or remedies the single woman's ostensibly disordered singleness. Taken together, these four interrelated tropes suggest that the single woman author represents the complexities and ambiguities

constitutive of postfeminism itself. Through her doubly entangled representation, she manifests as a postfeminist subject *par excellence*.

This thesis has furthermore mapped the ways in which these tropes have evolved across the period. Although the tropes I analysed in Chapters 2 and 3 have remained fairly stable, like those examined in Chapters 1 and 4, they nonetheless register an intensification of existing ambiguities around assumptions of what forms of authorial labour are deemed appropriate for the single woman subject. In recent films, there is an underlying suggestion that the dual emphasis on autobiography and relationality limits and devalues the work of the single woman author. I have also demonstrated how the deployment of scenarios of cruel optimism makes visible underlying power relations restricting the single woman author's ability to exercise her agency as a self-determining subject. For example, the waning of the "can do" girl, which I explored in Chapter 1, reveals the ways in which women's choices are, in reality, constrained by intersectional inequalities to do with gender, class, and race. The amplification of ambiguities around narratives of "choice" and "agency" thus strains the meritocratic underpinnings of neoliberal discourse. The depiction of mentorship as a form of cruel optimism, analysed in Chapter 4, likewise exposes how far mentoring relations perpetuate gender inequality through the production of compliant female subjects. Finally, in Chapters 3 and 4, I showed that recent texts betray an interest in "alternative" bearers of masculinity through either a realignment of romantic attachment or through the representation of a romantic hero who explicitly supports acts of female self-determination.

Part of my argument has been that the single woman author acts as a prism for postfeminism itself. In turn, I have argued that recent texts' modification of the tropes frequently associated with the figure correspond to shifts within postfeminism itself. Having made the case that the tropes have, to varying extents, each undergone subtle but significant affective shifts, it therefore follows that postfeminism itself has undergone corresponding shifts. To be clear, such changes do not mark the end of postfeminism, but rather, register manoeuvres of recalibration designed to "take into account" (cf. McRobbie 2004) recent developments such as the (re)emergence of feminist rhetoric in the public sphere. Like Rosalind Gill, then, I see postfeminism as currently operating in part "through a celebration of (a certain kind of) feminism,

rather than its repudiation" (2017, 612). The concomitant critique of cruel male mentors alongside the portrayal of desirable "woke", female-friendly masculinity illustrate postfeminism's "dynamism and adaptability" and "its ability to change and mutate in relation to new ideas" (Gill 2017, 611). On one hand, these portrayals suggest a willingness to revise the affective economy of relationships between men and women by making patriarchy accountable for its abuses (see, for example, the #MeToo movement). On the other hand, these depictions attest an *un*willingness to detach from patriarchal authority or romance narratives, exemplifying the ways in which these affective shifts comprise both "*continuity and change*" rather than a complete "displacement" of postfeminism (Gill 2017, 611, emphasis original). Through its theorising of an affective shift within postfeminism, this thesis has therefore also furthered understandings of postfeminism as an ever-shifting sensibility whose ability to inform and shape cultural forms endures to this day.

In demonstrating the benefits of employing affective approaches to postfeminism, this thesis has made an important methodological intervention in the field of feminist media studies. In particular, my use of Lauren Berlant's framework of cruel optimism has enabled me to apprehend shifts in postfeminism without recourse to totalising narratives of historical displacement. Cruel optimism helps to make sense of how and why postfeminist fantasies of the good life can remain so singularly powerful *in spite of* recent developments such as the trauma of the financial crisis or the resurgence of political activism to do with race or gender. As Berlant states, "it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working" (2011, 263):

> Subjects who have x in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire even though its presence threatens their well-being because whatever the content of the attachment, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living and to look forward to being in the world. (Berlant 2011, 24)

With detachment from cruel fantasies inevitably precipitating a devastation of one's sense of self, is it any wonder that postfeminism has paradoxically managed to

"tighten its hold on contemporary culture and [make] itself virtually hegemonic"
(Gill 2017, 609)?

Having begun to map affective shifts within postfeminism as a sensibility informing
contemporary Anglo-American cinema, this thesis presents avenues for further
research. Recent headlines such as "11 actually pretty shocking things *Friends*
couldn't get away with today" (Baxter-Wright 2017), for example suggest that
generation-defining sitcoms like *Friends* (1994-2004) could now be fruitfully
revisited with a view to track these shifts on television. Throughout this project, I
have invoked the re-emergence of feminism in the public sphere as a particularly
recent cultural development which has been "taken into account" by postfeminist
media; however, as I indicated in my introduction, this change cannot be ascribed to
a single factor. In other words, the putative "fourth wave" of feminism is not
singularly responsible for *Friends* now being apprehended as problematically
"whitewashed" (Cobb, Ewen, Hamad 2018), or for the protagonists' comfortable
Manhattan lifestyles seeming unattainable to millennial audiences regularly berated
for their avocado-eating habits. New research could therefore probe the myriad of
recent cultural developments which have contributed to affective shifts within
postfeminism's structure of feeling. Potential factors worth including in such a study
include 9/11 and the mediation of global terrorism, the digital turn, the 2008
economic crisis and the intensification of precarious employment, as well as the
increased visibility of online activism such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo.

There is also scope for further work specifically on the figure of the single woman
author. Like any doctoral thesis, this project has necessarily been limited in its remit.
Future research could usefully broaden the text sample beyond its current temporal
and geographical boundaries. Studying the single woman author beyond the confines
of Anglo-American cinema, and/or extending the time period as far back as the
1960s would crucially illuminate the ways in which the mutually constitutive
identities "single woman" and "woman author" signify across different national
contexts, and within different feminist moments. As this thesis has demonstrated, this
figure is a significant prism through which cultural fascinations and anxieties about
female autonomy are recurrently worked out. No matter the death of the author then,
we are far from finished with the single woman author.

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Appendix: Filmography

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
I Love Trouble	1994	Charles Shyer	Touchstone Pictures	**Nancy Meyers** Charles Shyer	
Little Women	1994	**Gillian Armstrong**	Columbia Pictures	**Robin Swicord**	**Louisa May Alcott**
Speechless	1994	Ron Underwood	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	Robert King	
How to Make An American Quilt	1995	**Jocelyn Moorhouse**	Amblin Entertainment	**Jane Anderson**	**Whitney Otto**
Grace of my Heart	1996	**Allison Anders**	Universal Pictures	**Allison Anders**	
The Pillow Book	1996	Peter Greenaway	Eurimages	Peter Greenaway	**Sei Shonagon**
You've Got Mail	1998	**Nora Ephron**	Warner Bros. Pictures	**Nora Ephron Delia Ephron**	Miklós László
10 Things I Hate About You	1999	**Gil Junger**	Touchstone Pictures	**Kristen Smith Karen McCullah Lutz**	William Shakespeare
Girl, Interrupted	1999	James Mangold	Columbia Pictures	James Mangold **Lisa Loomer Anna Hamilton Phelan**	**Susuanna Kaysen**
Mansfield Park	1999	**Patricia Rozema**	Miramax Films	**Patricia Rozema**	**Jane Austen**

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
Message in a Bottle	1999	Luis Mandoki	Bel Air Entertainment	Gerald Di Pego	Nicholas Sparks
Never Been Kissed	1999	Raja Gosnell	Fox 2000 Pictures	**Abby Kohn** Marc Silverstein	William Shakespeare
The Virgin Suicides	1999	**Sofia Coppola**	Muse Productions	**Sofia Coppola**	Jeffrey Eugenides
28 Days	2000	**Betty Thomas**	Columbia Pictures	**Susannah Grant**	
Coyotte Ugly	2000	David McNally	Touchstone Pictures	**Gina Wendkos**	
Bridget Jones's Diary	2001	**Sharon McGuire**	Studio Canal	**Helen Fielding** Andrew Davies Richard Curtis	**Helen Fielding**
Iris	2001	Richard Eyre	Miramax Films	Richard Eyre Charles Wood	Jon Bayley
Josie and The Pussycats	2001	Harry Elfont **Deborah Kaplan**	Universal Pictures	**Deborah Kaplan** Harry Elfont	Richard Goldwater Dan DeCarlo John L. Goldwater
Prozac Nation	2001	Erik Skjoldbjærg	Given Films	Galt Niederhoffer Frank Deasy Larry Gross	**Elizabeth Wurtzel**
Riding in Cars with Boys	2001	**Penny Marshall**	Parkway Productions	Morgan Ward	**Beverly Donofrio**
Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood	2002	**Callie Khouri**	Gaylord Films	Mark Andrus **Callie Khouri**	**Rebecca Wells**

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
Morvern Callar	2002	**Lynne Ramsay**	BBC Films	**Liana Dognini** **Lynne Ramsay**	Alan Warner
Possession	2002	Neil LaBute	Warner Bros. Pictures	David Henry Hwang **Laura Jones** Neil LaBute	**A.S. Byatt**
Van Wilder: Party Liaison	2002	Walt Becker	Tapestry Films	Brent Goldberg David Wagner	
How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days	2003	Donald Petrie	Paramount Pictures	**Kristen Buckley** Brian Regan Burr Steers	**Jeannie Long** **Michele Alexander**
I Capture the Castle	2003	Tim Fywell	Isle of Man Film Commission	**Heidi Thomas**	**Dodie Smith**
In the Cut	2003	**Jane Campion**	Pathé Pictures International	**Jane Campion** **Susanna Moore** Stavros Kazantzidis	**Susanna Moore**
Something's Gotta Give	2003	**Nancy Meyers**	Warner Bros. Pictures	**Nancy Meyers**	
Sylvia	2003	**Christine Jeffs**	BBC Films	John Brownlow	
The Life of David Gale	2003	Alan Parker	Universal Pictures	Charles Randolph	
Under the Tuscan Sun	2003	**Audrey Wells**	Touchstone Pictures	**Audrey Wells**	**Frances Mayes**
A Cinderella Story	2004	Marc Rosman	Warner Bros. Pictures	**Leigh Dunlap**	

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason	2004	**Beeban Kidron**	Universal Pictures	**Helen Fielding** Andrew Davies Richard Curtis Adam Brooks	**Helen Fielding**
Down with Love	2004	Peyton Reed	Fox 2000 Pictures	**Eve Ahlert** Dennis Drake	
Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow	2004	Kerry Conran	Paramount Pictures	Kerry Conran	
Capote	2005	Bennett Miller	Cooper's Town Productions	Dan Futterman	Gerald Clarke
Hitch	2005	Andy Tennant	Columbia Pictures	Kevin Bisch	
Thank You For Smoking	2005	Jason Reitman	ContentFilm	Jason Reitman	Christopher Buckley
The Perfect Man	2005	Mark Rosman	Universal Pictures	**Gina Wendkos Heather Robinson Katherine Torpey** Michael McQuown	
The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants	2005	Ken Kwapis	Warner Bros. Pictures	**Delia Ephron Elizabeth Chandler**	**Ann Brashares**
Blood Diamond	2006	Edward Zwick	Warner Bros. Pictures	Charles Leavitt C. Gaby Mitchell	
Miss Potter	2006	Chris Noonan	Phoenix Pictures	Richard Maltby	

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
Once	2006	John Carney	Summit Entertainment	John Carney	
Scoop	2006	Woody Allen	Ingenious Film Partners	Woody Allen	
Stranger than Fiction	2006	Marc Foster	Columbia Pictures	Zach Helm	
The Devil Wears Prada	2006	David Frankel	Twentieth Century Fox	**Aline Brosh McKena**	**Lauren Weisberger**
The Holiday	2006	**Nancy Meyers**	Universal Pictures	**Nancy Meyers**	
Angel	2007	François Ozon	Canal+	François Ozon Martin Crimp	**Elizabeth Taylor**
Atonement	2007	Joe Wright	Universal Pictures	Christopher Hampton	Ian McEwen
Becoming Jane	2007	Julian Jarrold	BBC Films	Kevin Hood **Sarah Williams**	Jon Spencer
Freedom Writers	2007	Richard LaGravenese	Paramount Pictures	Richard LaGravenese	The Freedom Writers with **Erin Gruwell**
Music and Lyrics	2007	Marc Lawrence	Village Roadshow Pictures	Marc Lawrence	
Starting Out in the Evening	2007	Andrew Wagner	Cinetic Media	Fred Parnes Andrew Wagner	Brian Morton
The Jane Austen Book Club	2007	**Robin Swicord**	Mockingbird Pictures	**Robin Swicord**	**Karen Joy Fowler**

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
The Nanny Diaries	2007	**Shari Springer Berman** Robert Pulcini	The Weinstein Company	**Shari Springer Berman** Robert Pulcini	**Emma McLaughlin Nicola Kraus**
Sex and the City	2008	Michael Patrick King	New Line Cinema	Michael Patrick King	**Candace Bushell**
The Accidental Husband	2008	Griffin Dunne	Blumhouse Productions	**Bonnie Sikowitz Clare Naylor Mimi Hare**	
The Secret Life of Bees	2008	**Gina Prince-Bythewood**	Fox Searchlight Pictures	**Gina Prince-Bythewood**	**Sue Monk Kidd**
The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants 2	2008	**Sanaa Hamri**	Alcon Entertainment	**Elizabeth Chandler**	**Ann Brashares**
Vicki Cristina Barcelona	2008	Woody Allen		Woody Allen	
An Education	2009	**Lone Scherfig**	BBC Films	Nick Hornby	**Lynn Barber**
Confessions of a Shopaholic	2009	P.J. Hogan	Touchstone Pictures	**Tracey Jackson** Tim Firth **Kayla Alpert**	**Sophie Kinsella**
Crazy Heart	2009	Scott Cooper	Fox Searchlight Pictures	Scott Cooper	Thomas Cobb
He's Just Not that Into You	2009	Ken Kwapis	New Line Cinema	**Abby Kohn** Marc Silverstein	Greg Behrendt **Liz Tuccillo**

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
State of Play	2009	Kevin Macdonald	Universal Pictures	Matthew Michael Carnahan Tony Gilroy Billy Ray Paul Abbott	
Dear John	2010	Lasse Hallström	Screen Gems	Jamie Linden	Nicholas Sparks
Easy A	2010	Will Gluck	Screen Gems	Bert V. Royal	
Eat Pray Love	2010	Ryan Murphy	Columbia Pictures	Ryan Murphy **Jennifer Salt**	**Elizabeth Gilbert**
Going the Distance	2010	**Nanette Burstein**	New Line Cinema	Geoff LaTulippe	
Letters to Juliet	2010	Gary Winick	Summit Entertainment	Jose Rivera Tim Sullivan	**Lise Friedman** **Ceil Friedman**
Tamara Drewe	2010	Stephen Frears	BBC Films	**Moira Buffini**	**Posy Simmonds**
Tiny Furniture	2010	**Lena Dunham**	Tiny Ponies	**Lena Dunham**	
Albatross	2011	Niall MacCormick	CinemaNX	**Tamzin Rafn**	
One Day	2011	**Lone Scherfig**	Random House Films	David Nicholls	David Nicholls
The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel	2011	John Madden	Fox Searchlight Pictures	Ol Parker	**Deborah Moggach**
The Help	2011	Tate Taylor	1492 Pictures	Tate Taylor	**Kathryn Stockett**

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
Young Adult	2011	Jason Reitman	Right of Way Films	**Diablo Cody**	
Girl Most Likely	2012	**Shari Springer Berman** Robert Pulcini	Anonymous Content	**Michelle Morgan**	
Lola Versus	2012	Daryl Wein	Groundswell Productions	**Zoe Lister-Jones** Daryl Wein	
Pitch Perfect	2012	Jason Moore	Gold Circle Films	**Kay Cannon**	Mickey Rapkin
Safety Not Guaranteed	2012	Colin Trevorrow	Big Beach Films	Derek Connoly	
Adult World	2013	Scott Coffey	Anonymous Content	Andy Cochran	
Austenland	2013	**Jerusha Hess**	Moxie Pictures	**Jerusha Hess Shannon Hale**	**Shannon Hale**
Authors Anonymous	2013	**Ellie Kanner**	Bull Market Entertainment	David Congalton	
Begin Again	2013	John Carney	Apatow Productions	John Carney	
Hateship Loveship	2013	**Liza Johnson**	Benaroya Pictures	Mark Poirier	**Alice Munro**
In a World…	2013	**Lake Bell**	3311 Productions	**Lake Bell**	
Man of Steel	2013	Zack Snyder	Warner Bros. Pictures	Christopher Nolan David S. Goyer	Jerry Siegel Joe Shuster
Not Another Happy Ending	2013	John McKay	Synchronicity Films	David Solomons	

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
Saving Mr Banks	2013	John Lee Hancock	Walt Disney Pictures	**Kelly Marcel** **Sue Smith**	
Ask me Anything	2014	Allison Burnett	Decipher Entertainment	Allison Burnett	Allison Burnett
Obvious Child	2014	**Gillian Robespierre**	Sundial Pictures	**Gillian Robespierre** **Karen Maine** **Elisabeth Holm** **Anna Bean**	
Testament of Youth	2014	James Kent	BBC Films	**Juliette Towhidi**	**Vera Brittain**
The Rewrite	2014	Marc Lawrence	Castle Rock Entertainment	Marc Lawrence	
Top Five	2014	Chris Rock	IAC Films	Chris Rock	
Welcome to Me	2014	**Shira Piven**	Gary Sanchez Productions	Eliot Laurence	
Wild	2014	Jean-Marc Vallée	Fox Searchlight Pictures	Nick Hornby	**Cheryl Strayed**
A Country Called Home	2015	**Anna Axster**	Kickstart Productions	Jim Beggarly **Anna Axster**	
Crimson Peak	2015	Guillermo del Toro	Legendary Pictures	Guillermo del Toro Matthew Robbins **Lucinda Coxon**	
Man Up	2015	Ben Palmer	StudioCanal	**Tess Morris**	

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
One More Time	2015	Robert Edwards	Parts and Labor	Robert Edwards	
Ricki and the Flash	2015	Jonathan Demme	TriStar Pictures	**Diablo Cody**	
The Diary of a Teenage Girl	2015	**Marielle Heller**	Cold Iron Pictures	**Marielle Heller**	**Phoebe Gloekner**
The DUFF	2015	Ari Sandel	CBS Films	Josh A Cagan	**Kody Keplinger**
The Girl in the Book	2015	**Marya Cohn**	Varient	**Marya Cohn**	
Trainwreck	2015	Judd Apatow	Universal Pictures	**Amy Schumer**	
Brain on Fire	2016	Gerard Barrett	Denver and Delilah Productions	Gerard Barrett	**Susannah Cahalan**
La la land	2016	Damien Chazelle	Summit Entertainment	Damien Chazelle	
Their Finest	2016	**Lone Scherfig**	BBC Films	**Gaby Chiappe**	**Lissa Evans**
Whiskey Tango Foxtrot	2016	Glenn Ficarra John Requa	Paramount Pictures	Robert Carlock	**Kim Barker**
A Quiet Passion	2017	Terence Davies	Potemkino	Terence Davies	
Mary Shelley	2017	Haifaa Al-Mansour	Sobini Films	**Emma Jensen** Haifaa Al-Mansour	
Passengers	2016	Morten Tyldum	Columbia Pictures	Jon Spaihts	
The Incredible Jessica James	2017	Jim Strouse	Beachside Films	Jim Strouse	

FILM TITLE	YEAR	DIRECTOR	PRODUCTION	SCREENPLAY	ORIGINAL AUTHOR (IF ANY)
Set it Up	2018	**Claire Scanlon**	Treehouse Pictures	**Katie Silberman**	
The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society	2018	**Mike Newell**	Canal+	**Don Roos** **Kevin Hood** **Thomas Bezucha**	**Annie Barrows** **Mary Ann Shaffer**