From Living Dolls to Sex Bots:
The Doll in Twentieth Century and Contemporary Women's Writing

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Abstract

This thesis examines representations of the doll in modern and contemporary women's writing, with a particular focus on gender, and its intersections with race and class. As a surrogate woman constructed under patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism, the doll is an important symbol in the history of feminist discourse and women's literature. This thesis identifies four different types of doll that feature in women's writing: The Living Doll, The Barbie Doll, The Sex Doll and The AI Doll. Chapter One, The Living Doll, examines the way doll-like traits are projected on to women, showing how women writers recast the 'Living Doll' stereotype to highlight and challenge patriarchal expectations of femininity, masculinity and race. Chapter Two, The Barbie Doll, surveys several contemporary texts by women writers which feature Barbie to show how these texts use her to challenge a branch of third-wave feminism which celebrates Barbie as feminist. Instead, this chapter argues that Barbie is a symbol of unrealistic body standards, female commodification, and capitalist greed, which has been manufactured by Mattel for profit. Chapter Three, The Sex Doll, draws on under-examined texts by two famous female authors to show how the figure in women's writing moves from a symbol of female sexual liberation in the early twentieth century to a symbol of female objectification with the rise of technology and the sex industry. Chapter Four, The AI Doll, marks a turning point, whereby the figure of the doll moves from object to subject. This final chapter examines the feminist potential of the AI Doll as featured in women's science fiction from 1925 until 2023, which establishes how this figure can help to deconstruct gender binaries and patriarchal hierarchies. Ultimately, the thesis argues that women writers repurpose the figure of the doll to critique the patriarchal versions of womanhood that the figure represents in the context of late-stage capitalism.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2023, Barbie mania gripped the world as girls and women flooded the cinemas dressed in bright bubble-gum pink to watch Greta Gerwig's record-breaking hit film *Barbie* (2023), revealing the impact that dolls (and patriarchal constructions of femininity) still have in culture today. The live-action film follows a character called 'Stereotypical Barbie', who lives in the fictional utopian matriarchy, Barbie Land, and begins to worry about becoming a 'real' woman with cellulite, flat feet and body odour, as all these things appear on her body. This parody of the doll-like beauty ideals of women is subverted at the end of the film when Barbie chooses to embrace imperfection and become human, regardless of the horrifying beauty expectations and misogyny she experiences in the real world's patriarchal society (a direct reflection of twenty-first century society in the West). Despite many feminists criticizing Barbie as a figure that represents unrealistic beauty ideals and female commodification, the film's central message that women are more than living dolls has, for many, re-branded the contentious figure of Barbie as feminist.[1] The success of the Barbie film shows how relevant the doll still is as a cultural phenomenon. But is this neoliberal, hypercommodified version of the doll positive for women's rights, or does it, instead, lean into capitalist and patriarchal aspirations for womanhood?

The Barbie film is a recent exemplification of the trend in women's writing that I identify in this thesis. I propose that women writers repurpose the figure of the doll to critique the patriarchal version of womanhood that the doll often represents in the context of late-

[1] Martine Delvaux, *Serial Girls: from Barbie to Pussy Riot*, trans by. Susanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood (Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines, 2016), pp. 31, 42; Catherine Riley and Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and Women's Writing: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 72; Ronke Babajide, 'How an Anti-Feminist Symbol Like Barbie Became a Modern Feminist Icon', *Medium* (28 August 2023), <https://medium.com/bitchy/how-an-anti-feminist-symbol-like-barbie-became-a-modern-feminist-icon-11bb76f29255> [Accessed 31 August 2024]; M. G. Lord, 'Opinion: Yes, Barbie is a feminist — just don't ask her creators', *Los Angeles Times* (16 July 2023), <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2023-07-16/barbie-movie-feminism-doll-greta-gerwig-margot-robbie-ryan-gosling-mattel> [Accessed 31 August 2024].

stage capitalism. This thesis examines a large corpus of fiction by women writers to assess whether literary representations of the doll can ever be free from the doll's patriarchal associations, and to examine how representations of the literary doll are reflective of the way late capitalism (the era of capitalist growth since World War Two) has exacerbated patriarchal oppression and gender inequalities.[2] This project analyses the doll as a symbol of feminine subjectivity in twentieth and twenty-first century Anglo-American women's writing through an analysis of four distinct doll types: The Living Doll, The Barbie Doll, The Sex Doll and The AI Doll. I have identified these doll types as most closely reflecting patriarchal constructions of femininity and the commodification of women's bodies in women's writing over the past one hundred years. This thesis draws on the four waves of feminism, recognising that feminism has changed since 2010, with the emergence of artificial intelligence and new media, which will be explored most prevalently in my final chapter on the AI Doll. The feminist critical position in this thesis is intersectional, recognising how race and class intersect with gender, in order to convey an anti-racist and anti-capitalist politics.

In the following chapters, I define the doll as a man-made surrogate human, or a human-like object. Conversely, the 'Living doll' is characterized as a doll-like human, or someone who is treated like a doll. I focus particularly on women's alignment with dolls here, rather than on children's dolls, as there is already a history of literary criticism on literary representations of children's dolls, particularly in children's literature.[3] This is with the exception of Barbie which is the most famous example of how the doll relates to women's

[2] Ernest Mendel, *Late Capitalism* (London: Humanities Press, 1975), p. 11.

[3] Ricky Herzog, 'Sissies, Dolls, and Dancing: Children's Literature and Gender Deviance in the Seventies', *The Lion and the Unicorn (Brooklyn)*, 33.1 (2009), 60–76; Eugenia Gonzalez, '"I Sometimes Think She Is a Spy on All My Actions": Dolls, Girls, and Disciplinary Surveillance in the Nineteenth-Century Doll Tale', *Children's Literature (Storrs, Conn.)*, 39.1 (2011), 33–57; Jocelyn Van Tuyl, 'Dolls in Holocaust Children's Literature: From Identification to Manipulation', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 40.1 (2015), 24–38 (p. 24); Robin Bernstein, 'Children's Books, Dolls, and the Performance of Race; or, The Possibility of Children's Literature', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 126.1 (2011), 160–69 (p. 167).

beauty standards and the commodification of the body, which is why I include it in this study. Through mapping the evolution of these four doll types, this thesis tracks the doll from a symbol which highlights the objectification and commodification of women, through The Living Doll, The Barbie Doll and The Sex Doll, to a subversion of gender constructs, and what it means to be human, through the AI doll. The AI doll chapter marks an unexpected departure in the thesis as it stands as a symbol of hope in women's science fiction in re-imagining technological futures under a feminist, socialist society, instead of a patriarchal, capitalist one. This is because artificial intelligence gives the doll agency, whilst the other doll types remove agency from women. Therefore, the AI doll in women's fiction moves away from commodification and objectification towards the humanization of the doll itself, symbolizing how definitions of who is deemed 'human' have shifted over time. This thesis includes previously neglected twentieth-century texts such as Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis* (1925), Daphne du Maurier's 'The Doll' (1937) and Margaret Yorke's *The China Doll* (1961). It also features underappreciated texts by famous contemporary women writers such as Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood. This thesis argues that, as a surrogate woman constructed under colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy, the doll is an important symbol in the history of feminist discourse and women's literature in articulating a feminist critique of patriarchal standards of femininity, beauty, race and class.

This study of the literary doll is unique in its focus on women's writing, with previous literary scholarship on the doll primarily concentrating on male authored texts, such as E.T.A. Hoffman's 'The Sandman' (1816) and Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (1865).[4] As with

[4] Julie Park, 'The Post-Enlightened: Shattering the Spectacles of Reason in "The Sandman"', in *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), pp. 207-11; Kara Reilly, 'Olympia's Legacy', in *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 111-47; Ben Moore, 'The Dolls' Dressmaker Re(ad)dressed: Jenny Wren's Critique of Childhood, Femininity and Appearance', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 44.3 (2016), 473–90; Victoria Smith, 'Dolls and Imaginative Agency in Bradford, Pardoe, and Dickens', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 40.1 (2009), 171–97.

Hoffman's mechanical doll, Olympia, who is fetishized by the male protagonist, Nathanial, the alignment of women and dolls has historically been an oppressive tradition which consigns women to the status of objects to be fetishized and subjugated. Despite the doll being a symbol of female objectification and commodification, and the large number of texts by women writers featuring dolls that I have identified, surprisingly, critical investigation of the doll in literary texts by women writers has not been undertaken in an extended way. This thesis addresses a gap in literary criticism by examining women writers' representations of the doll alongside the figure's feminist history and discourse. Putting the literary doll in its socio-historical context shows that the doll is a metaphor for white, patriarchal womanhood that reflects social and political issues of the day, and which has been used as a symbol of oppression in feminist theory since its origin. This thesis is also essential to mapping women writers' literary reactions to the enduring popularity of the doll in material culture. The rising popularity of the doll in discussions of female identity in the twenty-first century, with the popularity of films such as *M3GAN* (2022) and *Barbie* (2023), means that an analysis of the impact of the doll's popularity as a symbol of female subjectivity in women's writing across feminist history is fitting.

This thesis undertakes a close textual analysis of at least two literary works in each chapter alongside key theoretical feminist texts to consider how women's fiction responds to attitudes towards gender issues during the time they were written. I draw on second-wave feminist critiques of patriarchal constructions of femininity such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1978) to show how early feminists were subversive in their rejection of assigned gender expectations and how this is reflected in literary representations of the doll during this period. In a similar vein, I use third-wave feminist critiques of women's beauty and behavioural expectations, such as Naomi Wolf's

The Beauty Myth (1990) and Natasha Walter's *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (2009) to show how third-wave feminists challenged gender essentialism (the belief that some things are inherently masculine or feminine) and how this is reflected in late twentieth and early-twenty-first century women's literature that features the doll. This thesis also highlights how women writers parody and critique some branches of third wave feminism, such as 'lipstick feminism', which embraced traditional aspects of femininity in popular culture. Across the four chapters - primarily in chapters Two and Four - I engage with queer scholars such as Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam, Erica Rand and Paulina Palmer to examine how the doll can be used in subversive and 'queer' ways to destabilize the compulsory heteronormativity, as well as hyperfemininity, nurtured by doll stereotypes. I also draw on history and cultural studies scholarship and feminist critiques of postfeminism (the notion that women having more social and financial agency is a sign that we have reached gender equality) such as Angela Holdsworth's *Out of the Doll's House: The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century* (1988), Angela McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2008) and Kat Banyard's *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today* (2010). This helps to demonstrate how women's representations of the doll reflect the feminist sentiments of the time in which they are expressed, such as contemporary intersectional women's writing highlighting the need for an evolving feminism because most women have not yet reached equality.

This analysis of the literary doll takes an intersectional feminist position, examining the ways the doll can be used to show how capitalism, racism and patriarchy harm women and marginalized groups. My thesis employs fourth wave and contemporary feminist philosophical non-fiction texts which examine gender, sexuality and race in the contemporary moment. These include Amia Srinivasan's *The Right to Sex* (2021), to observe contemporary gender, race and sex issues in light of the rise of #MeToo and the incel movement, and

Jeanette Winterson's *12 Bytes: How Artificial Intelligence Will Change the Way We Live and Love* (2021), to examine how technological progress intersects with concerns around gender, race and sexuality. I engage with black feminist scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks and Audre Lorde, particularly in my first two chapters, to underline how the literary doll can expose the need for intersectional feminism, particularly in relation to representations of the doll that highlight white femininity as the ideal or standard. This thesis takes an intersectional approach because of the junctures of oppression that women often face. As Gina Wisker argues 'women can be seen to suffer a triple oppression in terms of patriarchy, the colonial powers and gendered versions of silencing and oppression'.[5]

My thesis also draws on feminist theories of intersectional feminism relating to capitalism and colonialism, particularly anti-capitalist and anti-colonial feminism, to demonstrate how contemporary gender, race and class oppression are all linked to late-stage capitalism, and how this is manifested in the doll types under investigation. American philosopher and critical theorist Nancy Fraser advocates for a 'feminism for the 99 percent' which is anti-capitalist, linking a capitalist society to the proliferation and enforcement of gender oppression, domestic and work-place violence, gender binarism and heteronormativity, racism and colonialism, and ecological destruction.[6] Ultimately, Fraser directly links capitalism and colonialism to female objectification and commodification: 'the truth is that racism, imperialism, and ethnonationalism are essential buttresses of generalized misogyny and the control over all women's bodies.'[7] Similarly, in *Socialist Feminism: A New Approach* (2022), Frieda Afary argues that capitalism 'objectifies and commodifies women

[5] Gina Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 81.
[6] Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99 Percent a Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019), pp. 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18. Fraser's support for the 'new feminist wave' 'rejects capitalism's structural undervaluation of women's labor', and urges for a feminism which collaborates with 'anti-racists, environmentalists, and labor and migrant rights activists' against capitalism, arguing that 'a feminism that is truly anti-racist and anti-imperialist must also be anticapitalist.' Fraser, pp. 8, 16.
[7] Fraser, p. 17.

and has consistently opposed women's control over their own bodies' and that gender and race oppression are active ingredients in capitalism, noting that 'capitalism embodies both patriarchy and racism'.[8] David Harvey also observes that 'contemporary capitalism plainly feeds off gender discriminations and violence as well as upon the frequent dehumanization of people of colour', suggesting that capitalism cannot exist and thrive without the objectification of sexualized and racialized bodies.[9] This thesis draws on these theories of anti-capitalism to recognize that the doll in twentieth and twenty-first century women's writing is a pivotal vector in expressing how late-stage capitalism has exacerbated gender, race and class inequalities. This analysis of women's writing highlights and critiques capitalism's effect on patriarchal and colonial subjugation, particularly in relation to the commodification of women's bodies, revealing a neglected history of women's voices utilizing the doll for feminist and socialist activism.

The Doll in Material Culture and Feminist Discourse

The line between dolls and women began to be blurred after the eighteenth century as a result of their shared links to women's fashion.[10] According to Juliette Peers, the French fashion doll conjured up an image of a 'newly rebellious womanhood, the refusal of the angel of the house', suggesting a more progressive link between women and dolls during this period.[11] Nonetheless, Peers also suggests that women becoming more like dolls holds negative connotations, noting that 'the doll not only frequently looks like a woman, sometimes she is a woman; in fact she is a clear, unmistakable sign of women's limited intellect, passivity,

[8] Frieda Afary, *Socialist Feminism: A New Approach* (London: Pluto Press, 2022), p. 16. Afary sees socialist feminism as an alternative to the capitalist, heteropatriarchal and racist society we currently live in.
[9] Harvey, p. 25.
[10] Adam Geczy, *The Artificial Body in Fashion and Art: Marionettes, Models and Mannequins* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), p. 92.
[11] Juliette Peers, *The Fashion Doll: from Bébé Jumeau to Barbie* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 67.

frivolity'.[12] One definition of the doll, which has been in use since 1778 according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that a doll is:

> A pretty, but unintelligent or empty person, esp. when dressed up; a pretty, but silly or frivolous woman. Also in more general sense: a woman; a girl; esp. a very beautiful or attractive woman; also *occasionally*, a pleasant or attractive man. a doll's face, one conventionally pretty, but without life or expression.[13]

This suggests that in the eighteenth century the doll began to be associated with negative perceptions of femininity and womanhood, signalling that women were merely unintelligent objects for the male gaze. Here, it is clear that the alignment of women and dolls has had negative connotations since the doll's origin in popular western culture.

Writing that asserts the relationship of dolls to the cultivation of female identity can be found in women's magazines in Britain as early as the eighteenth century, such as *The Lady's Magazine* (1770-1850).[14] In 1782, in volume thirteen of *The Lady's Magazine*, there is a piece of writing titled 'Deborah, or the history of an old maid', which is written 'by herself'. This volume shows the preliminary feelings of women using dolls for self-expression, as Deborah says, 'my doll was a kind of model of myself'.[15] Other writings in the same volume hold a similar sentiment, such as an extract called 'Peculiarities, respecting the education of females', by Scottish writer and judge, Lord Henry Home Kames in *Loose thoughts up on education* (1781), which says:

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[12] Peers, p. 9.
[13] Entry 'Doll', The *Oxford English Dictionary*, n. d. <https://www.oed.com> [Accessed 21 September 2023].
[14] *The Lady's Magazine* was a forerunner in platforming women's voices, as well as targeting its readership to female audiences. According to *AM Digital*, the creator of the digital database *Eighteenth Century Journals* which uniquely holds a full run of *The Lady's Magazine*, the magazine was 'a feminised space in an otherwise male-dominated genre'. Anon, 'The Lady's Magazine and the Emergence of Women as Active Participants in the Eighteenth Century Periodical Press', *AMDigital* (16 December 2010) <https://www.amdigital.co.uk/insights/news/the-ladys-magazine-and-the-emergence-of-women-as-active-participants-in-the-eighteenth-century-periodical-press#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20unique%20aspects,written%20content%2C%20free%20of%20charge.> [Accessed 17 October 2023]
[15] Anon, 'Deborah, or the history of an old maid', *The Lady's Magazine*, 13 (1782), p. 65.

> A girl, wishing to be agreeable, is fond of ornaments that please the eye. She begins with a doll, which she dresses and undresses, to try what ornaments will suite best. In due time, the doll is laid aside; and the young woman's own person becomes the object of her attention.[16]

This gender essentialist view of women's relationship to dolls in the late eighteenth century suggests that women saw dressing dolls as practicing for dressing in society. The doll here is therefore used to shape a woman's perception of her social self. In several volumes of *The Lady's Magazine*, the doll is primarily noted as a plaything for children.[17] In volume thirteen (1782), it is suggested that the doll is a tool used to socialize maternal instincts in girls in another published extract from Kames' *Loose thoughts up on education* titled 'Instructions preparatory to the marriage state':

> The time a girl bestows on her doll, is a prognostic that she will be equally as diligent about her offspring […] Here is displayed pure nature in perfection. A girl begins with a doll, then thinks of adorning her own person. When she is married, her children become her dolls, upon whom all her taste in dress is displayed.[18]

Once again, Kames expresses a gender essentialist view in his suggestion that a girl's maternal treatment of her dolls is 'pure nature in perfection'. Kames' viewpoint here shows that a woman's treatment of her dolls was seen as reflective of her mothering abilities, as well as a model of herself. Extracts from *The Lady's Magazine*, therefore, show the gender essentialist origins of the alignment of dolls and women in the eighteenth century.

Recent cultural histories have shown the extent to which the doll has been used to perpetuate racial as well as gendered hierarchies, which I particularly examine through the China doll in Chapter One and through the Barbie doll and the idealization of whiteness in Chapter Two of this thesis. The historical use of black dolls to ridicule women of colour specifically is clear through America's history of slavery and colonialism. Topsy-turvy dolls

[16] Lord Henry Home Kames, 'Peculiarities, respecting the education of females', *The Lady's Magazine*, 13 (1782), p. 42.
[17] Children playing with dolls appears in volume 1, 9, 17, 18, 19 of *The Lady's Magazine*.
[18] Kames, 'Instructions preparatory to the marriage state', *The Lady's Magazine*, 13 (1782), p. 542.

(Fig. 1), which likely originated in American plantation nurseries in the early nineteenth century, were symbols of racism and colonialism.[19] Topsy-turvy dolls were material dolls which, when flipped over, became an entirely different doll, usually one black doll and one white, as the skirts hid one of the dolls, and were likely designed to reinforce racial and sexual power dynamics.[20] Robin Bernstein suggests that black dolls were used by children to act out race dynamics during slavery, reinforcing the idea that 'slavery legally defined some humans as things, and emancipation legally redefined all humans as humans'.[21] According to Bernstein, using dolls to re-enact violence and white supremacy was not unusual as 'many nineteenth-century white children - especially but not exclusively girls - read books about slavery and then used dolls to act out scenes of racialized violence and forced labor'.[22] Bernstein even suggests that nineteenth-century doll makers invited violence towards black dolls by making them out of more durable materials such as rubber and cloth instead of ceramic or wax.[23] One suffrage doll was created to satirize both African Americans and suffragists, portraying a black woman as a stump speaker for women's rights and the doll moved up and down when wound up by a key.[24] Dolls, then, have been a tool of white supremacy and racial oppression since as early as the nineteenth century, particularly in the context of slavery and colonialism, showing how dolls have been historically used to reinforce established hierarchies and to diminish groups regarded by elites as inferior.

[19] Julian K. Jarboe, 'The Racial Symbolism of the Topsy-Turvy Doll', *The Atlantic* (20 November 2015) <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/11/the-racial-symbolism-of-the-topsy-turvy-doll/416985/> [Accessed 2 November 2023].
[20] Ibid.
[21] Robin Bernstein, 'Children's Books, Dolls, and the Performance of Race; or, The Possibility of Children's Literature', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 126.1 (2011), 160–69 (pp. 163-4).
[22] Ibid.
[23] Bernstein, p. 164.
[24] Florey notes that this may have been to evoke American abolitionist Sojourner Truth. Florey, *Women's Suffrage Memorabilia*, p. 191.

Fig. 2: Photo of Topsy-Turvey Doll taken by K. Tait Jarboe and Zak Bickel for *The Atlantic* [online] in 2015.

As with racialized dolls, dolls were also used to ridicule suffragettes more widely. This is shown in the anti-suffragette dolls manufactured to mock the suffragettes during the first wave of feminism. A 'hostile depiction of a suffragette' came in the form of a wooden hand-painted doll made in Germany c.1912-14 in a more masculine, shouting posture in order to depict suffragettes as aggravated and threatening.[25] It is also clear that some suffrage dolls were meant as a caricature as shown by one manufactured doll which, when pressed in the middle, would cause cymbals to clash, implying the suffragettes were nothing more than clowns or performing monkeys.[26] Another suffragette china doll had a removable head, presumably for 'ridicule' and another was a cartoonish wooden figure attached to a card which says, 'please tell me why the boys just look at me, and then they pass me by', mocking the appearance and undesirability of suffragettes.[27] Here, dolls turned from presenting patriarchal femininity to ridiculing a certain strand (or lack) of femininity which was associated with suffragettes.

[25] Rachelle Foster, 'The rare doll that caricatures the Suffragettes', *Museum Crush* (2018) <https://museumcrush.org/the-rare-doll-that-caricatures-the-suffragettes/> [Accessed 22 November 2023].
[26] Florey, *Women's Suffrage Memorabilia*, p. 190.
[27] Florey, *Women's Suffrage Memorabilia*, p. 191; Kenneth Florey, 'Toys and Games', *Woman Suffrage Memorabilia* (2013) <http://womansuffragememorabilia.com/woman-suffrage-memorabilia/toys-and-games/?unapproved=70969&moderation-hash=3aa5f771b58c8842277c4e5d1ba10625#comment-70969> [Accessed 22 November 2023].

Dolls became a tool for not only socializing women into femininity, but also motherhood through the baby doll. The baby doll became popular as a child plaything in late nineteenth century England and, in the early twentieth century, the baby doll turned from a childhood plaything to something considered an important feature of childhood development.[28] By the 1920s, baby dolls were being used to socialize girls towards motherhood and baby dolls were made out of rubber so they were more lifelike and durable for 'bathing, feeding and nappy-changing'.[29] Disguised as an innocent child's toy, the doll was used as a device to socialize and construct the role of women as mothers from a young age.

As early as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft had challenged the doll as a tool for nurturing motherhood and anticipated arguments made by second and third-wave feminists in the twentieth century, that a woman is more than a 'living doll'.[30] Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792) is an influential text which argued for women's rights outside of the marital home.[31] In her discussion of girls and dolls, Wollstonecraft specifically used the figure of the doll to show how doll play is entirely socialized and forced, noting that 'a girl, whose spirits have not been damped by inactivity, or innocence tainted by false shame, will always be a romp, and the doll will never excite attention unless confinement allows her no alternative'.[32] Similar to the gender essentialist views offered by Lord Kames during the same period, Wollstonecraft then highlights the stereotypes associated with boys' and girls' play,:

> Boys love sports of noise and activity […] girls, on the other hand, are fonder of things show and ornament; such as mirrors trinkets and dolls; the doll is the peculiar

[28] Antonia Fraser, *Dolls* (New York: Putnam, 1963), pp. 62, 82.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago, 2011), p. 125.
[31] Anon, 'Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', *British Library* (n.d.) <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/mary-wollstonecraft-a-vindication-of-the-rights-of-woman> [Accessed 26 October 2023].
[32] Ibid.

> amusement of the females; from whence we see their taste plainly adapted to their destination.[33]

Wollstonecraft highlights the gender essentialist view of girls being naturally drawn to play with 'trinkets and dolls', and then dismantles this stereotype. She underlines that it is not 'nature' that causes girls to play with dolls, but 'habit' and the fact that they are 'forced' into this behaviour, noting that 'girls [are] forced to sit still, play with dolls, and listen to foolish conversations; the effect of habit is insisted upon as an undoubted indication of nature.'[34] Wollstonecraft argues further that the role of women as primarily mothers 'degrades them by making them mere dolls', anticipating arguments made by second-wave feminist pioneers Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan in the mid-twentieth century.[35] Retrospectively, critics acknowledge Wollstonecraft's text as initiating the first wave of feminism, which was associated with women's suffrage, as well as access to higher education and property rights in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe and America.[36] Wollstonecraft's use of the doll in her proto first-wave feminist text shows that the doll has been part of feminist discourse since its origins.

The doll has been a significant figure in feminist discourse in showing how women are socialized to act like passive objects. Like first-wave proto-feminist Wollstonecraft, French second-wave feminist Simone de Beauvoir acknowledges, in her influential feminist text *The Second Sex* (1949), how women are socialized to perceive themselves as submissive dolls. De Beauvoir notes that the doll is 'a passive thing' and that 'the little girl pampers her doll and dresses her as she dreams of being dressed and pampered; inversely, she thinks of

[33] Wollstonecraft, p. 120.
[34] Wollstonecraft, p. 121.
[35] Wollstonecraft, p. 217.
[36] Elizabeth Evans, *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms: Neoliberalism, Intersectionality, and the State in Britain and the US* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), p. 5.

herself as a marvellous doll'.[37] Furthermore, de Beauvoir discusses how the doll stands in as a symbolic double of the girl, which is replaced by a mirror when she grows up, a tool she uses to frame her passivity.[38] The image of oneself in the mirror, de Beauvoir argues, is rejected by men as they do not see themselves as objects of desire, whilst:

> the woman, knowing she is and making herself object, really believes she is seeing herself in the mirror: passive and given, the reflection is a thing like herself; and as she covets feminine flesh, her flesh, she enlivens the inert qualities she sees with her admiration and desire.[39]

De Beauvoir also acknowledges how women are expected to perform as living dolls in the public sphere, as when she dresses up for a social occasion, 'woman is changed into a flesh-doll'.[40] Like Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir highlights how women are socialized to perceive themselves as dolls or passive objects in her influential text, establishing that this perception of the doll's negative and oppressive link to female identity was prevalent in early feminist thought.

Despite de Beauvoir pre-empting the second wave of feminism, it is widely recognized that Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) initiated the second wave of feminism in England and America through exposing 'the problem with no name' of the unhappy 1950s housewife.[41] Friedan argues that young marriages left housewives with no sense of identity outside of their family duties which led to a sense of dissatisfaction and emptiness during the mid-twentieth century.[42] In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan uses the figure of the doll to describe how second-wave feminists needed to break free from the image of women as dolls.[43] Friedan notes how feminists:

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[37] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage Books, 2011), p. 150.
[38] De Beauvoir, p. 315.
[39] De Beauvoir, pp. 315-6.
[40] De Beauvoir, p. 274.
[41] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010), p. 9.
[42] Friedan, p. 10.
[43] Friedan, p. 9.

> had to prove that women were human. They had to shatter, violently if necessary, the decorative Dresden figurine that represented the ideal woman of the last century. They had to prove that woman was not a passive, empty mirror, not a frilly, useless decoration, not a mindless animal, not a thing to be disposed of by others, incapable of a voice in her own existence.[44]

Friedan builds on Wollstonecraft's argument of women escaping the image of 'ornament' or 'toy' or de Beauvoir's allusion to women acting like 'passive dolls', saying that women were supposed 'to play the child, the doll, the toy' when married.[45] In women's writing, an examination of this idea of women as dehumanized objects and dolls, as suggested by Friedan, de Beauvoir and Wollstonecraft in the early waves of feminism, exposes a rich recent history of women critiquing the doll to highlight its role as a patriarchal figure. In focusing on women writers, this thesis amplifies the voices of women who 'shatter' the image of women as dolls in their fiction.

Many second and third wave feminist scholars have attempted to critique the image of women as dolls, particularly in relation to the rise of dieting and cosmetic surgery to look doll-like. In her important second-wave text *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Germaine Greer discusses the idea of beauty as social currency, as well as how it has been commodified by the fashion and cosmetics industry, saying that it has led to women becoming dolls: 'she is a doll: weeping, pouting or smiling, running or reclining, she is a doll.'[46] The words of writer and television producer Angela Holdsworth in 1988 carry weight in the twenty first century as 'women have not entirely fought their way out of the doll's house' because they 'dream as much as ever about looking like somebody else'.[47] Holdsworth's book on women's advances in society in the twentieth century concludes that women still have a long way to go before

[44] Text added in this edited version: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2001), p. 104.
[45] Wollstonecraft, p. 5; De Beauvoir, p. 315; Friedan, p. 92.
[46] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: 4th Estate, 2020), p. 34.
[47] Angela Holdsworth, *Out of the Doll's House: The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century* (London: BBC, 1988), p. 202.

gender equality is reached.[48] This is corroborated by Angela McRobbie, who criticizes the post-feminist belief that feminism is no longer necessary and its attempts to undo the gains made by the Women's Liberation Movement, as does Kat Banyard's *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today* (2010).[49] The expectation for women to look like dolls in order for companies to make a profit is sustained in the third wave of feminism with the growth of the sex industry and pornography. Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) is an influential text recognizing how the beauty, diet and porn industries capitalise on women's 'unconscious anxieties', causing a damaging influence on women's beauty standards with the rise in eating disorders and cosmetic surgery.[50] Wolf describes the effect of dolls on the hyper-sexualization and adultification of young girls, discussing how, in the 1980s, the new 'L'il Miss Makeup' doll encouraged children to look up to patriarchal standards of beauty from the age of five or six.[51] Stevi Jackson asserts that the idealization of Barbie in childhood doll play and child pageantry leads to experimentations with 'adult femininity' in young girls, which ultimately, cause 'self-objectification'.[52] The dangers of child sexualization are not just theoretical, but material. As Jackson notes that, 'this knowing but not knowing - being encouraged to sexualize themselves as objects without knowing the response this produces in adult men - is a dangerous game for girls'.[53] Second and third wave feminists draw on the link between women and dolls to acknowledge the harm of unattainable doll-like beauty standards on girls and women, which are perpetuated by the diet, cosmetic and sex industries.

[48] Holdsworth, pp. 11, 179.
[49] Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism Gender, Culture and Social Change* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), p. 24; Kat Banyard, *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today* (London: Faber, 2011), p. 2.
[50] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage Books, 2015), p. 9.
[51] Wolf, p. 93.
[52] Stevi Jackson, *Heterosexuality in Question* (London: SAGE, 1999), pp. 138, 139.
[53] Jackson, p. 139.

In *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (2009), Natasha Walter takes Wolf's and Jackson's observations further, arguing that the twenty-first century hypersexual culture driven by the sex industry has caused women to aspire for 'the bleached, waxed, tinted look of a Bratz or Barbie doll'.[54] Walter's identification of the hypersexual culture which grew during the late twentieth and early twenty first century presents a context which much of the contemporary women's writing examined here stems from and is critical of.[55] Walter claims that a hypersexualized aesthetic is promoted to young girls and women through dolls, glamour modelling and the sex industry, with women now aspiring to be sex objects.[56] Walter's work foregrounds the hypersexual culture which is a primary focus of this thesis in the way it links patriarchy and capitalism, through the sex industry, to the commodification of women's bodies, and how the figure of the (living) doll epitomizes this:

> In the hypersexual culture the woman who has won is the woman who foregrounds her physical perfection and silences any discomfort she may feel. This objectified woman, so often celebrated as the wife or girlfriend of the heroic male rather than the heroine of her own life, is the living doll who has replaced the liberated woman who should be making her way into the twenty-first century.[57]

Walter argues further that the image of women as doll-like in a hypersexualized society is a sign that women have not reached gender equality, an analysis shared by Holdsworth, McRobbie and Banyard.[58] The end of the third-wave and start of the fourth wave of feminism (a period defined as after 2010, when Walter's, McRobbie's and Banyard's texts were published) was a fruitful time for critiques of postfeminism and a renewed focus on acknowledging gender inequality. Both second wave and third wave feminism combatted the

[54] Walter, p. 2.
[55] Walter, pp. 12, 67.
[56] Walter, pp. 4-5, 6.
[57] Walter, p. 125.
[58] Walter, p. 8.

image of women as sexualized dolls which arose in the late twentieth century, and, more importantly, used this image to argue that women have not reached gender equality.

Despite many feminists across all the waves of feminism critiquing the idea of women as dolls, some cultural histories of the doll evidence that feminists have repurposed this traditionally feminine plaything for more liberatory ends. One suffragette doll which was used for direct feminist action in England was an 'attractive, well-dressed' suffrage doll which was sent to the Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, in 1910 and 1911 along with a letter asking for the fair treatment of suffrage prisoners.[59] Suffragist Rose O'Neill patented Kewpie in 1913 and used the image of the innocent, doll-like figure to promote an 'innocent, pure image' of women's suffrage in order to present suffragettes as 'non-threatening'.[60] In 1914, American artist Lillan E. Whittaker designed a cotton print of a 'little suffragist doll' for children to sew together and stuff with cotton in an effort to promote the suffrage movement and the end of child labour, and to use up the cotton in the South in a stance against slavery and white supremacy.[61] Also in America, dollmaker and women's rights advocate Mabel Drake Nekarda made a suffrage doll for young girls in order to inspire feminist and suffragette activism in them.[62] Nekarda's daughter, Helena, said that, 'her dolly could help her to remember the struggle if she could dress her up just like the marchers'.[63] O'Neill, Whittaker and Nekarda attempted to reclaim the doll figure for feminist campaigning in a stance against the anti-suffragette dolls, as well as the perception that dolls were only

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[59] Kenneth Florey, *Women's Suffrage Memorabilia: An Illustrated Historical Study* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2013), p. 190.
[60] Ivy Xun, 'Of Suffrage and Kewpies', *John Hopkins University* (n. d.) <https://exhibits.library.jhu.edu/omeka-s/s/VotesAndPetticoats/page/of-suffrage-and-kewpies> [Accessed on 22 November 2023].
[61] Anon, 'Suffrage Dolls and the Buy-a-Bale Campaign', *Library of Congress* (n. d.) <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/women-fight-for-the-vote/about-this-exhibition/new-tactics-for-a-new-generation-1890-1915/marketing-of-the-movement/suffrage-dolls-and-the-buy-a-bale-campaign/> [Accessed 22 November 2023]; Maria Gruner, 'The Little Suffragist Doll: Cotton, White Supremacy, and Sweet Little Dolls', *Nursing Clio* (2020) <https://nursingclio.org/2020/10/27/the-little-suffragist-doll-cotton-white-supremacy-and-sweet-little-dolls/> [Accessed 22 November 2023].
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

symbols of passive femininity. Here, the doll exemplifies the conflicts between feminists and anti-feminists surrounding women's autonomy and purpose during the suffrage movement.

In a similar way to the suffragettes' repurposing of the doll in the first wave of feminism, in the third wave of feminism, queer theorist Judith Butler argued that performing a gender stereotype, such as girls playing with dolls, can actually be used to signify gender non-conformity. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler notes:

> The DSM [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders] assumes that the doll you play with is the one you want to be, but maybe you want to be her friend, her rival, her lover. Maybe you want all this at once. Maybe you do some switching with her. Maybe playing with the doll, too, is a scene of improvisation that articulates a complex set of dispositions. Maybe something else is going on in this play besides a simple act of conforming to a norm. Perhaps the norm itself is being played, explored, even busted.[64]

Butler suggests that queer theory can enable an analysis of gender expression that is subversive and actually queers the feminine gender stereotypes of doll play. This idea is further examined in the 'queering Barbie' section of Chapter Two. Though Butler queers the doll here, Butler's concept of gender performativity – the idea that gender is performed rather than inherent to sex characteristics - is also particularly relevant to understanding how the hyperfemininity associated with the doll is used to socialize the performance of hyperfemininity by women through the third-wave adoption of the doll-like aesthetic exacerbated by celebrity culture and the sex industry.[65] This shows how contemporary feminism and queer theory work together to scrutinize the doll as a construction of feminine gender identity that can be queered through re-purposing the figure.

The Doll in Literature and Criticism

[64] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 97.
[65] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 43.

The doll figure as we know it today - a small manmade human-like figure or toy - has featured in literature since the eighth and ninth century.[66] However, the doll became more prominent in Anglophone literature during the eighteenth century when it gained popularity as a commodity.[67] Eighteenth-century literature aligned women with dolls in a misogynistic light. The first usage of the doll with its patriarchal associations was attributed to Frances Burney's novel *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), where a misogynistic Captain comments on the party guests, saying 'the men, as they call themselves, are no better than monkeys; and as to the women, why they are mere dolls.'[68] Whilst the literary origin of the doll's alignment with womanhood is from a female author here, as already discussed at the beginning of this chapter, literary scholarship has primarily examined the doll in literature by men, with only a few exceptions, such as Harriet Beacher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

The women authors in this thesis write against a tradition of nineteenth century European and Anglo-American literature which compared women to dolls in order to idealize patriarchal standards of femininity, such as E.T.A. Hoffman's 'The Sandman' (1816), Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) and Boleslaw Prus' *The Doll* (1890).[69] As Peers notes, 'in opera, operetta, ballet and short stories women may even be confused with dolls, so closely does one symbolize the other'.[70] Hoffman's 'The Sandman' stands as a touchstone for the doll as a representation of the patriarchal desire for passive women in Western society. The protagonist, Nathaniel, falls in love with a woman called Olympia, with 'glassy' eyes and

[66] Fraser, p. 12.
[67] Fraser, pp. 65, 67.
[68] Entry 'Doll', The *Oxford English Dictionary*, n. d. <https://www.oed.com> [Accessed 21 September 2023]; Fanny Burney, *Evelina* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), p. 158.
[69] German literature is a benchmark for many famous depictions of the doll. For instance, E. T. A. Hoffman's 'The Sandman' (1816), Thea Von Harbou's *Metropolis* (1925) and Reinhard Beuthien's *Bild Lilli* (1952-61), a German comic-strip which inspired the creation of Barbie.
[70] Peers, p. 9.

'stiff, stone-cold allures', only to realise at the end of the text that she is an automaton.[71] Nathaniel's romanticization of the 'stunningly lovely Olympia' as a 'well-proportioned, splendidly dressed lady' with an 'angelically lovely face', suggests that his obsession with Olympia is a result of her doll-like beauty and passivity. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Jenny Wren is a dressmaker for dolls and takes care of her father who she calls Mr Dolls. Though this interpretation is subversive in the male character assuming the role of the doll through Jenny taking care of her father, this representation still demonstrates the link between children's dolls and women (or girls) as caregivers. The doll-like figure in Boleslaw Prus' *The Doll* is the female character Izabela Łęcka, a beautiful aristocrat who is the romantic focus of the protagonist Stanisław Wokulski. Her place as a beautiful female figure of desire suggests that she is 'the doll' of the novel's title, indicating that women are valued only as objects of beauty and desire, rather than human beings under a patriarchal society. These novels show the history of patriarchal literature comparing women to dolls in oppressive, fetishized and objectified ways, which sets up the patriarchal context against which the women authors in this thesis are writing.

Another area of focus in existing scholarship on the doll in literature builds on Sigmund Freud's theorisation of the uncanny, looking at the doll's liminality or the gothic doubling of the doll in select literary texts.[72] This reading of the doll can be traced back to Sigmund Freud's 1918 essay on the uncanny.[73] Freud's essay argues that the doll evokes the uncanny because the idea of the living doll comes from an 'infantile wish, or simply from an infantile belief' that dolls can come to life.[74] Freud draws on 'The Sandman', calling

[71] E. T. A. Hoffman, *The Sandman* (London: Penguin Classics, 2016), pp, 19, 32.
[72] Anna Maria Panszczyk, 'Dollhood: The Doll as a Space of Duality in 20th-Century Literature and Art' (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011); Kenneth Gross, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 49, 31, 52; Chifen Lu, 'Uncanny Dolls and Bad Children in Contemporary Gothic Narratives', *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 45.2 (2019), 195–22.
[73] Sigmund Freud and David McLintock, *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin Publishing, 2003), p. 84.
[74] Freud, p. 86.

Hoffman 'the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature'; however, he emphasizes that it is the stealing of the eyes in the story, rather than the doll Olympia that presents a more potent example of the uncanny.[75] Nevertheless, academics such as Jo Collins still use Freud's concept of the uncanny to argue that dolls or automata evoke 'the "mechanical" uncanny'.[76] Critical attention has also regularly focused on the puppet, a specific kind of doll made to be operated by humans, to explore the uncanniness of puppets as human-like objects that can be manipulated. Kenneth Gross' *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (2011) is a more recent extensive exploration of the grotesque and dark uncanniness of puppets in novels such as Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio: Storia di un burattino* (1881), Russel Hoban's *Ridley Walker* (1980) and Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theatre* (1995). But, once again, the focus is exclusively on the figure in male-authored texts and it does not examine the importance of gender or capitalism to the rise of the figure in literature, demonstrating the necessity for this study.[77]

Similar to Gross, Helen Davies also focuses on the figure of the puppet in her book *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (2012). Davies explicitly links the puppet figure to oppressive gender expectations, and argues that the representation of women as puppets and dolls in neo-Victorian literature presents women as controlled and spoken for, or 'ventriloquised', by men.[78] Davies does offer a feminist argument, but once again, the focus of the study is on male-authored texts. There is a broad acknowledgement among scholars that the figure of the doll is a patriarchal

[75] Freud, p. 85.
[76] Jo Collins, *Uncanny Modernity Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, ed. by J. Jervis (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), p. 13.
[77] Gross, pp 49, 31, 52.
[78] Helen Davies, *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2012), p. 39. Davies examines the gendered significance of doll imagery in mainly male-authored neo-Victorian texts such as Henry James' *The Bostonians* (1886) and George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894).

object that symbolizes the silencing and subjugation of women, yet the lack of women's voices being examined shows that it is crucial that a survey of the way women interpret the doll is undertaken. Here, Davies' work signals the lack of literary criticism, or any extended study, of the doll as featured in women's writing.

Similar to its uncanny and ventriloquized uses as a puppet, the patriarchal literary tradition also regularly presents the doll as a device for horror through allusions to the doll as supernatural. Like Olympia in 'The Sandman', the mechanical doll is also represented in Ernest Edward Kellett's 'The Lady Automaton' (1901). The short story focuses on a man-made mechanical doll called Amelia who is presented as the perfect Edwardian woman: beautiful and silent.[79] Whilst Kellett's text does explore the idea of ideal women being man-made, which is likewise presented in 'The Sandman', it also suggests the doll is a threat to the men who create it, as the creator of Amelia, Arthur Moore, dies along with Amelia when she is destroyed, alluding to a supernatural link between the life force of the creator and created.[80] The supernatural is also explored through the figure of the doll in Algernon Blackwood's gothic short story 'The Doll' (1946), which focuses on an evil possessed doll. The doll in male-authored texts was therefore also symbolic of the patriarchal link between women and immorality. This is representative of the alignment of Eve with sin in the Bible, as suggested by Elizabeth Reis in her critical text on the patriarchal and puritanical view of women as sinful during the seventeenth century.[81]

Even though there are many instances of both the fetishization and demonization of women through the doll figure in patriarchal literature, some famous examples of the doll in

[79] The 'The Lady Automaton' was possibly inspired by the real-life creation of a mechanical doll in 1900, only a year before its publication, called 'Gavrochinette' by a Parisian automaton manufacturer, Phalibois. Philip Klass, '"The Lady Automaton" By E.E. Kellett: A Pygmalion Source?', *Shaw*, 2 (1982), 75–100 (p. 75).
[80] This is similar to *Metropolis* which will be examined in Chapter Four on the AI Doll.
[81] Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), pp. 2, 50.

nineteenth-century literature written by both men and women had more feminist sentiments. The figure of the doll is used to explore gender and race relations through the character of Topsy in Harriet Beacher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), an enslaved child named after a material doll which, as noted earlier, changes appearance when you turn it upside down. Topsy is powerless and treated as sub-human by the people around her, showing the doll's association with gendered and racialized dehumanization which will be explored further in Chapter One. The opening to Holdsworth's *Out of the Doll's House* (1988) invokes Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*:

> 'I want', said Bella Rokesmith, 'to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house.' When Charles Dickens wrote those words in *Our Mutual Friend* in 1864, women had little chance of being anything else.[82]

Dickens shows the early feminist sentiment of women escaping the expectation of being a passive object (doll) trapped in the domestic space (doll's house). Similar to Dickens, Henrik Ibsen's famous play *A Doll's House* (1878) demonstrates that the doll in male-authored texts has not always figured in inextricably patriarchal terms as it is widely acknowledged as a feminist text.[83] *A Doll's House* uses the doll trope in an argument for women's freedom from patriarchal constraints. Friedan refers to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as a feminist text which showed 'that a woman was simply a human being' and that thousands of women identified with Nora.[84] Nora confesses to her husband at the end of the play that she must leave him so she can be independent and educate herself, her saying 'our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll wife, just as at home I was Papa's doll child; and here the

[82] Holdsworth, p. 9.
[83] R. Hariyani Susanti, 'Literary Works Empowering Social Movements: A Doll's House & Bumi Manusia Analysis in Norwegian-Indonesian Feminism', *Lensa (Semarang. Online)*, 13.1 (2023), 119–34 (p. 121); Kristin Ørjasæter, 'Mother, Wife and Role Model: A Contextual Perspective on Feminism in A Doll's House', *Ibsen Studies*, 5.1 (2005), 19–47 (p. 42).
[84] Friedan p. 106.

children have been my dolls'.[85] Like Friedan's identification of 'the problem with no name', only by identifying the problem of her own objectification and suppression can Nora escape it. Famous depictions of the doll in nineteenth-century literature written by both men and women therefore prove to be critical of patriarchal gender and race constructs.

More recently, male-authored texts released in the second wave of feminism, such as Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972) and the Ian McEwan's lesser-known short story 'Dead as They Come' (1977) use the doll to highlight the misogyny behind men wanting the 'perfect woman' under late capitalism. *The Stepford Wives* ends by exposing how the men in the story swap their wives for robotic doll doubles when they do not meet their standard of domestic womanhood. Levin is commenting on the commodification and objectification of women here in suggesting that wives are as replaceable as dolls in a patriarchal, capitalist society and the feminist implications of *The Stepford Wives* have been examined in scholarship.[86] 'Dead as They Come' is another subversive representation of the doll as the male narrator develops a sexual obsession with a shop store clothes mannequin he names Helen. McEwan explores the idea of ideal women as passive objects as the misogynistic narrator falls in love with the mannequin, fetishizing women who are silent and passive: 'I prefer silent women who take their pleasure with apparent indifference'.[87] As Nahid Shahbazi Moghadam and Arbaayah Ali Termizi note, 'his inanimate partner is one more artefact added to his precious collection […] Helen, the mannequin, actually represents the "perfect object", which is in fact "the projection of his desires"'.[88] Furthermore, the clothes

[85] Ibid.
[86] Anne Williams, 'The Stepford Wives: What's a Living Doll to Do in a Postfeminist World?', in *Postfeminist Gothic,* ed. by Benjamin A. Brabon and Stéphanie Genz (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK), pp. 85–98 (pp. 87,90); Julie Wosk, 'Engineering the Perfect Woman', in *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and Other Artificial Eves* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), pp. 137-151 (p. 141).
[87] Ian McEwan, 'Dead as They Come', *The Iowa Review*, 8.4 (1977), 71-82 (p. 72).
[88] Nahid Shahbazi Moghadam and Arbaayah Ali Termizi, 'The Grotesque Body in Ian McEwan's Short Stories', *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 16.3 (2017), 37-59 (pp. 54-5).

mannequin is a symbol for male sexual dominance and capitalism under the patriarchy as suggested by Marquard Smith:

> the shop-window dummy as installation, and spectacle, as form, technology and thing – as commodity fetish twice over, since it is both the bearer of commodities and a commodity itself – tells us about capitalism and fetishism.[89]

McEwan's story critiques the patriarchal fetishization of women as commodities through the figure of the clothes mannequin. Both Levin and McEwan use the figure of the doll to highlight the intersection between late capitalism and the commodification of women's bodies during the latter half of the twentieth century. Despite these two more recent examples, this thesis unearths a long and neglected tradition of women writers' deployment of the doll in fiction, and maps this onto a much longer history of feminist thought and politics.

A significant and well-known feminist text by a woman writer that features the doll is Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967).[90] In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie is an orphan taken in by her toymaker carer Uncle Philip who treats the women in the house, including his mute wife, Margaret, like dolls he can control and silence, which is represented by him creating a doll double of Melanie. Uncle Philip also conducts puppet performances with Margaret's brother, Finn, who becomes romantically involved with Melanie. However, later in the novel, Uncle Philip instructs Melanie to play Leda in his puppet show where Leda is

[89] Marquard Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 23. In *The Erotic Doll* (2013) Marquard Smith analyses the myth of Pygmalion and applies his analysis to modern works and fetishizations of the sex doll, but, once again, almost exclusively focuses on the works of men. Smith fails to identify these subversive retellings of the erotic doll and neglects to present challenges to the traditional male heteronormative fascination with the sex doll. Smith, *The Erotic Doll*, p. 19.

[90] Gina Wisker also draws on Angela Carter's *The Loves of Lady Purple* (1974) and its representation of the doll: 'She escapes the role of living doll but is somehow now still trapped in someone's script as a deadly whore. She freed herself but the scenarios she goes off to enact based on her own decisions are still only those constructed for her by a social mindset that has limited versions available to women.' Gina Wisker, *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction: Carnival, Hauntings and Vampire Kisses* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), p. 45.

raped by the god Jove in the form of a swan, showing how Uncle Philip's shows are a representation of the patriarchal violence and oppression experienced when men seek to control women. Melanie throws the swan off her and escapes the play, demonstrating her resistance to patriarchal control and expectations of womanhood which puppets and dolls represent. A fire at the end of the text kills Uncle Philip, whilst Melanie escapes and survives, so she is rewarded for her refusal to be one of Uncle Philip's subjugated dolls, whereas he is punished. *The Magic Toyshop* is a clear example of women's representations of the doll exposing and criticizing the patriarchal attitudes towards women which consign them to inferior objects of desire and relegate them to dolls.

Over the past decade, some analysis of women's doll literature has begun to emerge, particularly in relation to the re-telling and re-writing of patriarchal figures and myths. Scholars such as Catherine Delyfer have started to examine how nineteenth-century women writers subvert the figure of Pygmalion's female creation, Galatea.[91] Delyfer suggests that 'whereas the Ovidian tale made Galatea voiceless, compliant, and inert, the late Victorian Galateas […] have ideas, ambitions, and lives of their own and do not accept marriage and motherhood as easily.'[92] Delyfer's 2016 book chapter suggests that women's voices regarding the creation of artificial women (like dolls and automatons) and their link to male violence and misogyny are beginning to be examined, especially in light of the #MeToo movement. Analysis of the doll in women's literature within the context of female identity and performativity has been explored by scholars Donna Mitchell, Cynthia A. Sloan and Trinna S. Frever in each of their articles.[93] Frever notes that, 'women fiction writers

[91] Smith, p. 11; Catherine Delyfer, 'Re-writing Myths of Creativity: Pygmalionism, Galatea Figures, and the Revenge of the Muse in Late Victorian Literature by Women', in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1880-1920*, ed. by Holly A. Laird (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 97-110 (p. 99).
[92] Ibid.
[93] Donna Mitchell, 'Leda or Living Doll? Women as Dolls in Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop', *Studies in Gothic Fiction*, 5.2 (2017), 4–12; Cynthia A. Sloan, 'Caricature, Parody, and Dolls: How to Play at Deconstructing and (Re-)Constructing Female Identity in Rosario Ferré's "Papeles de Pandora"', *Pacific Coast*

who invoke the doll symbol revise the very social messages of dollness - and by association, girlhood and womanhood - that circulate constantly through the popular culture in which they also participate'.[94] Building upon Frever's argument, this thesis suggests that women writers, across a plethora of texts and several waves of feminism, not only 'revise' patriarchal notions of womanhood through the doll but also perpetuate these notions in order to highlight gender, race and class inequalities. Like the feminist scholarship mentioned in this paragraph, most existing work which examines the doll in women's writing focuses narrowly on certain texts, particularly in well-known novels such as, Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* so this project is widening the canvas of study significantly.[95]

The women writers examined in this thesis are also writing within the context of dolls being symbols of white supremacy in the doll's literary, as well as material, history, such as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was reflective of the material culture which impacted racialized young girls in the nineteenth century. As already noted, Topsy was likely named after the Topsy-turvy dolls of the early nineteenth century.[96] Bernstein describes how children's fiction author Frances Hodgson Burnett reenacted and embellished scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, using a black doll for Topsy and a white doll she already owned for Little Eva.[97] The ability to flip between the two dolls emphasizes how the characters of Topsy and Little Eva are paralleled and compared alongside the binary power imbalance of black subjugation and white idealization. Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* explores how the motifs of blue eyes and dolls stand as a symbol of white

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Philology, 35.1 (2000), 35–48 (pp. 35-6); Trinna S. Frever, '"Oh! You Beautiful Doll!": Icon, Image, and Culture in Works by Alvarez, Cisneros, and Morrison', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 28. 1 (2009), 121-39 (p. 122).

[94] Frever, p. 122.

[95] Frever, p. 124; Cheryl A. Wall, 'On Dolls, Presidents, and Little Black Girls', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 35.4 (2010), 796–801 (p. 798).

[96] Julian K. Jarboe, 'The Racial Symbolism of the Topsy-Turvy Doll', *The Atlantic* (20 November 2015) <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/11/the-racial-symbolism-of-the-topsy-turvy-doll/416985/> [Accessed 2 November 2023].

[97] Bernstein, p. 160.

supremacy also. Fraser notes that, 'brown remained the favourite colour for dolls' eyes until the accession of Queen Victoria brought a patriotic wave of blue-eyed dolls', and blue-eyed dolls have remained the most popular still today.[98] The title of Morrison's text refers to the blue eyes the young black protagonist, Pecola Breedlove, wishes to have as she believes they will make her more beautiful in accordance with Eurocentric beauty standards. Unlike Pecola, Claudia, another young black female protagonist, rejects white, western beauty ideals and shows this through the destruction of her white dolls, with her saying, 'I destroyed white baby dolls'.[99] Once again, doll play is used to foreground the racist underpinnings of western beauty standards. Here, blue eyes and the doll are symbols of Eurocentric beauty ideals and white supremacy. This thesis draws on the racialized, as well as gendered, histories of the doll to examine texts by women authors of colour such as Sandra Cisneros and Shay Youngblood which feature dolls as symbols of western consumerism, cultural erasure and white supremacy.

Chapter Outline

Across the following four chapters, this thesis examines four doll types in women's writing: The Living Doll, The Barbie Doll, The Sex Doll and The AI doll. It identifies these doll types as significant in their occurrence in women's literature and their use in exposing systems of gendered oppression alongside the rise of late capitalism over the past one hundred years. Women writers use these doll types to expose the patriarchal structures that subjugate women, from gendered domestic labour, childhood and Hollywood stereotypes, to the sexualization, objectification and commodification of women's bodies in light of the rise of hypersexual culture and pornography in the third wave of feminism, to AI's current uses in

[98] Fraser, p. 17.
[99] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (London: Vintage, 2019), p. 20.

the oppression of women and marginalized groups, as well as its potential to facilitate feminist progress if the capitalist intent of Big Tech is dismantled.

Chapter One, The Living Doll, examines the patriarchal alignment of women with dolls in four Anglo-American literary texts from the second wave to the fourth wave of feminism. This chapter focuses on three feminine stereotypes associated with the 'Living doll' in Margaret Yorke's *The China Doll* (1961), Joyce Carol Oates' short stories 'Doll: A Romance of Mississippi' (2005) and 'The Doll-master' (2016) and Lisa See's *China Dolls* (2014). My analysis of Yorke's *The China Doll* looks at the gendered 'Living doll' stereotype of the 1950s housewife, alongside Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), demonstrating that Yorke pre-empts the 1950s housewife model before Friedan's influential second-wave feminist text. An examination of Oates' short stories shows how the 'Living doll' stereotype also links to patriarchal constructions of masculinity and gender stereotypes in child's play, which, when analysed alongside Natasha Walter's *Living Dolls*, highlights the hypersexual culture and gender essentialism which socializes women to become 'Living dolls' and men to treat women as fetishized objects. Although Oates' works have been analysed in scholarship in the context of the uncanny and gothic elements of evil children and dolls before, my chapter investigates how Oates' representation of the doll highlights contemporary feminist issues surrounding gender essentialism and hypersexual culture.[100] Finally, this chapter analyses See's historical novel *China Dolls* alongside Sheridan Prasso's *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, and Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient* (2005), to observe how See dismantles the racialized and gendered stereotype of the China doll placed on East Asian women by Hollywood during the twentieth century. This chapter

[100] Rob Latham, 'The Ineluctable Agon of Desire: Joyce Carol Oates's Suspense Fiction', *Los Angeles Review of Books* (8 January 2021) <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-ineluctable-agon-of-desire-joyce-carol-oatess-suspense-fiction/> [Accessed 27 February 2023]; Pascale Antolin, 'Deadly Girls' Voices, Suspense, and the "Aesthetics of Fear" in Joyce Carol Oates's The Banshee and Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi', *Bearing Witness: Joyce Carol Oates Studies*, 2.1 (2015).

argues that women writers utilize the figure of the 'Living doll' to highlight, through their female protagonists, how patriarchal notions of female subjectivity have been amplified by late capitalism, within a second- and third-wave feminist context of gendered domestic labour, hypersexual culture and racial stereotypes in Hollywood.

Chapter Two, The Barbie Doll, investigates Barbie as an iconic doll that has divided audiences, much like the recent film. For many feminists, Barbie is emblematic of everything wrong with patriarchal culture, whilst some third-wave feminists have argued that Barbie promotes feminist ideals. This chapter explores this complex history of and response to Barbie in several little-known contemporary American literary texts by women, looking at five key areas: capitalism and consumerism, beauty and femininity, hyper-sexualization and male violence, race and queerness. First, Barbie is examined in Sandra Cisneros' 'Barbie-Q' from *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) and Eve Ensler's 'Free Barbie' from *I am an Emotional Creature* (2010) in the context of capitalism and consumerism, as a motif for the destructive nature of Barbie as a consumer product to the environment, the global South, working class communities and exploitative child labour. Second, in the context of beauty and femininity, Barbie is analysed in Lynne Barrett's 'Beauty' (1992), from Richard Peabody and Lucinda Ebersole's short story collection *Mondo Barbie* (1993), to examine Barbie's effect on feminine beauty and behavioural ideals, with reference to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight* (1993), and the harmful impact of re-enforcing oppressive gender roles on young girls and women in generational cycles. This chapter also draws on Roberta Allen's 'Barbie' (1992) from *Mondo Barbie*, Barbara G. Walker's 'Barbidol' from *Feminist Fairytales* (1996), Barbara Kingsolver's *Pigs in Heaven* (1993) and Ensler's 'Free Barbie', to highlight the impossible beauty standards perpetuated by the Barbie doll. Third, A. M. Homes' 'A Real Doll' from *The Safety of Objects* (1990), and Belinda Subraman's 'The Black Lace Panties Triangle' (1993), from *Mondo*

Barbie, are drawn upon to examine how Barbie's hyper-sexualization is harmful in socializing male violence, further drawing on Walter's *Living Dolls* (2009). Section four surveys the harmful relationship of Barbie to race through Shay Youngblood's graphic novel *Black Power Barbie* (2013), in particular how Barbie stands as a symbol of white idealization, also drawing on Audre Lorde's important essay 'The Master's Tools with Never Dismantle the Master's House' (1979). Finally, in section five, Lisa B. Herskovits' 'How Barbie Warped Me' (1993) and Rebecca Brown's 'Barbie Comes Out' (1993), both from *Mondo Barbie*, are used to explore how the act of queering Barbie highlights her as a symbol of heteronormativity, with reference to Erica Rand's *Barbie's Queer Accessories* (2012) and Paulina Palmer's *The Queer Uncanny* (2012). This chapter argues that contemporary women writers utilize the figure of Barbie to challenge a branch of third-wave feminism which romanticizes Barbie as feminist, and criticize Barbie's manufacturer, Mattel, highlighting the structural racism, sexism, homophobia and class oppression which is enabled by corporate greed under patriarchy and capitalism.

Chapter Three, The Sex Doll, examines two examples of the sex doll in women's writing, one early twentieth-century British short story and one American twenty-first century dystopian novel to highlight the sex doll's development under late capitalism and across the waves of feminism. Daphne du Maurier's short story 'The Doll' (1937) and Margaret Atwood's novel *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) challenge the assumption of feminist historical progress, as 'The Doll' is a rare and progressive representation of a woman having sex with a male sex doll, whilst *The Heart Goes Last* is a more pessimistic representation of the contemporary sex bot as misogynistic in a capitalist dystopia. Atwood highlights how sex dolls reinforce unrealistic beauty and sexual expectations for women and commodify sex and women's bodies, showing the dangers of capitalism to feminist progress, with reference to Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman* (1978) and Kate Devlin's *Turned On: Science, Sex and*

Robots (2018). On the other hand, du Maurier uses the sex doll to explore female sexuality at a time when female expressions of sexuality were taboo but becoming more vocal with first-wave feminist activism, drawing principally on Sheila Jeffreys' *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930* (1997). The move from women as sexual objects to sexual beings is shown as the passive female dolls or protagonists in nineteenth-century male texts, such as Hoffman's 'The Sandman' and Prus' *The Doll*, emerge into sexually active characters in du Maurier's text, which uses the doll to express female sexuality instead of female passivity. Atwood's dystopian novel shows how, in the context of technological developments and the rise of the sex industry under late capitalism, the twenty-first century sex bot becomes a misogynistic figure of gendered oppression. Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* has been analysed in relation to the link between the sex bot and 'male fantasies around femininity and the female body' before.[101] However, in Coral Howells' article, her main focus is the use of genre and she only briefly discusses patriarchal expectations of femininity and the sex bot in relation to *The Heart Goes Last*. This chapter argues that women's representations of the literary sex doll highlight and critique patriarchal expectations of female sexuality, from female sexual liberation, when female sexuality was taboo, to female sexual subjugation under a hypersexual culture where men want women to become like sex bots.

Finally, Chapter Four, The AI Doll, marks a turn in this thesis as, whilst the previous three chapters examine texts that critique the doll as a symbol of patriarchal femininity and dehumanization, the texts analysed in this chapter suggest the potential for the AI doll to destabilize patriarchy by humanising the figure of the doll. This chapter discusses how women writers use the symbol of the AI doll to show how rejecting patriarchal, capitalist

[101] Coral Howells, 'True Trash: Genre Fiction Revisited in Margaret Atwood's *Stone Mattress, The Heart Goes Last, And Hag-Seed*', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 11.3 (November 2017), 297–315.

technological ventures and embracing the liberatory feminist potential of technology can enhance human connections and relationships. The AI doll is defined here as a cyborg or artificially constructed human figure with artificial intelligence and is surveyed in Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis* (1925), Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991) and Martha Wells' novella series *The Murderbot Diaries* (2017-2023), to see how representations of the AI doll have advanced across four waves of feminism. Futura is the man-made female AI doll in von Harbou's *Metropolis* and highlights the threat of technological developments under a patriarchal, capitalist society to women and the working classes. *Metropolis* also utilizes the AI doll to critique the rise of the patriarchal technology-obsessed movement Futurism and the patriarchal demonization of the New Woman, a figure that rose in the nineteenth century, marking more independence for women. The male-presenting cyborg, Yod, is the AI doll in Piercy's *He, She and It* and is used to explore the humanization of the AI doll and show how a reclamation of the doll from late-stage capitalist ventures like Big Tech can facilitate human connections and feminist progress. The genderless cyborg, Murderbot, is the AI doll in Wells' *The Murderbot Diaries* and, similar to Yod in Piercy's novel, is a symbol of the positive outcomes of human-technology relationships through facilitating connections across boundaries, but instead deconstructs physical gender binaries, rather than just socialized gender norms, through its agender appearance and point of view. Donna Haraway's influential posthumanist essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985) and Jeanette Winterson's more recent book on gender and technology, *12 Bytes* (2021), are used as key critical texts in arguing for the feminist potential of the AI doll in this chapter, whilst recognizing the dangers of patriarchal and capitalist institutions like Big Tech co-opting technology for financial gain and social control. This chapter argues that, with the rise of AI technology in the twenty-first century, the AI doll in women's writing transforms from a figure that symbolizes the threat of patriarchy to feminist technological progress just after the first wave of feminism in

Metropolis, to a figure of hope for feminist technological progress in the third and fourth wave of feminism.

Chapter One.

The Living Doll:

Recasting the Doll Stereotype in Relation to Femininity, Masculinity and Race

Got myself a cryin', talkin', sleepin', walkin', livin' doll
Got to do my best to please her just 'cause she's a livin' doll
Got a rovin' eye and that is why she satisfies my soul
Got the one and only walkin', talkin', livin' doll

Take a look at her hair, it's real
If you don't believe what I say, just feel
I'm gonna lock her up in a trunk so no big hunk
Can steal her away from me.

Cliff Richard, 'Living Doll'
(1959)

Cliff Richard's famous song 'Living Doll' is archetypal of patriarchal and sexist attitudes relating to women in the 1950s, and also stands as a prime example of why the 'Living doll' stereotype is a symbol of female objectification and ownership. For the purposes of this thesis, the 'Living doll' in literature is (as with Richard's song) a female character who is paralleled or equated with a doll and defined by their performance of an idealized feminine stereotype, constructed by sexism, colonialism and patriarchy. Through the analysis of four texts spanning six decades, this chapter maps the historical evolution of the literary 'Living doll' trope, from Yorke's highlighting of and resistance to the housewife in the second wave of feminism to Oates' subversion of the hypersexualized 'Living doll' and the emphasis on race through See's representation of the China doll (an example of a gendered and racialized stereotype) in the third and fourth wave of feminism. Section One draws on Betty Friedan's key second-wave feminist text, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), to demonstrate how the 1950s housewife as 'Living doll' stereotype was anticipated by Margaret Yorke's neglected British women's mystery-crime novel *The China Doll* (1961). This section also identifies literary allusions to works by Daphne du Maurier, as another author I examine in this thesis. In Section Two, Natasha Walter's *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (2009) is used to highlight

the male violence which results from female objectification under patriarchy and hypersexual culture in the twenty-first century when encountering the hypersexualized 'Living doll' or woman as plaything in Joyce Carol Oates' two twenty-first century American gothic short stories, 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi' (2003) and 'The Doll-Master' (2015). Finally, in Section Three, Sheridan Prasso's deconstruction of Asian female stereotypes in *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, & Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient* (2009) is used to highlight the racialization and exoticization of the China doll stereotype in Lisa See's American historical novel, *China Dolls* (2014), which takes place between 1938 and 1988. The authors in this chapter subvert the 'Living doll' trope recognized by Helen Davies in Neo-Victorian literature of 'ventriloquised women' who are 'denied the agency of voice and are confined to the role of dummy'.[1] These women writers, instead, reclaim the ventriloquised voice of the 'Living doll' through their female protagonists to spotlight the systems of violence that oppress the women under patriarchy. This chapter argues that the recasting of the 'Living doll' stereotype in twenty-first-century women's writing highlights what Kat Banyard calls the equality illusion, namely 'the equality that so many people see existing between women and men is an illusion'.[2] These texts particularly stress the patriarchal entrapment of their female protagonists in cycles of male violence, or the commodification of their own bodies through examining the Living doll's relationship to femininity, masculinity and race.

The term 'Living doll' has been used in an academic context to refer to women who are objectified through fashion modelling, as well as the post-WWII domestic housewife, whose fashion focused on 'fragility' over power, and who was expected to be in compliance

[1] Helen Davies, *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction: Passionate Puppets* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2012), pp. 39, 66.
[2] Kat Banyard, *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today* (London: Faber, 2011), p. 2.

with male desires as suggested by the Cliff Richard lyrics above.[3] Nevertheless, there has been little sustained study of the 'Living doll' as a feminine stereotype in literature despite there being academic interest in this type of 'Living doll' figure.[4] Many of the studies that do show this figure scholarly attention often capture dolls that come to life in 'fantastic' fiction instead of women who are equated to dolls.[5] Consequently, the examination of 'Living dolls' in the context of women's alignment with dolls in literature has only been the subject of only a couple of studies on well-known novels such as *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Bluest Eye*.[6] In comparison with these novels, the novels and short stories examined in this chapter have received scant critical attention.

Further examples of well-known novels by women that highlight the historical comparison of women to dolls include Jaqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls* (1966) and Elizabeth Macneal's *The Doll Factory* (2019). Lesser-known fiction includes Trudi Pacter's *Living Doll* (1992), which explores the lives of models in the 1990s, and Montana Katz's *Living Dolls and Other Women* (2021), which explores gender inequality in 1980s New York. However, Katz does not focus on the doll figure throughout her novel and, as already noted, the stereotype of the fashion model as doll has been examined in scholarship previously. American singer and author Cindy Jackson even titles her autobiography *Living Doll* (2002) because of her life goal of using cosmetic surgery to look like her 'talisman', Barbie, a doll

[3] Tim Edwards, 'Living Dolls? The Role of Clothing and Fashion in "sexualisation"', *Sexualities*, 23.5-6 (2020), 702–16; Patricia Baker, *Fashions of a decade. The 1950s* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), p. 29.
[4] Alexis Easley, 'Living Dolls: Women at Play in the Strand', *Research Society for Victorian Periodicals Conference*, Lecture (Canterbury Christchurch University, 23 July 2011); Anon, 'Living Dolls: The Doll in Literature, Art and Cinema', *Freud Museum*, Course (2022) <https://www.freud.org.uk/event/living-dolls-literature-art-and-cinema/?fbclid=IwAR22NEyliXpzQcYDikYWzv84R22vyAmAGYfyhcefSXrc5zM5Tm2v8mnkZZw> [Accessed 20 January 2022].
[5] Raquel Velázquez, 'Deconstructing Feminine and Feminist Fantastic through the Study of Living Dolls', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 22.4 (2020), p. 3.
[6] Donna Mitchell, 'Leda or Living Doll? Women as Dolls in Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop', *Studies in Gothic Fiction*, 5.2 (2017), 4–12; Trinna S. Frever, '"Oh! You Beautiful Doll!": Icon, Image, and Culture in Works by Alvarez, Cisneros, and Morrison', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 28. 1 (2009), 121-39 (p. 122).

type that will be discussed in my next chapter.[7] There I examine the cosmetic effects of Barbie on young girls. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on texts which critique the 'Living doll' outside of cosmetic surgery and the well-studied topic of fashion modelling. Instead, I examine three specific types of 'Living dolls' which still proliferate through contemporary feminist discourse in relation to women's objectification and its relationship to male violence: the 1950s housewife, the doll-like girl-child, and the China Doll.

Resistance to the 1950s Housewife as Living Doll in Margaret Yorke's *The China Doll* (1961)

The term 'Living dolls' in the twenty-first century often refers to women who attempt to look doll-like through dress, cosmetic changes and behaviour, a contemporary notion which emerged online in 2010.[8] This cultural phenomenon of the 'Living doll' in the twenty first century suggests a reclamation of the term. However, as outlined by Walter's *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* in 2011, this reclamation was not feminist, but influenced by the heavy marketing of the sex industry where women are 'defined by sexual allure' and encouraged to have the 'plastic look'.[9] Walter argues that there has been 'a resurgence in much of the media and certain social circles of an almost 1950s image of the perfect stay-at-home mother who wants to create her domestic haven single handedly' and 'a new glorification of the image of the perfect wife' in the twenty-first century.[10] Considering the persistent romanticization of the 1950s housewife role and aesthetic online, through influencer trends such as the 'Tradwife' on TikTok, which has links to 'right-wing, white supremacist movements', it is

[7] Cindy Jackson, *Living Doll* (London: Metro, 2002), p. viii.
[8] Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*, ed. by Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind (Rosalind M.) Gill, and Christina Scharff (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 133.
[9] Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago, 2011), p. 3.
[10] Walter, p. 223.

essential to scrutinize the traditional housewife role in relation to its participation in patriarchy.[11]

The stereotype of the 'Living doll' as 1950s housewife follows a historical trend in which women have been compared to dolls. This is reflected in twentieth-century art and culture, as well as literature. Late 1950s magazines and propaganda promoted 'the new happy housewife heroine' and the nuclear family through advertisements, which caused the women's movement to lose momentum in the 1950s and enable the sexist stereotype of the housewife to take hold.[12] The harm of the 'Living doll' as housewife stereotype is shown in the 'Living Doll' (1959) song lyrics above, which highlight how women were treated as possessions by men. Richard sings, 'I'm gonna lock her up in a trunk so no big hunk / Can steal her away from me', displaying the normalisation of sexist and abusive marital control during an era which treated women as dolls. Similarly, Sylvia Plath's satirical poem 'The Applicant' (1962) contains the lines: 'A living doll, everywhere you look. / It can sew, it can cook, / It can talk, talk, talk', highlighting the dehumanization of women through aligning them with toy dolls and referring to them as 'it'. Here, the poem depicts the link between consumerism and patriarchy in a world where men expect their wives to be like 'Living dolls' they can buy from a shelf.[13] The gendered expectations of women within the 1950s married

[11] Chris Stokel-Walker, a journalist for *Vice*, notes that Tradwife influencers hide 'supremacist' messages amongst their hashtags, with some linked to right-wing ideologues who share sentiments with 'fascists in Italy' and 'Nazis in Germany'. Stokel-Walker interviews Noelle Cook, a researcher of the rise of the right online, who 'believes many of those who follow the trad lifestyle are very thinly disguising their support for right-wing, white supremacist movements, luring in unsuspecting users who like the idea of a more laid-back lifestyle, before bombarding them with hate.' Chris Stokel-Walker, 'Behind the Rise of the Online "Tradwife" Movement', *Vice* (10 March 2023) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3ak8p8/online-rise-of-trad-ideology> [Accessed 15 March 2023].

[12] Angela Holdsworth, *Out of the Doll's House: The Story of Women in the Twentieth Century* (London: BBC, 1988), pp. 29, 193.

[13] This notion also features in Ira Levin's satirical feminist horror *The Stepford Wives* (1972) as discussed in this introduction.

home and the connection between the housewife and the 'Living doll' are exposed in Yorke's *The China Doll*.

Yorke was a prolific English crime writer, who wrote over forty novels in her lifetime. Her critically neglected fourth novel *The China Doll* (1961) anticipates many of the arguments in relation to the unhappy housewife put forward by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a text which 'sparked' second-wave feminism.[14] Yorke rejects the post-World War II 'new image of women as house-wife-mothers' which was principally constructed by male writers and editors, as argued by Friedan.[15] *The Feminine Mystique* finally gave an answer to 'the problem that has no name', the issue of the unhappy and unfulfilled housewife of the 1950s.[16] Friedan suggests that a housewife's unhappiness was due to marrying young and having no sense of purpose outside of the family home.[17] Yorke highlights the danger of women serving as passive housewives and becoming (to borrow a concept from Davies) 'feminized dumm[ies]' who are silent in the face of oppression, and who become unhappy in the marital home through *The China Doll*'s female protagonist.[18] Yorke's text is told from the point of view of a third-person omniscient narrator and subverts the 'ventriloquised' voice of the 'Living doll' to expose the often-abusive marital situation of the repressed 1950s housewife from the female protagonist's perspective.[19]

The China Doll fits into a tradition of women's writing that uses the figure of the doll to privilege the female point of view, through the female victim defeating the patriarchal

[14] Corinne Sweet, 'Ground-Breaking Author of The Feminine Mystique Who Sparked Feminism's Second Wave; BETTY FRIEDAN', *Independent* (7 February 2006) <https://www.proquest.com/docview/310946317?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:primo&accountid=14693> [Accessed 24 May 2023].
[15] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010), p. 37. Subsequent references shortened to Friedan with page reference.
[16] Friedan, p. 9.
[17] Friedan, p. 10.
[18] Davies, p. 40.
[19] Davies, p. 40.

aggressor, as also shown in Norah Lofts' *The Little Wax Doll* (1960) and Madeline Miller's *Galatea* (2013).[20] Penelope, the female protagonist, is the 'Living doll' of the text and is infantilised by her new husband, Vincent, when he gives her a china doll, which looks identical to her, before they both travel to her great-aunt Hermione's for Christmas. Aunt Hermione dies in the opening of the novel through electrocution whilst Penelope and Vincent are staying with her, which deeply upsets Penelope. Vincent uses the likeness of the doll to Penelope and her vulnerability in grief to exploit her family history of mental illness and convince her that she is mentally unstable. Vincent plays on this insecurity as Penelope initially believes she is hallucinating or that the doll is supernatural because it starts to mirror her movements. But it is revealed that Vincent and his mistress, Clarrie, have been moving the doll and marking the doll to mimic Penelope's physical state, and make her question reality. In classical mythology, the character of Penelope is a symbol of fidelity and domesticity in contrast to the female character of Circe who is a symbol of temptation and pleasure.[21] This mirrors Penelope's position in the novel as the passive, idealized housewife in contrast with Clarrie who embodies desire. Penelope also discovers that Vincent has been poisoning her which is why she has become physically as well as mentally weak across the period of the novel. In the climax of the story, Vincent attempts to kill Penelope to inherit her fortune, left to her by her Aunt Hermione, and it is also revealed that Vincent murdered Aunt

[20] In *The Little Wax Doll*, Miss Deborah Mayfield starts a position as a head mistress at a village school, but the community are involved in a witchcraft cult which intends to sacrifice one of her students. Her student is also doll-like as she is 'paler and prettier than the others; she had a drooping kind of grace, a meek, rather repressed manner'. Norah Lofts, *The Little Wax Doll* (London: Corgi Childrens, 1971), p. 38. Like Penelope, Miss Mayfield has a history of mental illness which is weaponised against her when the village cult convinces her she is hallucinating their sinister motives and she is disturbed by a voodoo doll she finds. Both Miss Mayfield and Penelope are manipulated with the intention of causing 'hysteria' and 'madness' to take away the power and autonomy of the female protagonist. Similarly, in *Galatea*, Galatea's feelings are undermined and misinterpreted as hysteria or weakness so that her husband can physically and emotionally control her. In Miller's re-telling of the Greek myth, Galatea says, 'I don't think my husband expected me to be able to talk', exemplifying the silence and compliance expected of the 'passive puppet'. Madeline Miller, *Galatea: A Short Story* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 23. As the Miller notes, 'she is meant to be a compliant object of desire and nothing more.' Miller, p. 54; Davies, p. 40.

[21] Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle, eds., *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, 1st ed. (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), pp. 128, 396.

Hermione at the beginning of the text too for financial gain. The text ends with Penelope fighting back against Vincent, who accidentally electrocutes himself, and Clarrie being arrested for her involvement in the plot, allowing Penelope to be free from her villainous husband and his mistress. Though Penelope is vulnerable to Vincent's manipulation throughout the novel, she breaks the 'Living doll' stereotype of the 1950s housewife through a physical shattering of the china doll, and through displaying strength and empowerment at the end of the text. This follows in the practice of feminists who, as noted by Friedan, 'had to shatter, violently if necessary, the decorative Dresden figurine that represented the ideal woman of the last century'.[22]

Through her use of literary allusion and careful plotting, Yorke uses the figure of the doll to expose the infantilization of housewives by their husbands in the 1950s. Penelope is unsettled by Vincent's gift of a doll which makes her believe that 'Vincent thought of her as still a child' (p. 60). This evokes Maxim de Winters' infantilization of his second very young wife Mrs. de Winters in du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), with Mrs. de Winters saying, 'I wished he would not always treat me as a child.' [23] Friedan notes how women were expected 'to play the child, the doll, the toy' during marriage, illustrating how the feminine mystique led to women physically and socially losing their autonomy through being relegated to passive objects.[24] When originally given the doll, Penelope's observation that, 'it's exactly like me!' (p. 30) and 'the likeness is uncanny' (p. 36) introduces a sense of foreboding that increases during the course of the novel and alerts the reader to the fact that the doll is symbolic of Penelope's childlike and passive status in her marriage to Vincent.[25] In particular, *The China*

[22] Text added in this edited version: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 104.
[23] Daphne Du Maurier, and Terry O'Brien, *Rebecca.* (La Vergne: New Central Book Agency, 2020), p. 79.
[24] Friedan, p. 92.
[25] This is similar to Vernon Lee's 'The Doll' (1927) in women writers critiquing the alignment of wives and dolls through the unsettling trope of men creating a doll in the image of their spouse.

Doll highlights how, when women become housewives, they are relegated to children or dolls to be looked after and controlled, as Penelope is also physically treated like a doll or child by Vincent. For example, when Penelope is lying in bed, feeling mentally and physically fragile due to Vincent's manipulation and poisoning, he 'propelled her gently back and tucked her in' (p. 710). The juxtaposition of the forceful verb and paternal tucking highlights the more sinister intentions overshadowing his care. Penelope being physically touched and controlled foregrounds the myth of women being 'passive victims' who can be 'pushed back easily into the feminine mystique' in the story.[26]

Yorke's novel presents the negative impact of women marrying too young, especially to an older man, showing how it causes unequal power dynamics within the relationship. Throughout the text Vincent uses Penelope's age to infantilise and manipulate her; she is described as 'a thin and shrinking creature, still a child' (p. 628), and Vincent treats her like a child, deciding 'she must go early to bed' (p. 694). Once again, this alludes to Mrs de Winters' infantilisation by Maxim in *Rebecca*, with him kissing her on the top of her head like a child, and using condescending, childish expressions with her like 'run along' and 'where have you been hiding?'.[27] Penelope is vulnerable to Vincent's manipulation because she sees herself as a fragile 'Living doll' at the beginning of the text, thinking '[i]mperceptibly the doll had already become "she"' (p. 50) and she has little self-confidence, believing that 'she was young and silly, when he was mature and wise' (p. 83). The omniscient narrator also describes her as 'poor darling Penny she was such a kid' (p. 768), scrutinizing Penelope's marriage age and highlighting how young marriage led to 'increased immaturity, emotional dependence, and passivity on the part of the newest victims of the

[26] As Friedan notes in her 1997 essay 'Metamorphosis: Two Generations Later', published in: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 18.
[27] Du Maurier, pp. 24, 34, 44.

feminine mystique'.[28] This is similar to *Rebecca* as Maxim himself even recognizes Mrs de Winters' very young age compared to his: 'I suppose you are young enough to be my daughter and I don't know how to deal with you'.[29] Between 1890 and 1940, the median ages of female marriage in America ranged between 21.2 and 22 years old, whereas between the 1950s and 1960s, the median ages of female marriage dropped to between 20 and 20.2.[30] This drop to an all-time low during this period led to women's magazines deploring the 'unhappy statistics' of young marriages, as well as the publication of both Yorke's *The China Doll* and Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.[31] Friedan further highlights how the feminine mystique 'glorified and in the name of femininity a passive, childlike immaturity' within marriage, and late 1950s advertisements of 'the new happy housewife heroine' presented a 'childlike kind of dependence', indicating how magazines promoted youth, naivety and a reliance on men as the housewife ideal.[32] The description of Penelope as a child and her infantilization by Vincent suggests that the romanticization of the 'baby-face bride' by Hollywood and advertising has a more sinister effect of instilling submission and compliance in young women through marriage.[33]

As already noted, Vincent's mistress, Clarrie, also perpetuates the patriarchal oppression of the 'Living doll' by actively helping Vincent psychologically manipulate and destabilize Penelope. One example of this is when Clarrie trips Penelope, causing her to injure her leg, and Clarrie's 'kindly hands seized her by the arm' (p. 850). The oxymoron of Clarrie's kindness versus the violent verb 'seized' alludes to the conflict of interest in women who play a role in relegating other women to controllable objects. Vincent and Clarrie's

[28] Friedan, p. 227.
[29] Du Maurier, pp. 23-4.
[30] J. R. Rele, 'Trend and Differentials in the American age at Marriage', *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, 43. 2 (April 1965), 219-234 (p. 220).
[31] Friedan, p. 6.
[32] Text added in this edited version: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 294; Friedan, p. 29.
[33] Friedan, p. 36.

collaboration in this scene is shown when it is revealed that the doll is also marked where Penelope has injured her leg, leading her to think, 'How odd that she had hurt herself just where the doll had been marked' (p. 867). Clarrie supports the harm of other women if it is in her interest. Later in the novel, Clarrie mocks Penelope and, like Vincent, likens her to a child, calling her clothes 'very teenage' (p. 1612) and saying, 'What small feet you've got my dear' (p. 1614), implying she is the naïve little red riding hood who has been deceived by the predatory wolf. Later in the text, Clarrie also actively helps Vincent in psychologically abusing Penelope; moving Penelope's clothes, she instructs Vincent to 'tell [Penelope] she did it herself while sleep-walking' (p. 1616). Clarrie is a representation of women who perpetuate and support the 'Living doll' stereotype actively harming women and supporting patriarchy in the process.

Through its female protagonist, *The China Doll* reflects the mental deterioration of the housewife during the 1950s, revealing that Penelope's mental decline is because of the oppressive circumstances of her marriage rather than an inherited mental illness. Penelope has a history of mental illness in her family, her mother having died by suicide when she was young, and so feels anxious about replicating her mother's fate. Near the end of the text, the mental strain from Vincent's manipulation causes Penelope to come close to jumping off a bridge. Like Yorke, Friedan highlights how societal expectations lead to women being stigmatized as mentally ill instead of identifying the source of their unhappiness:

> Does the mystique keep American woman from growing with the world? Does it force her to deny reality, as a woman in a mental hospital must deny reality to believe she is a queen? Does it doom women to be displaced persons, if not virtual schizophrenics, in our complex, changing world?[34]

[34] Friedan, p. 49.

The mystique of the housewife therefore encourages women to deny their reality and succumb to mental illness, which is emphasized through Vincent's gaslighting of Penelope throughout the text, insisting she just needs to rest when she is being actively poisoned and restricted by him. However, Penelope soon realises it is her marriage that is the source of her unhappiness. Later in the text, Penelope openly expresses her dissatisfaction with her marriage, but she is unable to name her condition:

> She looked at the months of her life with Vincent; at the queer, indefinable disappointment; the restless, insecure feeling she had discovered instead of tranquillity (p. 1308).

This parallels the mystery of 'the problem that has no name', of the unhappy housewife which Friedan identifies in 1963, two years after Yorke published *The China Doll*.[35] Penelope's low mood and instability therefore represent the 'indefinable disappointment' felt by housewives in the 1950s, and identified by Friedan, as a material consequence of an unfulfilling marriage rather than mental illness.

Yorke highlights how the feminine mystique can be overcome through women finding support and fulfilment outside of their marriages. When Penelope is injured after being deliberately tripped by Clarrie, her close friend Betty (like Friedan) 'bathed her bruises, lent her another pair of stockings and sat her down with a large gin and tonic' (p. 877). Betty is a source of support and comfort at a time when Penelope is mentally and physically struggling as a result of her husband's abuse and stands in stark contrast to Clarrie. Later in the text, Betty identifies Penelope's issue with her husband lucidly, saying simply 'You aren't happy with him', with Penelope agreeing (p. 1349). For Penelope, 'the relief of admitting it [her unhappiness] was enormous' (p. 1350). Friedan notes the growing mental deterioration of housewives during the 1950s and 1960s and how 'unmarried woman patients were happier

[35] Friedan, p. 9.

than married ones', which is also represented by Yorke through Penelope's comparison with Clarrie, a woman who is powerful and free despite being malicious.[36] Penelope is an example of the 1950s unhappy housewife who is forced to deny feeling unfulfilled with her marriage but finds liberation in identifying the problem with 'no name' through female support and friendship.

Yorke also engages with literary allusion to present how the 'Living doll' stereotype can be used by women as a more elusive form of resistance. Penelope's resistance begins with her thinking that 'no doll could possibly portend her doom' (p. 1255), which suggests a rejection of her assigned position as the controllable housewife or 'passive puppet'.[37] Penelope decides to take an active role in subverting the power dynamic within the marriage when she discovers Vincent is having an affair with Clarrie. After a period of illness, Penelope misleads Vincent by pretending she does not know about his deception and ill will, suggesting that they go out for a meal and dressing exactly like the doll in 'a green velvet dress' (p. 1476). Penelope performs the 'Living doll' in order to lure Vincent into a false sense of security before confronting him. This resistance visibly invigorates Penelope as 'her face was slightly flushed, and her eyes, large-pupiled, shone with nervous excitement', exhibiting how her being in control of her relationship stimulates and revitalises her mentally (p. 1476). This, again, conjures the image of the second Mrs. de Winters in *Rebecca* when she wears a dress she sees in a painting for a ball and believes her 'dull personality had turned vibrant'.[38] However, the second Mrs. de Winters does not realise it is Rebecca's old dress and is devastated when Maxim asks her to change. For both Penelope and Mrs. de Winters, the wearing of these emblematic dresses is a turning point. However, for Penelope the wearing of her green dress illustrates a reclamation of power and control in her relationship, whilst, for

[36] Friedan, p. 14.
[37] Davies, p. 40.
[38] Du Maurier, p. 81.

Mrs. de Winters, the wearing of Rebecca's old dress ends with her in tears and her being further infantilised when Beatrice says, 'You poor child, how wretchedly unfortunate, how were you to know?'.[39] This shows how Yorke is further re-purposing famous depictions of the submissive housewife, like Mrs. de Winters. Penelope then subverts the 'Living doll' stereotype when, whilst plotting to confront Vincent in her green dress, she 'felt exactly as if she were acting in a play and might forget her part' (p. 1490), highlighting the 'Living doll' as a performance of oppressive femininity. Additionally, Penelope uses the passive doll stereotype as a form of resistance at the end of the text when Vincent tells her to get up with the intention of murdering her and 'she remained where she was, motionless, and closed her eyes again' (p. 2107). The passivity and immobility of the 'Living doll' stereotype are here turned against her oppressive would-be murderer in an act of resistance.

As well as subverting the figure, Yorke highlights how the 'Living doll' stereotype must be actively resisted for the female protagonist to escape her fate as the 'Living doll' who is silenced by 'death'.[40] Earlier in the novel, Penelope fully rejects the china doll given to her by Vincent and then finally takes an active role in challenging and escaping her aggressor at the end of the text to regain her autonomy. Penelope destroys her china doll doppelganger as she 'flung the doll across the room. The noise it made, splintering into fragments against the skirting, seemed deafening to Penelope' (p. 720). Penelope's breaking of the china doll earlier in the text is a metaphor for her resistance to the 'Living doll' identity Vincent had manufactured for her, despite her then being conflicted throughout the novel. This also evokes Friedan's urge to 'shatter' the idealized Dresden doll image expected of women.[41] Furthermore, the visceral sensory imagery of the break being 'deafening' alludes to the

[39] Du Maurier, p. 85.
[40] Davies, p. 40.
[41] Text added in this edited version: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 104.

physical and emotional difficulty in the housewife escaping this stereotype because of the patriarchal 'forces other than the living woman herself' which often control the Living doll's circumstances.[42] Penelope confronts Vincent and Clarrie near the end of the text, saying to Vincent, 'did you give [Clarrie] a china doll too?' (p. 1987) and then to Clarrie, in reference to Vincent tripping Penelope on the stairs earlier, 'look out, don't go dropping it or you'll fall downstairs' (p. 1987). She also says to Clarrie, 'I don't want him - you have him - I'll go away' (p. 1990). Her tone is commanding, powerful, and even sarcastic at times, indicating that she has regained her confidence and voice by the end of the text, enabling her to actively leave her marriage. Penelope also fights back when Vincent tries to electrocute her on an electric fire at Aunt Hermione's home: 'she tried to struggle, clawed at him desperately with her hands and kicked' (p. 2109). Yorke denounces the submissive 'Living doll' through the violent and animalistic imagery of Penelope attempting to 'claw' and 'kick', as though her liberation depends on her harnessing an internal animalistic instinct, rather than the performative and constructed figure of the 'Living doll'. This is further proven when it is noted that she acted from 'instinct' in grabbing Vincent's gun out of his jacket pocket when he is investigating the electric fire that was meant to electrocute Penelope, but ultimately kills him (p. 2122). Her active role in resisting the patriarchal constraints that kept her compliant to her husband's wishes are what enable her to escape the restraints of the 'Living doll'.

Like Miss Mayfield and Galatea in the novels by Norah Lofts and Madeline Miller cited at the beginning of this discussion, Penelope is treated by her husband like a doll throughout Yorke's novel, but ultimately defeats her antagonist.[43] Penelope is portrayed as

[42] Frever, p. 122.

[43] *Galatea* is a rare instance of the story of Galatea, a statue created in her husband's vision and brought to life, being told from her perspective. Galatea uses her weight as a statue to drown her husband, sacrificing herself in the act as she returns to stone. Miss Mayfield resists the manipulation by the cult who wish to sacrifice her student, which allows her to save herself and the student. Therefore, the female protagonist's resistance to the patriarchal antagonist's infantilization and manipulation is representative of a tradition of women's writing which resists the 'feminized dummy' stereotype. Davies, p. 40.

the 'feminized dummy, the "copy" of an originating masculine voice' initially, a trope that usually ends in the female protagonist being 'silenced' through 'marriage or death' by the end of the text.[44] Penelope's resistant ending subverts these tropes of the 'Living doll'. Yorke highlights the lack of voice of the 'Living doll' as passive housewife, emphasizing how the 'Living doll' stereotype needs to be dismantled and rejected for women to have autonomy within the married home, then shows the 'Living doll' reclaiming her autonomy through resistance at the end of the novel. Clarrie and Vincent are punished at the end of the text, through death or being arrested, rather than Penelope, showing how the text scrutinizes the patriarchal preservation of the 'Living doll' stereotype by women as well as men. However, unlike Galatea, who turns back to stone in order to drown her abusive husband in Miller's version of the tale, Penelope's husband's death does not come at the cost of her own life, signifying that women can resist the 'Living doll' stereotype without losing their own life and identity.[45]

Joyce Carol Oates' Living Dolls: Critiquing Male Violence and Parental Enforcement of Binary Gender Norms

Today, the link between oppressive gender roles and the doll is as prevalent as ever and is explored in popular culture and literature. Several female music artists have drawn on the doll to express this in obvious ways, such as FKA Twigs' song 'I'm Your Doll' (2015), Lady Gaga's 'Plastic Doll' (2020) and Bella Poarch's 'Dolls' (2022). In recent years, feminist artists have also drawn on the doll in less obvious ways such as Hozier's 'Eat Your Young' music video, released on 5 April 2023, which uses the figure of the 'Living doll' to highlight the harm caused by forcing children into binary gender roles. The video depicts two

[44] Davies, p. 40.
[45] Penelope also escapes her aggressor as Melanie and Iris do in *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and *The Doll Factory* (2019).

performances, one of a play set on a stage (which an adult audience watches) and one of a puppet show (which a child audience watches).[46] In the play, a father is sent to war and returns injured and feels ashamed and emasculated, whilst his wife begins to turn into a Greek statue she admires for her beauty, a reference to Galatea, demonstrating how oppressive gender roles shame men and relegate women to no more than feminized objects. The couple also have a son in the play who is forced into playing with more masculine toys rather than dolls (the father taking a doll off him at one point). The son is also obligated to take on a masculine job role, with his parents dressing him as a butcher, then fireman, which it is implied ultimately leads to his death. The children's puppet show mirrors the play but falls apart in the end, showing children the fragile nature of binary gender structures. The final shot of the puppet show is a hand opening a fridge of blood, warning children that adhering to patriarchal gender constructs only leads to their self-destruction and harm. Like Hozier's music video, Oates' 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi' (2003) and 'The Doll-Master' (2015) warns of the harm parental figures can cause when imposing patriarchal gender roles onto their children. Oates' texts also scrutinize the male violence that results from the treatment of women and girls as feminized objects or dolls, particularly in the context of the mainstreaming of the sex industry and hypersexual culture in the twenty-first century.[47]

In *Living Dolls*, Natasha Walter argues that, in the twenty-first century, girls are being socialized through TV shows and magazines from a young age to look 'doll-like' and 'airbrushed' to embody the figure of the hypersexualized 'Living doll', in the form of

[46] This video will be further referenced in relation to Oates' 'The Doll-Master'.
[47] 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi' was originally published in *Gettersby Review* in 2003 and reprinted in *The Best American Mystery Stories* in 2004 and then *The Female of the Species* in 2006. Joyce Carol Oates, *The Female of the Species* (London: Quercus, 2006), p. 277. Subsequent references in parentheses; 'The Doll-Master' originally appeared in the short story collection *The Doll Collection*, edited by Ellen Datlow in 2015 and re-published in Joyce Carol Oates' short story collection *The Doll-Master and Other Tales of Terror* in 2016. Joyce Carol Oates, *The Doll-Master and Other Tales of Terror* (London: Head of Zeus, 2016), p. 317. Subsequent references in parentheses.

glamour models and sex workers.[48] Walter identifies how the figure of the doll is taking over young girls lives and encouraging them to view themselves as sex objects.[49] The commodification of femininity in the twenty-first century through the 'Living doll' in TV, film, fashion and music, through Disney animation, cosmetic surgery, and Instagram, has led to a third-wave feminist romanticization of the 'Living doll' stereotype which is 'defined by the sex industry'.[50] One key reason for this unrealistic image of female perfection is the mainstreaming of pornography online caused by 'the much greater presence of pornography in the lives of many young people, driven by the internet.'[51] Walter criticizes the hypersexual culture where:

> men are still encouraged, through most pornographic materials, to see women as objects, and women are still encouraged much of the time to concentrate on their sexual allure rather than their imagination or pleasure.[52]

Through her short stories, Oates scrutinizes how the sex industry has taught boys to treat women as the feminine playthings they are told to reject as children, and how women are encouraged to view themselves as 'sexy dolls'.[53] Oates is writing in the context of Banyard's equality illusion, a myth that women having more social, financial and sexual power means that they have reached full equality.[54] As Walter notes, 'the rise of a hypersexual culture is not proof that we have reached full equality; rather, it has reflected and exaggerated the deeper imbalances of power in our society'.[55]

Walter also discusses the new determinism of the 1990s and early 2000s in *Living Dolls*, where gender roles were placed on boys and girls marketed by toy companies:

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[48] Walter, pp. 67, 2.
[49] Walter, p. 6.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Walter, p. 4.
[52] Walter p. 108.
[53] Walter, p. 28.
[54] Banyard, p. 2.
[55] Walter p. 8.

'Pink girls, blue boys. Princesses, fighters. Shy girls, grunting boys. Good girls, aggressive boys'.[56] These gendered characteristics are not innate, but are socialized, marketed and then performed. Walter's argument evokes Judith Butler's central concept that, 'performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.'[57] For example, men perform masculinity, such as having short hair, wearing trousers, being protective and aggressive, and women perform femininity, such as having long hair, wearing dresses and being more nurturing and passive. Butler argues that binary gender roles such as these are 'habitual and violent presumptions', which lead to the oppression of women: 'a feminist view argues that gender should be overthrown, eliminated, or rendered fatally ambiguous precisely because it is always a sign of subordination for women.'[58] Through the parents of and social pressures surrounding her female protagonist in 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi' and her male protagonist, Robbie, in 'The Doll-Master', Oates criticizes the gender stereotypes parental figures place on children within her short stories. Oates' texts support Walter's and Butler's criticism of gender determinism and the hypersexualized 'Living doll' by highlighting how the gender determinism associated with the doll can perpetuate harmful binary gender roles for children.

The film industry has also utilized horror to resist the hyperfeminine and hypersexualized 'Living doll' to create the 'diabolic doll' (a malevolent doll which comes to life) which is threatening and terrifying, from Susannah O'Brien's *The Doll* (2017) to the *Child's Play* franchise (1988-2017), and more recently Gerard Johnstone's *M3GAN* (2022).[59] There have been many texts that explore the figure of the evil doll too such as Algernon

[56] Walter, p. 131.
[57] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Florence: Routledge, 2007), p. xv.
[58] Butler, pp. viii, xiv.
[59] Velázquez, p. 4.

Blackwood's 'The Doll' (1946), Richard Matheson's 'Prey' (1969), William Goldman's *Magic* (1976) and, more recently, Laura Purcell's *The Silent Companions* (2017). However, a lot of literature which features the doll has moved away from the 'the cliché of the evil doll', including the volume of short stories *The Doll Collection* (2015) edited by Ellen Datlow, where Oates' 'The Doll-Master' was originally published.[60] In the introduction to this volume, Datlow notes that:

> in these stories, what they so often highlight is the malevolence that lurks not in dolls – which are, after all, only poor copies of ourselves, only objects at our mercy – but in the human beings who interact with them. Not horrific in themselves, but imbued with horror by their owners or controllers, what the dolls in these stories often reveal is the evil within us, the evil that we try to keep hidden, but that dolls bring to light.[61]

Oates' short stories draw on the tradition of the doll embodying the human capacity for evil – through dehumanization, objectification and violence – coming to light. Oates' works have been categorized as part of the 'horror field' with her fiction having a sense of darkness and dread mixed with realism.[62] Some have defined her work as 'Gothic naturalism', 'keyhole realism' or even 'Oatesian realism', where Oates explores the dark minds of her characters in everyday settings.[63] Oates herself says that she has 'always been drawn to "gothic" elements' in her prose fiction despite focussing on the more realistic horrors of 'ordinary lives', noting that 'there is no fiction so horrifying as the horror of actual life'.[64]

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[60] Ellen Datlow, *The Doll Collection* (London: Tor, 2015), p. 14.
[61] Datlow, p. 14.
[62] Rob Latham, 'The Ineluctable Agon of Desire: Joyce Carol Oates' Suspense Fiction', *Los Angeles Review of Books* (8 January 2021) <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-ineluctable-agon-of-desire-joyce-carol-oatess-suspense-fiction/> [Accessed 27 February 2023].
[63] Mary E. Papke, 'Naturalism's Children: Unruly Naturalism in Works by Darcy Steinke, Joyce Carol Oates, and Lynda Barry', *Studies in American Naturalism*, 11.2 (2016), 56–70 (p. 62); Mary Warner Marien, 'More Oates-Style Keyhole Realism', *The Christian Science Monitor* (21 August 1991) <https://www.csmonitor.com/1991/0821/20142.html> [Accessed 27 February 2023]; Anthony Joseph Fonseca, 'Horrifying Women, Terrifying Men: A Gender-Based Study of Sexual Horror in the Fiction of Robert Aickman, John Hawkes, Angela Carter, and Joyce Carol Oates, 1965-1980' (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1993), p. 135.
[64] Lisa Morton, 'Interview: Joyce Carol Oates', *Nightmare Magazine*, 25 (2014) <https://www.nightmare-magazine.com/nonfiction/interview-joyce-carol-oates/> [Accessed 27 February 2023].

Oates is a divisive author whose work has been interpreted as both feminist and non-feminist. She herself proposes that her 'pseudonym novels have a distinct feminist cast' filled with 'murderous feminist rage', suggesting that she aligns a woman's capacity for violence with feminist empowerment.[65] However, by mentioning the feminist intentions of her pseudonym novels, Oates implies that the works written under her own name are perhaps not as feminist. In her article 'Unliberated women in Joyce Carol Oates' Fiction' (1978), Joanne V. Creighton notes that Oates 'is not usually thought of as a feminist writer' because her portrayal of women is usually passive and unliberated.[66] Anthony Joseph Fonseca suggests that 'like [Angela] Carter, Oates was often faulted by feminists' for her portrayal of women as 'victimized' which got her a reputation as a 'non-feminist writer'.[67] However, some argue that Oates captures the reality of a woman's 'vulnerabilities and inevitabilities' because 'a sense of helplessness is the essence of horror' and Fonseca suggests that 'Oates uses detailed violence against women' to emphasize 'the need for feminist reform.'[68] This chapter suggests that the fiction written by Oates that features the 'Living doll' motif actually diverges from her usual works of victimized womanhood and explicit male violence. 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi', as well as her short story collection *The Female of the Species* (2006) in which it features, differs from Oates' historical portrayal of passive and victimized women by presenting women as having the capacity for violence. Although women are victims of male violence in 'The Doll-Master', Oates does not feature explicit acts of violence against women in either text. Instead, Oates' 'Living doll' texts are feminist in exhibiting the effects of the aftermath of male violence on the 'Living doll' through her own acts of explicit violence, or

[65] Ibid.
[66] Joanne V. Creighton, 'Unliberated women in Joyce Carol Oates' Fiction', *World Literature Written in English*, 17.1 (1978), 165-175 (pp. 165, 174).
[67] Fonseca, pp. 135, 138.
[68] Terrence Lafferty, 'Horror: Joyce Carol Oates' 'The Doll-Master and Other Tales of Terror,' and More', *New York Times* (1 June 2016) <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/05/books/review/horror-joyce-carol-oatess-the-doll-master-and-other-tales-of-terror-and-more.html> [Accessed 27 February]; Fonseca, p. 140.

death. In both stories examined here, Oates criticizes the hypersexualized figure of the 'Living doll' that is romanticized by television and magazines.[69]

Like Yorke, Oates subverts the gender essentialism which characterizes the passive stereotype of the 'Living doll' through her female protagonist not simply being a submissive victim, whilst also criticizing the Living doll's casualisation of violence in the story. The short story collection from which 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi' comes, *The Female of the Species*, is named after Rudyard Kipling's 1911 poem of the same name which reads 'the female of the species is more deadly than the male' and Pascale Antolin notes that, in Oates' collection, 'women of all ages and conditions are represented as murderers'.[70] Oates disturbs and distorts the image of women, or girls, as weak and innocent by showing their potential for violence.[71] However, in 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi', Oates critiques the normalisation of violence through her female protagonist's seemingly random acts of violence. The female protagonist is a child named Doll who is rented out to clients by her pimp father, Ira Early, in hotel rooms along the Mississippi river. These clients pay for Doll's time but have agreed that they are not allowed to touch her. Doll's name highlights her need to perform a child-like femininity for her paedophilic clients as she is meant to look 'not that much older' than eleven (p. 66). Her father keeps her this age through medication that halts puberty. Nonetheless, Ira perceives Doll as a violent individual who he 'can't control' because Doll frequently murders clients every few weeks for a seemingly unknowable reason. Doll also collects 'mementos' (p. 52), with Ira being the recipient of these, including a severed finger in the case of her most recent client who she nicknames Mr Radish (p. 68). The story is told from the third person with the narrative point of view switching between Ira

[69] Walter, p. 3.
[70] Pascale Antolin, '"Deadly Girls" Voices, Suspense, and the "Aesthetics of Fear" in Joyce Carol Oates' The Banshee and Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi', *Bearing Witness: Joyce Carol Oates Studies*, 2.1 (2015), p. 1.
[71] Antolin, p. 2.

Early, Doll herself and Mr Radish. The text subverts the pretty, passive characterization of the 'Living doll', highlighting the contradictions in Doll's innocent, doll-like appearance with her casual violence. But Oates paints Doll's violence as disturbing rather than liberatory:

> She'll slash this arsehole's carotid artery, watch him bleed out like the last one. Except this time, for sure, Doll won't get blood splatters. Bad enough on your clothes, but in your pig-tailed hair it's a bummer (p. 66).

The contrast between her violent slashing of Mr Radish's throat and her childlike hairstyle all mediated by her colloquial language creates a disturbing effect. Oates uses the destabilizing effect of horror to critique the perpetuation of violence as a result of its normalisation. Oates subverts the passive 'Living doll' here, but also critiques the idea that the 'Living doll' can overcome male violence by perpetuating that same horrific and unprovoked violence.

Despite Doll's capacity for violence, Oates garners sympathy for Doll as she is a victim and manifestation of the violent world she grew up in. The story is set in mid-western America at a motel not far from the Mississippi river where it is suggested that Doll's mother's body was disposed, having gone missing years earlier. Doll never wishes to stray far from the river in order to be close to her mother, implying the 'romance' in the title is ironically a tragedy that evokes the generational cycles of violence towards women. Through all three perspectives – Ira, Doll and Mr Radish - Oates demonstrates how, despite Doll believing she is in control in her encounters, she is always at risk of harm from the oppressive nature of predatory male desire. Unknown to Doll, Mr Radish, thinks 'maybe he should rape, murder, or murder, rape' Doll (pp. 69-70). The naïve assertion that 'Doll sees [Mr Radish] is no threat' (p. 67) just before his shocking thought confession shows that Doll often underestimates the danger she is in. Doll's violence does not mean that she is not a victim, rather it re-enforces her victimisation as a child whose casual violence, unknowingly, saves her from predators like Mr Radish. Some critics suggest that Doll's violence means she is not

a victim, with Antolin arguing that Oates' portrayal of Doll as a killer 'prevents sympathy'.[72] Similarly, in a review of *The Female of the Species*, Margaret MacPherson argues that:

> In Oates' world, the female of the species is violent, seductive, cold and heartless. She is sexually insatiable and often operates from a position of revenge.[73]

However, Doll's inner thoughts suggest that the randomness of her kills are not out of 'revenge', but out of child-like spite. Doll has been raised in a world where violence is normalised and so she sees violence as a way to get what she wants: safety and control. One feminist interpretation might be that Doll is a victim of her situation as a child whose circumstances have surrounded her with the constant threat of violence, as Oates describes her as 'a beautiful little girl, but breakable' (p. 53). Oates shows how Doll is not just a perpetrator of violence, but a product and victim of a violent upbringing.

'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi' is a critique of the patriarchal myth promoted by the sex industry, that women are empowered by self-objectification. Oates illustrates how women becoming 'Living dolls' through hyperfemininity and self-grooming is not liberatory as Doll has no choice in performing the role of the hyperfeminized and sexualized 'Living doll' to make a profit through sex work. Doll actively performs the role of the doll-like girl-child for voyeuristic and paedophilic customers: 'Facial movements, fluttering eyelashes, more of the smile, variants of the smile, sweet lowered gaze'.[74] Doll lists her feminine acts as though they are a routine, a performance of girl-like hyperfemininity she stages for her clients. As Butler notes, 'gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of

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[72]Antolin, p. 4.
[73] Margaret MacPherson, 'Murder, Mayhem Debunk Notions of the Fairer Sex: Final Edition', *Edmonton Journal* (Edmonton, Alta: Postmedia Network Inc, 2006), p. 275.
[74] Joyce Carol Oates, 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi', *The Female of the Species* (London: Quercus, 2006), pp. 51-76 (p. 66). Subsequent references in parentheses.

substance, of a natural sort of being.'[75] The 'highly rigid regulatory frame' alludes to the lack of choice in binary gender performativity and it is also implied that Doll's performance is not entirely her own as 'she's wound up like a mechanical doll, one-two-three-four, the usual', implying that 'forces' other than herself control her performance as the 'Living doll' (p. 66).[76] Oates subsequently criticizes how hypersexual culture is, in the terms described by Walter, 'co-opting the language of choice and liberation' by highlighting how Doll's performance as a child sex worker is 'fuelled more by desperation than liberation'.[77]

Oates' short story also highlights how parents use the 'Living doll' stereotype to enforce oppressive and hypersexualized gender roles onto their children. Doll's 'painted eyes, luscious peachy lips, and blusher on her cheeks' (p. 61) highlights how girls 'are expected to model themselves on their favourite playthings'.[78] Doll must embody the 'Living doll' girl-child to make money for her father, Ira, through renting her out to clients with one rule: 'Do Not Touch' (p. 56). Here, Doll becomes a doll-like object of voyeurism for her sadistic father. Ira keeps Doll pre-pubescent with puberty suppressors, so the reader is not entirely clear how old Doll is, creating a sense of uncanniness surrounding her eternal youth. This sense of uneasiness surrounding Doll's age is further illustrated through her father calling puberty an 'ugly phenomenon' (p. 70). The father wishes to keep his child in a feminine state of arrested development (a doll-like state), yet she is dressed up as a sexualized adult in 'sexy white knee-high boots' and a 'black satin miniskirt' (p. 69), illustrating how industries use hypersexual culture to profit from sexualizing young girls. Here, Oates stresses the harm and violence that is facilitated by parental figures who adultify their children through instilling oppressive gender expectations onto them.

[75] Butler, p. 43.
[76] Frever, p. 122.
[77] Walter pp. 33, 35.
[78] Walter, p. 2.

Oates further highlights the harm of parents using the doll to enforce oppressive binary gender roles onto their children in 'The Doll-Master'. The short story is set in twenty-first century Northeastern America in a 'mostly white' neighbourhood where Robbie, the male protagonist, lives with his affluent parents (p. 9). The text details Robbie's journey from a child who is not allowed to play with dolls to his murdering of women as an adult. The text is told entirely from Robbie's first-person perspective, which underlines the psychological harm caused by his parents' gender expectations and makes Robbie's subsequent murder of women even more unsettling. Robbie is not allowed to play with dolls as a child because his parents believe he should conform to binary gender norms, since, as Butler notes, 'the breakdown of gender binaries' is 'so monstrous, so frightening' to a patriarchal, heteronormative society.[79] Robbie says: 'Mother told me that my father "didn't think it was a good idea" for me to be playing with a doll at my age. Dolls are for girls, she said. Not boys' (pp. 4-5). Instead, his parents attempt to instil more masculine gender expectations, Robbie denoting that 'in place of Baby Emily who was so sweet and placid and smelled of foam-rubber my father has instructed my mother to buy an "action toy"' (p. 5). Here, once again, it is the father instilling these oppressive gender binaries, which lead to toxic masculinity and male violence, causing Robbie to view women as dolls to collect. Walter notes that 'many feminists in the past argued that girls and boys should be encouraged to play across the boundaries laid down by their sex'.[80] However, the phenomenon of parents, particularly the father, instilling binary gender expectations through banning boys playing with dolls is a common phenomenon, as shown in Hozier's music video when the couple in the play have a son and the father bans him from playing with dolls, leading to a violent outburst and, eventually, his death. Walter also describes how a mother she interviewed bought her son an

[79] Butler, p. viii.
[80] Walter, p. 1.

Ariel doll and his father 'cut all its hair off, in an effort to try to make it a more suitable doll for a boy'.[81] Oates is highlighting and then critiquing the common occurrence of parents forcing children to conform to, and perform, gendered interests in relation to playing with dolls.

The trauma of Robbie having to reject his more feminine interests leads to him lacking empathy, a trait of toxic masculinity, leaving him unable to form human connections and only connecting with dolls emotionally, as well as viewing women as dolls. The toxic masculinity instilled in Robbie leads him to avoid any sort of human connection as he sees it as threatening. Robbie says, 'You can look into a doll's eyes without fear of the doll seeing into your soul in a way hostile to you but you can't be so careless looking at anyone else' (p. 14). Robbie's stunted capacity for human connection leads to him finding a connection with dolls which will not expose his vulnerability, and he ends up going to therapy from the age of eighteen, labelled under 'troubled adolescents' (p. 15). His connection to dolls is so visceral that he fears that he might 'break down' to the therapist when she removes from the room the Dresden doll that has been sitting with them throughout their therapy sessions, also worrying that the therapist had realised his obsession with dolls and will reject this desire as his father did (p. 19). His inability to show emotions, as well as his hatred for his female therapist, exposes the toxic masculinity that causes him shame surrounding his true feelings, as well as his developing misogyny. Similarly, Doll is emotionally stunted, casually imagining violence and acting playfully in serious situations like when she merrily calls her father a 'wicked ol-prevert' (p. 68). The child-like mispronunciation of 'pervert' and the seriousness of its meaning illustrates Doll's incapacity to comprehend the serious situations she is placed in.

[81] Walter, p. 136.

Consequently, through first-person psychological realist reactions to the doll, Oates exposes how gender essentialism mentally and emotionally harms these children.

Oates also exposes how the doll's alignment with femininity enables children to blur the line between women and dolls, as well as humans and objects, which materially harms both girls and women. The parental enforcement of shame surrounding Robbie's more feminine interest as a child means that he now believes collecting or admiring real dolls is more taboo than him murdering and collecting 'found dolls', a term Robbie uses to describe the women he kills. Robbie's sense of reality becomes so warped that he begins seeing dolls as people. For example, Russian dolls make Robbie feel 'sick' as he 'thought of how a woman carries a baby inside her and how terrifying it would be if that baby carried another baby inside it' (p. 17). He also imagines the Dresden doll in his therapist's office talking and saying: 'You can't touch me - not me! I belong to her. You didn't "find" me, I was always here. And I will be here when you are not' (p. 18). The figure of the doll here reminds Robbie of his own vulnerabilities in terms of his shame in wanting to 'touch' the doll, as well as his own mortality. Robbie's belief that playing with toy dolls is more taboo than collecting his found dolls is also exposed when he says, 'She could never be a *found doll* – for I could never touch her' (p. 19). His conservative, gender-conforming upbringing means that he feels that he has more of a right to harm and collect women's bodies, than even 'touch' a toy doll. In this way, Oates exposes the damage of forced gender determinism and conformity on men, as well as the female victims of those men.

In the same way that Robbie's forced gender conformity leads him to view dolls as humans, the warping of human and object through the influence of hypersexual culture and gender essentialism also leads Robbie to dehumanize women by viewing them as dolls. For example, Robbie reflects on how he prefers it when adults' legs are hidden like teachers behind desks so he can imagine them as 'big ungainly dolls […] whose jaw hinges were

always moving' instead of as humans (p. 15). He similarly dehumanizes the women he murders and collects as 'found dolls':

> Mariska was a beautiful ceramic doll, very different from Baby Emily. Mariska had cream ceramic-skin and on her cheeks two patches of rouge. […] It was strange to touch Mariska's skin which was hard and unyielding ceramic skin except where it had been cracked and broken (p. 6).

Robbie's dehumanization of Mariska romanticizes her death as she is 'beautiful' as a doll and instead of Mariska's death being painted as graphic, her ceramic skin is simply 'cracked and broken'. He further speculates that Mariska had fallen from a step or that she had been 'tossed' 'by someone who had tired of her rouged cheeks, rosebud mouth, colorful peasant costume' (p. 8). The repetition of Mariska's doll-like traits shows Robbie's obsession with the doll-like look and his violent speculation as a result of her dollness shows how the fetishization of women being doll-like through hypersexual culture perpetuates male violence. In Will Atkin's review of Marquard Smith's critical text *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (2013), Atkin notes how Smith warns that the 'blurring between things and people can go too far' and that 'the erotic doll can seem to endorse appalling patterns of violence and abuse on account of its unrealistic ability to absorb such acts and project indifference to them.'[82] Robbie's 'blurring' of women and dolls has caused him to dehumanize women and, therefore, commit acts of violence towards them, highlighting how, as in *The China Doll*, the dehumanization of women by aligning them with dolls leads to material violence.

In both stories, male violence towards the 'Living doll' is highlighted as a result of viewing women as objects. Oates never presents the horror of the violent act itself in her short fiction, instead making the act more realistic and horrific by leaving the male violence up to the imagination of the reader. Mr Radish thinks he can harm Doll because he,

[82] Will Atkin, 'Beware the Erotic Doll', *Art History* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2015), 239–42 (p. 242).

incorrectly, views her as powerless and vulnerable and Robbie commits acts of violence because of his dehumanising view of women. Oates uses the cruel point of view of the male characters to underline the normalisation of everyday male violence in domestic settings. Mr Radish's horrific confession in thinking that, 'maybe he should rape, murder, or murder, rape, this exquisite child, get it over with in a burst of passion, then murder himself?' (pp. 69-70) highlights the normalisation of his violence towards women that embody the 'Living doll'. The casual tone of the question despite its horrific nature shows how easily male violence is born out of the fetishization of the hypersexualized 'Living doll' as an 'exquisite child'. Similarly, in 'The Doll-Master', Oates critiques the casualization of male violence through Robbie who casually re-tells the violent events of his murders. For example, Robbie describes how one of his found dolls, Barbie, had given him the most difficulty as she 'scream[ed] so loud' and 'her fingernails, shaped and polished' inflicted 'damage' on his forearm (p. 21). The attention Robbie gives to Barbie's groomed nails highlights the violence he has inflicted is merely an afterthought to his romanticization and objectification of her feminine features. Robbie is also unfazed by having to murder his mother if she found his 'dolls' because he views all women as dolls, even referring to his mother as a 'motionless mannequin-figure' (p. 23). Robbie says, 'it would not be an easy or pleasant matter to subdue, silence, and suffocate Mother, so much larger than any of the found dolls' (p. 23). The casual violence towards women uttered by the male characters in both texts shows how the alignment of women and dolls through hypersexual culture and gender determinism leads to the casualisation of male violence towards women.

Oates presents the 'Living doll' or incapacitated woman as a site of horror to highlight the threat of male violence, as well as to subvert the 'Living doll' as a representation of feminine perfection. Doll is a site of horror through her uncanny and unsettling appearance. This is shown through the 'barracuda-flash in Doll's glass dilated eyes' (p. 56) and her 'snaky

pink tongue moistening her lips, simulation of a blush, if Doll could blush' (p. 66). The inhuman, reptilian imagery is predatory and vampiric, presenting Doll as a cold-blooded creature. The 'airbrushed perfection' of the 'Living doll', as noted by Walter, is subverted through being presented as inhuman rather than attractive.[83] Oates uses realist horror to highlight the real-world consequences of male violence against women perpetrated by the hypersexualized 'Living doll' trope. Realist horror is defined by its 'realistic style to depict terrifying actions performed by ordinary people in commonplace settings'.[84] This is shown in Robbie's description of the grotesque scene of his 'found dolls' finally being discovered by his mother where he finally sees the bodies as they are:

> the found dolls were revealed as small skeletons with rags of clothing and wisps of hair on their battered skulls; their faces were skull-faces, with mirthless grins and eyeless sockets; their bone-arms were spread, as for an embrace (p. 31).

The 'small skeletons', 'eyeless sockets' and 'bone-arms' in the form of an 'embrace' are unsettling because they allude to the devastation of child death caused by Robbie as a result of his warped view of women (or girls) and dolls. Both images of the 'Living doll' are unsettling in these short stories, illustrating how Oates subverts the romanticized and hypersexualized expectations of the figure.

Finally, Oates highlights the doll as a voyeuristic object, not just through Doll as a sex worker that can only be observed, but through the 'found doll' photography Robbie posts online. Robbie establishes a website under the name *The Doll-Master*, saying 'I posted shadowy, oblique and "poetic" pictures of the found dolls, images too dark and irresolute to be identified, though visitors to the site found them "haunting" - "eerie" – "makes me want to see more!"' (p. 28). Through the voyeuristic objectification of the 'found dolls', Oates is

[83] Walter, p. 2.
[84] André Loiselle, 'Horror, Realism and Theatricality', in *Theatricality in the Horror Film: A Brief Study on the Dark Pleasures of Screen Artifice* (Online: Anthem Press, 2019), pp. 9–24 (p. 9).

highlighting the disturbing way patriarchal views of womanhood paint the passive and incapacitated living (or dead) doll as a site of feminine beauty rather than horror. Robbie's online photography of his 'found dolls' is similar to the real-life instances of doll photographers identified by Mitchell Lancaster-James in his 2018 study into doll companionship:

> some doll relationships were entirely predicated by photographic requirements. Comments indicated that doll owners often see their dolls as models: 'I have five [dolls] and another on order. One, my first, I view as a synthetic partner, and the others have joined us mostly to be photographic models and brighten up my home.' [85]

Oates identifies the online spaces which fetishize dolls as if they are women or 'models', and view women merely as objects of voyeurism and fetishism. The romanticization of the found dolls as 'poetic' and 'haunting' highlights how the fetishization of objects that mimic women such as sex dolls is akin to fetishizing dead women, which is disturbingly shown through the online audience reactions to Robbie's 'found dolls'.[86] Oates highlights how viewing objects as women and women as objects both hold significant material harm in influencing and fetishizing the objectification of and violence towards women through the figure of the 'Living doll'.

Challenging the Asian Mystique of the China Doll in Lisa See's *China Dolls* (2014)

Like Hollywood's romanticized promotion of the subservient housewife and hypersexualized bombshell, Hollywood has helped propel oppressive stereotypes of East Asian women into the Western world, such as the 'geisha, housewives, exotic Cathay Girls, China Dolls, Suzie Wongs, Madame Butterflies, powerful Dragon Ladies, martial arts mistresses, and the like.'[87]

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[85] Mitchell Lancaster-James, 'Beyond the Sex Doll: Post-Human Companionship and the Rise of the "Allodoll"', *Robotics*, 7.62 (2018), p. 11.
[86] The sex doll and its relationship to necrophilia is discussed further in Chapter three.
[87] Sheridan Prasso, *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, & Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), p. 141. Kindle.

Sheridan Prasso's *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, & Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient* (2009) exposes the romanticized and fetishized stereotypes of East Asian women perpetuated by Hollywood in films such as *Sayonara* (1957), *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) and *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003). Like Friedan's classification of the unhappy housewife in *The Feminine Mystique*, *The Asian Mystique* exposes the Western, patriarchal structures that created and reinforced the gendered and racialized stereotypes that materially oppressed East Asian women in the West. Prasso asserts that 'Hollywood became an incubator and a firing kiln for the Orientalized perceptions inherited by Europe', including that of the China doll.[88] 'China Doll' is an offensive expression used to describe a 'submissive, delicate, and overly emotional' East Asian woman, whilst 'Dragon Lady' is in binary opposition with the China doll and describes a 'threatening, cold […] hard and aggressive', as well as 'sensual' East Asian woman.[89] Joey Lee and Prasso discuss the stereotypes of the 'China Doll' and 'Dragon Lady' in film and media, establishing how these racial stereotypes are harmful because they 'exoticize and dehumanize East Asian women', causing them to be objectified and sexualized in the process.[90] Aljosa Puzar's study of female dollification in South Korea suggests that there is a 'broader usage of doll-related imagery and metaphors in regard to Asian femininities' being used online, suggesting that the China doll stereotype is still prominent in the digital age of the fourth wave of feminism.[91]

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[88] Prasso, p. 333. Prasso outlines how stereotypes in Hollywood film changed from Anna May Wong's 'submissive Asian girl' (p. 1663) or China doll stereotype in the 1920s, to the 1950s 'image of Asian woman as devoted wife or girlfriend' (p. 1737) in the 1950s, to 'the image of Asian women-as-prostitute/sex-vixen' (p. 1853) in the 1960s, to a limited view of Asian women as 'brides and servants' (p. 1315) in 1970s, to the 'distort[ed] and sexualize[d]' (p. 1436) image of Asian women in 1980s TV, to the more 'empowered'(p. 1456), but 'cold, bitchy Dragon Ladies' (p. 1518) of the 1990s, a stereotype which originated in the 1930s and 40s with Anna May Wong (p. 1561).

[89] Joey Lee, 'East Asian "China Doll" or "Dragon Lady"?', *Bridges: An Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Connections*, 3.1 (2018), 1-6 (pp. 1,3).

[90] Ibid; Prasso, p. 124.

[91] Aljosa Puzar, 'Asian Dolls and the Westernized Gaze: Notes on the Female Dollification in South Korea', *Hankook University of Foreign Studies*, 27.2 (2011), 81-111 (p. 90).

My analysis of Lisa See's *China Dolls* (2014) in the final part of this chapter uses *The Asian Mystique* to analyse See's dismantling of East Asian stereotypes by 'revealing the fully dimensional human beings beyond our usual perceptions' and 'accepting that cultures are ever-evolving'.[92] Published in 2014, *China Dolls* is speaking to the breaking of East Asian stereotypes in the 2010s. During this decade, popular shows like *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022) and *Killing Eve* (2018-2022) cast actors of East Asian descent to play the leads, while *Kim's Convenience* (2016-2021) provided Canada's first all-Asian lead cast, and the highest grossing romantic comedy film of the decade, *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), based on the 2013 text of the same name, was released.[93] The upsurge in literature, film and television which dismantles racialized stereotypes in Hollywood coincides with a branch of the third and fourth-wave feminist movement which focused more on intersections of race and gender in feminist discourse. For E. Evans, intersectionality 'denotes the multiple and overlapping layers of oppression that affect an individual's life' and has been explored in feminist literature by scholars such as Angela Davis and Kimberlé Crenshaw since the 1980s. [94] Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin's *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism* (2004) provides a framework for intersectional feminism in the twenty-first century, for 'blowing open the idea that class, race, sexuality, and gender are singular entities that exist independently of one another' and 'looking at various tendencies toward domination'.[95] As Labaton and Martin note:

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[92] Prasso, p. 143, 145.
[93] In *The Walking Dead*, Korean-American actor Steven Yeun played fan-favourite Glenn, and Canadian-American actor Sandra Oh, whose parents are South Korean immigrants, played titular character Eve Polastri in *Killing Eve*. Ananya Panchal, 'TOP 10 ROM-COMS FROM THE 2010s', *The Buzz* (27 November 2020) < https://www.thebubuzz.com/single-post/top-10-rom-coms-from-the-2010s#:~:text=%E2%80%9CCrazy%20Rich%20Asians%E2%80%9D%20is%20based,rom%2Dcom%20of%20the%20decade.> [Accessed 17 September 2023].
[94] Elizabeth Evans, *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms: Neoliberalism, Intersectionality, and the State in Britain and the US* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), p. 49.
[95] Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin, *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), p. 27.

> a feminist movement cannot succeed if it does not challenge power structures of wealth and race. If the model within which one works centralizes whiteness and/or wealth, the poorest and most victimized women in the world will be overlooked.[96]

This analysis of *China Dolls* examines the intersections of race and gender that are used to oppress East Asian women through the China doll stereotype created by colonial and patriarchal structures.

China Dolls highlights and then subverts several of the China doll stereotypes perpetuated by Hollywood and, like Yorke's *The China Doll*, disrupts the Living doll's silent and passive connotations by giving her a voice. Based on the real lives of East Asian performers, *China Dolls* is a historical fiction novel that is told from the point of view of three Asian-American nightclub performers in San Francisco's Chinese nightclub, The Forbidden City, in the late 1930s and 1940s. By setting the novel during this early Hollywood era, See shows how these racialized stereotypes developed, and how they can be confronted through amplifying the voice of East Asian women during this period of racial discrimination and suppression. See's historical novel fits into a tradition of women's historical fiction that uses 'a historical setting in order to explore issues of gender, and a desire to rewrite history from a point of view that centralises women's concerns'.[97] See puts the voices of her three female protagonists at the fore to break down the racialized stereotypes defined by Hollywood, and show them as three-dimensional figures with agency who become successful despite being confronted with both racial and gendered oppression.

The three female protagonists include Grace Lee, who is Chinese American and grew up in an abusive home in Ohio, Helen Fong, who is from a middle-class traditional Chinese family in San Francisco's Chinatown and Ruby Tom, who is Japanese American but claims

[96] Labaton and Martin, p. 30.
[97] Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 5.

that she is Chinese due to the persecution she would face in light of Pearl Harbour. Whilst the close bond between these characters is reestablished by the end of the novel, their friendship throughout the text is turbulent. Ruby's success as a starlet in Hollywood garners some jealousy amongst the group, and she is later arrested for being Japanese, something she is only able to hide because of Western racism which views East Asian women as a homogenous group. Grace takes Ruby's position as the starlet after her arrest, leading Ruby to accuse Grace of reporting her Japanese heritage to the police out of jealousy. However, the informer is revealed to be Helen who reported Ruby because of her resentment towards Japanese people as it was Japanese soldiers who murdered her husband and child before she moved to America. The betrayal and heartbreak at the heart of this story means that the friends do not talk for years until they come back together in a reunion in 1988. Grace says in the conclusion of the novel:

> For ten years, Helen, Ruby, and I had shared our dreams, successes, and failures — as women, friends, daughters, and performers. […] No one in the world knew me like Ruby and Helen did and we would be forever invisibly linked, but we all still needed a break from each other to mend and to heal.[98]

The shared experience these East Asian women had as performers in the early-twentieth-century American nightclub scene cements their connection, as women who could understand each other's struggles of sexism and racial prejudice through being stereotyped as the China doll. See highlights the oppressive nature of the stereotype, as well as how her protagonists are forced to comply with it, and, finally, how the stereotype is then overthrown by her protagonists through reclaiming the voice and humanity of East Asian women during this period.

[98] Lisa See, *China Dolls* {New York: Random House, 2014), p. 368. Subsequent references in parentheses.

See underscores how the West 'exoticize[s] and dehumanize[s]' East Asian women by racializing and sexualizing them through the China doll stereotype.[99] See highlights the 'othering' and dehumanization of East Asians in America, which enables them to be objectified. Whilst imprisoned for being Japanese, Ruby thinks of a time when her mother said to her, 'the *gaijin* - the white foreigners – can't hear the difference if we are crying or laughing because they don't see us as human' (p. 215). The dehumanization of East Asian women is also shown when Grace first comes to San Francisco at the beginning of the novel and, for the first time, is called 'lady' by a child she comes across: 'My face crinkled. I'd never been called lady before. Measly girl. Hog face. Chink. Chinaman. Little one. Apple-pie winner. Heart dumpling. Kid and China doll just yesterday, but never lady. Act the part!' (p. 14). Grace's shock at being referred to as human demonstrates her previous racial de-humanization and her need to 'act the part' (p. 14) in order to be taken seriously. This de-humanization enables the objectification and subsequent sexualization of East Asian women through the China doll being stereotyped as 'sexually available'.[100] When Grace first becomes sexually active whilst still performing in nightclubs mid-way through the novel, she acknowledges that performers are expected to be sexually available towards soldiers, saying that 'some people dubbed us Khaki-wackies, Cuddle Bunnies, and Good-time Charlottes. We were doing our part for the war effort — even if that meant we had to deal with a lot of busy hands' (p. 199). Before her arrest, Ruby is also sexualized and exoticized as her nightclub persona, Princess Tai, on *Life* magazine cover:

> The cover showed a pair of long legs that went up, up, up until they reached a giant bubble that covered . . . well, what it covered was left to the imagination. The woman's face was obscured — turned alluringly away from the camera lens — but the headline billed her as Princess Tai— Star of San Francisco's Hot Spot— The Forbidden City (p. 138).

[99] Lee, pp. 1, 3.
[100] Prasso, p. 128.

Ruby's 'obscured' face and 'alluring' posture alludes to the mystery and exoticization of the East, which is fetishized by the West, which Prasso names 'The Asian Mystique'. Even Ruby's name becomes exoticized as 'Princess Tai' here, and the name of the nightclub itself, 'The Forbidden City', alludes to the illicit and sexually transgressive connotations of the performers. Esther Ngan-Ling Chow discusses how America's participation in East Asian wars, such as the Vietnam war, continues to perpetuate the stereotypes of Asian women as 'cheap whores and exotic sexpots' and Lee and Rosalind Chou suggest that the objectification and sexualization of East Asian women maintains and supports white supremacy.[101] See's emphasis on the de-humanization of East Asian women, and their subsequent sexualization, highlights the role racial and sexual objectification plays in constructing 'The Asian Mystique', as well as the China doll stereotype.

See exposes how the hyper-sexualization of East Asian women through fetishized Western stereotypes has material consequences for Asian women in relation to male violence. After Ruby is arrested and Helen has a child out of wedlock, Grace moves in with a fellow East Asian nightclub performer, Ida Wong. One night after a performance at the club, Grace comes home to find Ida murdered by her white American boyfriend, Ray Boiler, in a 'jealous rage' at the male attention she receives from her line of work (p. 258). Ray's sense of ownership of Ida leads to material violence as he was 'obsessed' with her (p. 256), believing his murder of her meant the other men would not 'win' Ida's affection (p. 155). Ray completely objectifies Ida, treating her as a trophy to win or be destroyed. Like In Oates' stories, See here shows how the objectification and fetishization of women as 'Living dolls' leads to male violence. Even in death, Ida is dehumanized and not treated as a victim by the American police because they discover that she is Japanese. Grace 'watched as the cops

[101] Esther Ngan-Ling Chow, 'The Development of Feminist Consciousness Among Asian American Women', *Gender & Society*, 1.3 (1987), 284–99 (p. 288); Lee, p. 2; Rosalind S. Chou, *Asian American Sexual Politics the Construction of Race, Gender, and Sexuality* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), p. 14.

opened Ida's dresser drawers and pulled out the contents, letting her panties, bras, stockings, and nighties sail — like leaves torn from trees in an autumn storm — into her blood on the floor' (p. 257). The contrast between Grace's benevolent natural imagery of Ida as a fallen tree and the police's racialized and sexualized treatment of Ida's death shows how Western institutions undermine her position as a victim of male violence. Joe Mitchell, a white man with whom Grace falls in love, but who becomes romantically involved with Ruby, also attacks Ruby when he finds she is not the 'China doll' he expected. The text highlights how harmful the China doll stereotype is to East Asian women as both Ida and Ruby are subject to white, male violence regardless of whether they embody the China doll image. As Chow writes, 'domination by men is a commonly shared oppression for Asian American women.'[102] Puzar further notes that:

> Asian femininity is the old co-product of the Western gaze acting together with various local patriarchal circumstances based on the image of docile and malleable yet exotic and eroticized femininity. Clearly, that image, from the start, also involved aspects of discursive and material violence, abuse, and exploitation.[103]

Consequently, See highlights the material violence suffered by East Asian women as a result of the fetishization and racial stereotyping of Asian women in America.

The text is critical of institutions and structures that force the female protagonists to perform the China doll stereotype. Later in the novel, now famous performers with Helen as their manager, Grace and Ruby are offered better-paid work at a new Chinese nightclub in New York called the 'China Doll' (p. 324). This is emblematic of the performance of the China doll as the dancers have to actively perform the exoticized China doll stereotype while in its walls. The show at the China Doll is called 'Slant-Eyed Scandals' (p. 322), illustrating how racist language is used openly to profit from racialized bodies in the West. All the girls

[102] Chow, p. 286.
[103] Puzar, p. 90.

also ‘pretend to be Chinese’ (p. 329), showing how the women in the text are paid to act more exoticized for their American audience. Grace aspires to be a movie star, and while she recognizes that she will only be cast as a ‘maid or dragon lady’ in a film, she does not want to fight the Western establishments that ‘put people like us into a recognizable box’ (p. 135), instead she wants to be the ‘*Chinese* Eleanor Powell’, having been brought up to value American ideals over Chinese ones (p. 231).[104] The performers must either conform to the role of the China doll or become palatable to their American audience through exaggerated Chinese expressions, as well as embodying Americanized versions of themselves. As Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson notes in his interrogation of performance and law in Asian America, ‘racial subjection is most successfully realized when the state is able to seduce and compel racialized bodies to perform as raced subjects.’[105] They are viewed as exoticized commodities instead of people who must lose their own identity to make money. The women are socialized to believe this participation in Western capitalism is beneficial because they are financially rewarded and find human connection through their friendship, shown in the final lines of the text: ‘we dance and dance and dance’ (p. 376). Even though the performance of the China doll allows the performers financial freedom, this comes at the expense of being objectified and exoticized and becoming complicit in racism and capitalism. Through the China Doll nightclub, See highlights the subjugation of the China doll through their own commodification.

Although *China Dolls* portrays East Asian performers as participating in the perpetuation of stereotypes for profit, See highlights how East Asian women had no choice in catering to racist Hollywood stereotypes to financially thrive in early-twentieth-century America. Racial prejudice in Hollywood meant that white actresses would often get roles

[104] Eleanor Powell was an American dancer and actress active between 1928 and 1953.
[105] Joshua Takano. Chambers-Letson, *A Race So Different Performance and Law in Asian America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), p. 26.

over actresses of colour as shown by Grace who says, 'I looked up casting calls in *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*, but the white girl always got the job' (p. 116). Therefore, East Asian performers did not have autonomy in their performance of Asian stereotypes because of the limited opportunities available to them. These limited opportunities are alluded to in Grace's interaction with Helen's granddaughter at the end of the novel. At the 1988 reunion of the China doll performers, Helen's granddaughter questions Grace: 'Did you know you were perpetuating Asian stereotypes? How could you dance at a place called the China Doll or even tolerate being called a China doll?', which Grace struggles to answer (p. 372). Grace's inability to articulate an answer to the question also mimics her inability to voice her desires or choose the path of her career as a China doll performer during this period. Historically, Hollywood and Western audiences controlled what was popular in film and TV and so East Asian performers had no choice in perpetuating the stereotypes that were widespread in Hollywood to gain financial autonomy. As Prasso notes, 'It's not just Hollywood or Broadway or publisher's row; frequently these images are reinforced and exploited by Asians themselves, with a realization that playing to type frequently has been what sells to Western audiences'.[106] The lack of choice of East Asian actors and performers is also shown across the twentieth century in real-life examples, such as Chinese-American actresses, Anna May Wong (active: 1919-1961) and Lucy Lui (active: 1991-present), who, when questioned about their perpetuation of Asian stereotypes, both said they 'did not have much choice'.[107] See highlights how racism in the film industry materially harmed East Asian women and how the limited roles for East Asian women forced them to perpetuate the stereotype of the China Doll.

[106] Prasso, p. 316.
[107] Prasso, p. 314.

East Asian men were also forced to perpetuate East Asian stereotypes, demonstrating how Western stereotypes of racialization and sexualization harmed both racialized men and women. Unlike the female protagonists, Eddie, a queer Chinese American performer befriended by the protagonists, is resistant to the West's commodification of East Asian stereotypes, wanting to break away from the Forbidden City club scene. Eddie voices his frustration at getting typecast based on his ethnicity, saying that he does not want to be the 'Chinese Fred Astaire' and that, 'I want to be recognized for who I am and what I do' (p. 135). This is rooted in Chinese Americans having to prove their American identity more than white Americans, regardless of gender. Like Eddie's experience of being racialized, Robert S. Chang denotes his personal experience as an Asian American in *Disoriented Asian Americans, Law, and the Nation-State* (1999), noting that the label of 'Asian American' made him feel 'oddly dislocated' as 'Asian American is defined relationally to unmodified Americans' and further says, 'in the United States, my position as "American" is less certain'.[108] *China Dolls*, therefore, shows how Western racial stereotypes also affected men as well as women, whilst also demonstrating how racialized men were able to resist these stereotypes whilst women were not.

Because the China Doll stereotype is defined by the West's sexualization and objectification of feminized and racialized individuals, East Asian men can also be included in its definition because of the West's historical feminization of them. Eddie's perceived identity is wholly defined by his racialization and feminization by the West, rather than his own perceptions of self, as shown by American officers calling him 'fairy' (p. 140), and when he attempts to re-enforce his masculinity by offering to beat someone up, Helen said it 'gave us a good laugh' (p. 142). As Chow notes, 'while both being racially "othered," Asian and

[108] Robert S. Chang, *Disoriented Asian Americans, Law, and the Nation-State* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 1, 2, 3.

Asian American women have been constructed as sexually exotic docile bodies while men have been racially "castrated."'[109] Furthermore, David L. Eng argues in *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (2011), that through 'a colonial world order' which would 'define Oriental as "submission," as "weakness," as "woman"' and 'makes Oriental and masculine antithetical terms', 'an Oriental "could never be completely a man."'[110] When Helen falls pregnant outside of marriage Eddie agrees to marry her to save her from disgrace and to disguise his own homosexuality. However, Eddie's inability to live as his authentic self and the state's enforcement of hypermasculine roles upon him, such as being required to enlist in the army, causes his mental decline and he becomes an alcoholic. Eddie being stereotypically emasculated in America through his race and sexuality, as well as being forced into stereotypical roles of toxic masculinity, leads to his mental deterioration, highlighting how imposing patriarchal gendered and racialized stereotypes onto both men and women is materially harmful.

China Dolls highlights the racist Western perception of East Asian women as a monolith or 'one homogenous mass' through the China doll stereotype, in order to challenge it later in the text.[111] At first, See's text highlights how the China doll performers are perceived as interchangeable by their male bosses, with the performers often replacing each other. For example, Ruby is immediately replaced by Grace at a Hollywood film set when she is arrested. The director says, 'I need an Oriental dancer', showing how the West views East Asian women as a cohesive unit rather than as individuals with divergent backgrounds, cultures and identities (p. 210). As Sandra Lyne notes, 'Asian females become replicas, simulacra […] a commodity indistinguishable from the trinkets and fripperies of Japan's

[109] Chou, p. 14.
[110] David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 1, 3.
[111] Prasso, p. 120.

exotic merchandise'.[112] The replaceability of these women highlights how the West views China dolls as expendable objects rather than human beings. Nonetheless, through Grace, See highlights how Ruby is not a China doll that can be easily replaced, but a highly skilled performer. Grace attempts to replicate Ruby's fan and bubble act, but cannot, saying how Ruby had 'always said what she did was a lot harder than it looked, and she was right' (p. 211). Instead, Grace produces her own routine of 'Chinese opera movements' with 'ballroom styling' to become a 'motion-picture star' in her own right, indicating that 'China dolls' are not just objects that can be replaced, but unique individuals with their own talents (p. 212). *China Dolls* refutes the notion that East Asian women are a monolith, instead, identifying the protagonists as having individual skills and goals, as shown through Helen becoming a successful businesswoman, Grace becoming a mother and wife, and Ruby becoming a film star at the end of the novel.

See ultimately challenges the Asian Mystique of the China doll perpetuated by Hollywood and Western literature, demonstrating that it 'takes the image of Asian woman and distorts her to western fantasies'.[113] Despite Grace and Helen being more stereotypical of the China doll in being sexually innocent and more compliant to the wishes of men, this is subverted by Grace actively pursuing lovers and a career as a 'star' and Helen revealing her traumatic past and accidentally falling pregnant outside of marriage. More importantly, the protagonists subvert the notion of the China doll who 'suffers, waits, cares for the child, and suicides', by actively flourishing in their career goals and surviving.[114] See subverts the idea of 'Asian women as a delicate, fluttery, bewitching butterfly' in John Luther Long's *Madame Butterfly* (1898) and 'the image of sweet, gentle Japanese child-woman' in Arthur Golden's

[112] Sandra Lyne, 'Consuming Madame Chrysanthème: Loti's "dolls" to Shanghai Baby', *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* (8 October 2002), 47-59 <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue8/lyne.html> [Accessed 11 April 2023]
[113] Prasso, p. 1676.
[114] Lyne.

Memoirs of a Geisha (1997).[115] Both stereotypes of the China doll are written by men, exposing how, like the housewife stereotype, the China doll was primarily created and perpetuated by men.

China Dolls' feminist and political message is re-enforced by its front cover (Fig. 2), which subverts the passive, servile and exoticized image of the China doll by featuring an East Asian performer enthusiastically smiling and facing the reader, fully dressed in a glamourous, movie-star dress. Lyne scrutinizes the stereotypical hypersexualized and submissive images of Asian women on book covers, noting:

> The Shanghai baby/China doll construct averts its eyes, as our attention is diverted to its light, bare skin, rich black hair and sensuous lips. 'Tattoos' (the washable variety?) brand the body with overtones of primitivism, and the colour combinations, white face, black hair, tinted lips, although in a Chinese context, evoke Japanese geisha, "Madame Butterfly" make-up. (Madame Butterfly was a geisha). The shift from pink to red lips, and the loosened hair eroticise and modernise the geisha-like image.[116]

Both on the front cover and in the novel, See's 'China dolls' do not 'avert' their eyes and they are not eroticised victims, like the stereotypical Madame Butterfly or Geisha in western patriarchal literature. Instead, they are portrayed as active and vocal professionals who subvert the passive and gentle China doll stereotype.

[115] Prasso, pp. 1703, 1727.
[116] Lyne.

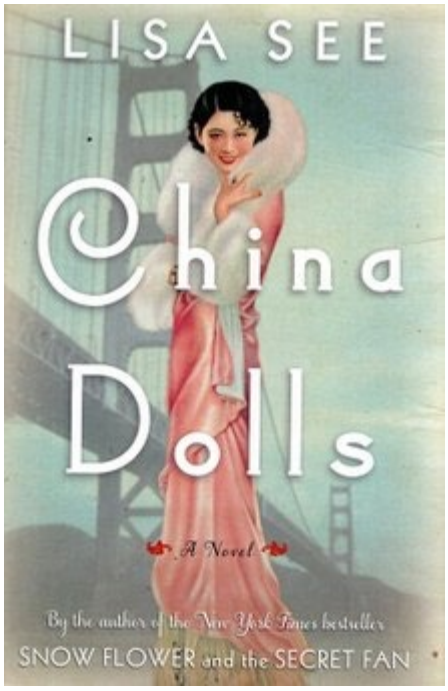

Fig. 2: Stock image of the front cover of the first edition of China Dolls taken from AbeBooks.

See turns two-dimensional stereotypes into three-dimensional characters to highlight the superficiality and oversimplification of East Asian stereotypes. The text subverts and problematizes the China Doll-Dragon Lady dichotomy through presenting the racist and sexist circumstances which force East Asian women into these binary stereotypes. For example, Ruby is modern and changing, and her ability to resist stereotypes is exemplified when she says, 'A woman isn't just one thing' (p. 150). Ruby is not the China doll or Dragon Lady, shown through her first-person accounts which portray her as a three-dimensional character who cares about her friends and family, as she is affectionate towards her female friends and inconsolable when her brother is killed. The one area where she is not emotional in is in her romantic affairs, seeing men as objects to be used and manipulated rather than loved, like the 'Dragon Lady', who is 'unfeeling, savage, sexual, and absolutely self-

serving'.[117] However, her coldness towards men is explained by their own objectification of her, as well as, her racial discrimination, as a Japanese woman trying to pass as Chinese in America, rather than as an inherent trait. She even says, 'mother had taught me about not showing my emotions', revealing that remaining unemotional is a coping mechanism passed down through the generational trauma of being racialized (p. 349). The one instance where Ruby plays the figure of the China doll is with her white American boyfriend, Joe, because she believes this is what he desires, and if she marries him that will gain her social currency in America. Ruby says, '"Joe is so American." […] "He's the most American person I've ever met. If I marry him, won't that prove I'm American too?"' (p. 193). Ruby's performance of the China doll exposes her desire to not feel 'oddly dislocated' as an Asian American woman in America.[118] When Joe questions why she never told him she was Japanese, Ruby's retort is described as 'mocking' and 'brutal' but only to 'protect herself' as she says, '"You wanted a China doll. I gave you a China doll"' (p. 208). Ruby further opposes the dragon lady who is stereotypically 'brought to submission' by a Western lover in the end as she is never romantically monogamous, saying 'no one would tie me down' (p. 319), and is still a movie star performer into old age.[119] See utilizes the character of Ruby to show the complex nature of East Asian women in America who are expected to fall into stereotypes yet refuse.

See's China dolls escape the fate of conventional, compliant marriage which characterizes the 'ventriloquised' 'Living doll' trope identified by Davies in neo-Victorian literature, as well as the Hollywood stereotype of the China doll.[120] Grace's story subverts the tradition of the Asian lover dying in film and literature and being replaced by a white woman. Instead, Grace marries Joe, the white man she loves, and her marriage is also one of

[117] Lee, p. 3.
[118] Chang, p. 1.
[119] Lee, p. 3.
[120] Davies, p. 40.

resistance because interracial marriage was illegal at the time.[121] Grace breaks the racist stereotypes regarding interracial couples perpetuated by Hollywood in the early to mid-twentieth century. For example, Prasso notes that, 'the actress Anna May Wong once complained that in the sixty films in which she appeared beginning in 1919, she always had to play a slave, temptress, prostitute, or doomed lover; whose lines were "Chinglish," who was forbidden to kiss a Western man (illegal until 1948 under California anti-miscegenation laws), and who always had to die so that the women with yellow hair could get the white man.'[122] Furthermore, Grace chooses to marry a man who accepts her for who she is, instead of Helen's brother who expects her to be a 'proper Chinese wife' (p. 137) and play the China doll. Grace's resistance to conventional marriage and systems of racial oppression through her marriage to Joe illustrates her opposition to the subjugated fate of the China doll. Helen and Ruby also resist conventional marriage, Helen marrying a gay man to disguise her illegitimate child and Ruby resisting marriage all together.

See also subverts the trope of the 'white knight' saving the China doll. Not only do the China dolls of the text save themselves, but Grace saves Joe mentally after he feels emasculated as a result of losing a limb at war.[123] Joe worries that his leg amputation has undermined his masculinity, saying to Grace, '"I didn't want to come back to you as less than a man"' (p. 342). On Joe's return from war, Grace says that 'he had always felt invincible but to me he felt almost ghostlike', identifying the hollow, traumatised Joe that has returned from war (p. 342). Grace takes control of her situation with Joe, insisting that 'Whatever you have in you, I can take it' (p. 346) and she is not willing to choose between 'love or stardom', instead choosing both (p. 347). By embodying resilience in supporting Joe, and refusing to

[121] Interracial marriage was only made legal in 1967 when the US Supreme court declared its ban 'unconstitutional'. Prasso, p. 1120.
[122] Prasso, p. 310.
[123] Prasso, p. 1863.

sacrifice her career for love, Grace resists the stereotype of the passive East Asian lover. Through this, See disrupts the idea of Asian women as 'dolls' and white men 'as the controller of the playroom', which is established in nineteenth-century literature through Pierre Loti's novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), a text which influenced *Madame Butterfly* and which has been described as creating 'male protagonists who commodify Japanese women to docile doll-like images.[124]

See, therefore, problematizes the China doll stereotype in her novel as her China doll performers resist the stereotypes set up by Hollywood and western patriarchal literature. The female protagonists' individualism and resistance to the passive China doll stereotype is found in their differing roles and career paths. Prasso highlights the growing importance of social individualism amongst East Asian communities and how they are not a cohesive unit as stereotyped by the West. As Prasso notes further in relation to East Asian women, 'there are those with mean streaks or altruistic tendencies; the flighty or the serious; those who are content to be good, nurturing mothers or those who would rather have high-flying careers'.[125] See's representation of the China doll as multi-faceted highlights how East Asian women can never be China dolls because human beings cannot adhere to two-dimensional stereotypes. It is only Western perceptions of the Asian Mystique which paints them as such.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literary image of the 'Living doll' develops from a feminine stereotype of silence, compliance and passivity in the post-World War II private household, which is critiqued by Yorke, to a more public commodification of sexualized and racialized stereotypes in the twenty-first century, which is challenged and subverted by Oates and See.

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[124] Lyne; Sadahisa Watanabe, 'Ambivalent Modernity and Exoticism: Japanese Doll-Like Women in Pierre Loti's Madame Chrysanthème and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's Tade Kū Mushi', *Japanese Language and Literature*, 56.2 (2022), 299–328 (p. 299).
[125] Prasso, pp. 533-4.

All three authors liberate their female protagonists equated with dolls as fully dimensional human beings who are not simply a victim of the 'Living doll' stereotype, rejecting the 'Living doll' as a two-dimensional feminine stereotype or 'mystique'. All the texts discussed above highlight how the 'Living doll' is controlled by patriarchal forces at times and then how the 'Living doll' stereotypes are re-purposed to reclaim the autonomy of the female protagonists from those forces. For Yorke, the 'Living doll' is re-purposed through her female protagonist manipulating the patriarchal aggressor, for Oates, it's through Doll perpetuating violence against her aggressors and, for See, it's through the China dolls not fitting into binary stereotypes of the 'Living doll'. The female characters problematize these stereotypes, highlighting how women are only relegated to stereotypes through the Western male gaze which perceives the 'Living doll' through the feminine mystique, hypersexual culture and the Asian mystique.

Contemporary women's writing highlights how the commodification of the 'Living doll' by media and Hollywood has also accelerated the gender inequality and material oppression that the figure evokes, Oates particularly scrutinizing the horrifying effect of the hypersexualized and objectified 'Living doll' stereotype on children. Oates' short stories critique the romanticization of the 'Living doll' induced by hypersexual culture and gender determinism and illustrate how, as Walter notes, the rise of hypersexual culture 'has reflected and exaggerated the deeper imbalances of power in our society'.[126] Extending this critique, See's novel shows how racialized minorities face the intersectional oppression of both gendered and racialized stereotypes through the figure of the China doll. Ultimately, the 'Living doll' is scrutinized by all three women writers as an invention of patriarchy and white supremacy.

[126] Walter p. 8.

Chapter Two.

The Barbie Doll:

The Doll as Commodity under Patriarchy and Capitalism

I'm a blond bimbo girl in a fantasy world
Dress me up, make it tight, I'm your dolly
You're my doll, rock'n'roll, feel the glamour in pink
Kiss me here, touch me there, hanky panky.

Aqua, 'Barbie Girl' Lyrics (1997)

In 1997, Danish-Norwegian band, Aqua, released the song 'Barbie Girl', a parody and social commentary on the cultural misogyny Barbie represents. Mattel sued MCA Records (Aqua's music label) six months later, only to lose the case and then use the song on a promotional video in 2009.[1] That Mattel was prepared to capitalise on a feminist critique it had earlier tried to suppress perfectly illustrates how the company favours profit over feminist principles. Nevertheless, Mattel have attempted to use the newly released film *Barbie* (2023) to re-brand the controversial figure in a feminist light, hoping to latch on to the popularity of its female director Greta Gerwig and a renewed interest in feminism in its fourth wave due to online activism, with much success. The film grossed over one billion dollars at the box office in the first seventeen days of release and Mattel's revenue from doll and accessories sales increased by $125 million.[2] Mattel's Barbie first came to the American market in 1959 and has since been one of the best-selling toys of all time, having made $1.68 billion in sales globally in 2021 alone.[3] Barbie's success is attributed to Mattel's ability to shift with the times and

[1] Stuart Elliott, 'Years Later, Mattel Embraces "Barbie Girl"', *New York Times* (2009) <https://archive.nytimes.com/mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/26/years-later-mattel-embraces-barbie-girl/> [Accessed 29 September 2022]

[2] Anon, 'Barbie film hits $1bn mark at global box office', BBC (7 August 2023) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-66424359> [Accessed 19 March 2023]; Joan Verdon, 'Barbie Movie Boosted Mattel's Sales, But Investors Held Their Applause', Forbes (25 October 2023) < https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanverdon/2023/10/25/barbie-movie-boosted-mattels-sales-but-investors-held-their-applause/?sh=66d2b971bd4a> [Accessed 19 March 2024].

[3] Anon, 'Gross sales of Mattel's Barbie brand worldwide from 2012 to 2021', *Statistica* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/370361/gross-sales-of-mattel-s-barbie-brand/> [Accessed 6 October 2022]

monetise on popular trends, primarily pushing for a celebration of 'successful' women over a promotion of feminist equality and diversity. The release of a Barbie doll modelled after Queen Elizabeth II for her jubilee is an example of the romanticization of women's power without scrutinizing the patriarchal values that created unequal power structures such as the monarchy. This chapter critiques the placement of Barbie as feminist, by her creator Ruth Handler and some third-wave feminists, through an analysis of American women's writing which highlights Mattel's Barbie as complicit in the subjugation of women.

Barbie is an icon of American consumer culture and Eurocentric feminine beauty standards, which has shaped, or distorted, what has been viewed as normal or desirable by children and adults. Art and media, such as Aqua's 'Barbie Girl' song and Thomas Forsyth's art exhibition 'Food Chain Barbie', both released in 1997, have famously attempted to critique the sexist connotations of Barbie through parody, yet the feminist criticism of Barbie in literature has been underexplored.[4] This chapter focuses on the altering and damaging potential of Barbie, particularly on children and marginalized communities, highlighted by women writers who feature Barbie in their literary works. It shows how women writers underline the harmful role played by Barbie as a commodity in women's oppression and patriarchy through capitalism, in texts which focus on the power of the Barbie doll industry and its legacy of consumer culture fuelled by whiteness, sexism and heteronormativity. This chapter explores five key areas – capitalism and consumerism, femininity and beauty, hyper-sexualization and male violence, race, and queerness – to analyse how women writers represent Barbie as a patriarchal figure in their fiction. It argues that late-twentieth century and twenty-first century women writers resist the attempt by some third-wave feminists to

[4] Anon, 'Tom Forsythe's Food Chain Barbie', *NCAC* (2008) <https://ncac.org/update/tom-forsythes-food-chain-barbie> [Accessed 4 October 2022].

reclaim Barbie as empowering for women, and instead critique Barbie as heteropatriarchal and capitalist in their fictional representation of this iconic doll.

The texts analysed in this chapter primarily come from an array of short story collections or novels from the 1990s which suggests an upsurge in women's literature that explores Barbie during this period. These include A. M. Homes' *The Safety of Objects* (1990), Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991), Richard Peabody and Lucinda Ebersole's *Mondo Barbie* (1993), Barbara Kingsolver's *Pigs in Heaven* (1993) and Barbara Walker's *Feminist Fairytales* (1996). Some texts from the twenty-first century will also feature, including a short story from Eve Ensler's short story collection *I am an Emotional Creature* (2010) and Shay Youngblood's graphic novel *Black Power Barbie* (2013). A large proportion of the texts examined come from *Mondo Barbie*, a collection of poems and short stories that feature Barbie published in New York, just three years after Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) which reprised the second-wave feminist critique of feminine beauty standards. In their introduction to this collection of poems and short stories (most of them dating from 1990 to 1993), editors Peabody and Ebersole state that the volume is 'a home for brave Barbie survivors' which attempts to find 'a way to reach all those warped by Barbie'.[5] *Mondo Barbie* features literature from writers of several backgrounds, who repurpose Barbie in a subversive way in order to explore Barbie's impact on child and adult identity, often through satire. In her text *Barbie Culture* (1999), Mary F. Rogers suggests that *Mondo Barbie* can be found on library shelves amongst queer literature, subverting Barbie's heteronormative foundations, which will be expanded on in the final section of this chapter.[6] The volume contains poetry by women writers, including the poem 'Barbie doll' (1971) by famous second-wave feminist Marge Piercy, only published twelve years after the creation of Barbie.

[5] Richard Peabody and Lucinda Ebersole, *Mondo Barbie* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. xvi.
[6] Rogers, p. 46.

However, my discussion focuses on the fiction from the collection. The introduction of *Mondo Barbie* does not explicitly mention Barbie's relationship to feminism, but this chapter examines the feminist uses of Barbie in several short stories from *Mondo Barbie* to remedy this.

Barbie and Feminism

Barbie has been an object of controversy since her arrival in 1959, and many second-wave feminists during the mid to late twentieth century have suggested that Barbie's slim and disproportioned look has harmed women, regardless of Barbie's supposedly 'feminist' changes through the years. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) summarises the beauty expectations of women in society around the time of Barbie's creation as being white, blonde, thin and feminine as a result of mainstream marketing and media, and Barbie perpetuated this.[7] Though Mattel has attempted to undo this harmful beauty stereotype propagated by their creation of the 'original' Barbie by releasing Barbies of colour, the 'Curvy Barbie', and more androgynous Barbies, the Barbie doll is still heavily associated with being white, slim and feminine.[8] In fact, the 'curvy' Barbie added to harmful discourse surrounding women's body standards, as Rebecca C. Hains denotes, 'although curvy Barbie's body mould would scale up to approximately a US women's size 4—still well below a U.S. woman's average size—*Time* reported the story as though this size increase made the doll

[7] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, New ed. / introduction by Lionel Shriver (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 6, 7. Friedan's text outlines the unhappiness of housewives in the 15 years after World War Two.
[8] M. G. Lord, 'Barbie', *Britannica* (n.d.) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Barbie> [Accessed 11 October 2022]; Claire Bates, 'How does "Curvy Barbie" compare with an average woman?', *BBC* (2016) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35670446> [Accessed 7 October 2022]; Ashley Vega, 'Are the new Ken doll looks based on lesbian comedian Cameron Esposito?', *Gay Star News* (2017) <https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/new-ken-doll-looks-based-lesbian-comedian-cameron-esposito/> [Accessed 7 April 2022].

fat.'[9] Germaine Greer argues in *The Whole Woman* (1999) that despite the release of a Barbie with her 'bosom and hips […] slightly reduced and her waist slightly enlarged' in 1998, Barbie has taught women to 'despise their bodies'.[10] Similarly, Susan Bordo, in her influential text *Unbearable Weight* (1993), notes that is it 'absurd' to suggest 'that the development of a "Happy to Be Me" Barbie style doll of nonanorexic proportions signifies that feminist concerns over the cultural tyranny of slenderness are "out of date."'[11] Such pronouncements on Barbie align with compelling arguments about the body made within second-wave feminism which scrutinize unattainable beauty and body expectations for women as patriarchal.[12] Within the framework made by Bordo and Greer, Barbie is not a harbinger for feminist progress and diverse iterations of Barbie do not reflect inclusive changes in society. Rather, Barbie is harmful to women's body image and any attempt to reflect real women in Barbie by Mattel is virtue signalling.

Feminist critique of Barbie has not been made without repercussions from her creator, Mattel, who have attempted to sue anyone who has tried to criticize Barbie through their art, as was the case with Aqua's 'Barbie Girl'. Another example of Mattel's resistance to criticism is when, in 1999, Mattel tried to sue artist Thomas Forsythe for using Barbie dolls in an exhibition which critiqued the objectification of women associated with Barbie by showing naked Barbie dolls damaged by household appliances; Mattel lost the case in 2001 under the protection of artistic freedom.[13] Additionally, Ophira Edut's edited collection of feminist

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[9] Rebecca C. Hains, 'The Politics of Barbie's Curvy New Body: Marketing Mattel's Fashionistas Line', *The Marketing of Children's Toys: Critical Perspectives on Children's Consumer Culture*, eds. Rebecca C. Hains and Nancy A. Jennings (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 265-283 (p. 274).
[10] Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (New York: Random House, 2014), p. 32.
[11] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 29.
[12] As Wolf does in *The Beauty Myth*.
[13] Davis notes, 'Forsythe earned less than $3,700 from his Barbie work, with half the sales coming from Mattel investigators'. Joyzelle Davis, 'Mattel can't sue Utah man, court says', *Deseret News* (2003), <https://www.deseret.com/2003/12/30/19803840/mattel-can-t-sue-utah-man-court-says> [Accessed 27 September 2022].

essays titled, *Adios, Barbie: Young Women Write about Body Image and Identity* (1998), had to change its name to *Body Outlaws: Rewriting the Rules of Beauty and Body Image* when Mattel filed a trademark infringement lawsuit against Seal Press, demonstrating Mattel's attempts to even silence feminist women writers who reject Barbie.[14] Mattel's attempts to silence all forms of feminist protest against Barbie illustrates it as an institution which upholds patriarchy. As Martine Delvaux argues, Mattel believes Barbie must remain 'untouched' by critique because 'Barbie is one of the Tables of the Law of misogyny', a patriarchal power that exists to harm 'organic women' and avoid criticism.[15]

Despite this robust critique of Barbie's harmful effects on women by second-wave feminist discourse and some artists, other famous artists have been celebratory of Barbie. Like Mattel, these artists tend to monetise on Barbie's success. For example, luxury accessory designer Sophie Webster collaborated with Mattel in 2015 to design a collection of heels, sneakers and flats for the adult footwear market inspired by Barbie priced at between £320 and £395.[16] Webster has a webpage titled 'Barbie by SW' which features a Barbie doll modelled after herself, a Barbie film called 'All Dolled Up' and pictures from a photoshoot with model Kali Uchi dressed as Barbie, all used to promote her highly-priced shoes.[17] Another example is Craig Yoe's *The Art of Barbie: Artists Celebrate the World's Favourite Doll* (1994) which showcases artwork featuring Barbie such as Andy Warhol's famous 'Portrait of BillyBoy*' (1986) which sold for £722,500 in 2014.[18] Warhol was inspired by

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[14] Ophira Edut, eds., *Body Outlaws: Rewriting the Rules of Beauty and Body Image* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2004), p. iii.
[15] Martine Delvaux, *Serial Girls: from Barbie to Pussy Riot*, trans by. Susanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood (Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines, 2016), p. 31.
[16] Anon, 'Everything You Need to Know About Sophia Webster's Barbie-Inspired Collection', *Marie Claire* (2015) <https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/news/fashion-news/barbie-by-sophia-webster-54105> [Accessed 9 October 2022]
[17] 'Barbie by SW', *Sophia Webster* (n.d.) <https://www.sophiawebster.com/sophia-world/tag/barbie-by-sw> [Accessed 9 October 2022]
[18] Anon, 'The Property of BillyBoy*Andy Warhol (1928-1987)', *Christie's* (2014) <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5834402> [Accessed 8 October 2022] Artwork description: head and shoulders of Barbie in Warhol's pop art style. The portrait is also used for cover of *The Art of Barbie*.

fashion designer, and self-proclaimed 'Barbie collector extraordinaire', BillyBoy* who wrote *Barbie: Her Life and Times* (1987), a celebratory history of Barbie and her effect on fashion and American culture.[19] BillyBoy*, as Warhol's muse, exemplifies the reclamation of Barbie as a gay icon, particularly to gay men, which will be discussed further in the 'queering Barbie' section of this chapter. Nonetheless, BillyBoy* has since revoked his support for Barbie saying 'Barbie is no longer touching on the zeitgeist of the moment' and that if he had a daughter, he would not buy her Barbie dolls because he would not want her 'to be constantly obsessed with getting something, and that immense preoccupation with high-heeled shoes and clothes.'[20] BillyBoy*'s new view of Barbie as materialistic, and Webster and Warhol profiting from Barbie's iconography, show how the celebration of Barbie in the late-twentieth and twenty-first century is about materialism and consumerism rather than empowerment.

Even some feminists have attempted to reclaim Barbie as a feminist icon, for example, Susan Shapiro, whose work aligns with the hyper-feminine ideologies of third-wave feminism, such as 'Girlies' and 'lipstick feminism'.[21] Shapiro argues that Barbie 'empowered young girls' to follow any career path they choose in her article 'Barbie Turns 60 Today. When Her Creator Was That Age, She Launched a Business Making Comfortable Prosthetic Breasts. On the Dick Cavett Show, She Asked the Host to Feel Them'.[22] Shapiro admires Barbie's creator and co-founder of Mattel, Ruth Handler, who has always argued that Barbie

[19] Hannah Moore, 'Why Warhol painted Barbie', *BBC* (2015) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34407991> [Accessed 8 October 2022]; Billy Boy, *Barbie: Her Life and Times* (New York: Crown Pub, 1987); BillyBoy*, *Barbie: Her Life and Times* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1987).
[20] Moore.
[21] Shapiro published her first book in 1996; Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, 10th anniversary edn (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), p. 398; Sona Gaur, 'Feminism: A Political Crusade Against Patriarchy', *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences & Humanities*, 6 (2018), 5-7 (p. 7).
[22] Shapiro.

is feminist, saying that she helps girls 'dream about the future and its endless possibilities'.[23] Shapiro further suggests that Barbie never becoming a mother is a feminist choice made by Handler: 'Eager to promote careers over the domesticity that bored her, Ruth refused, insisting Barbie represent a female's right to choose her own life.'[24] According to Handler and Shapiro, Barbie is not a doll meant to mother, she is, as American short story writer Jill McCorkle states 'a sophisticated grown-up doll, a recipient of fantasies that involved far more than motherhood.'[25] These fantasies were meant to involve little girls actively using their imagination and projecting themselves onto Barbie so they could go horse-back riding, swimming, or become a pop star or doctor, all through Barbie.[26] Although Barbie was meant to encompass more than motherhood, a pregnant Midge (Barbie's best friend) was released by Mattel in 2002, suggesting that Handler did not maintain this principle across all of her doll line.[27] This caused a backlash from the public because they felt it promoted teen pregnancy and went against family values as Midge was originally sold outside of a nuclear family and without a wedding ring.[28] Mattel's discontinuation of Midge as a result of her unpopularity is mocked in the Barbie movie, showing how, once again, Mattel attempts to undermine, or even profit from, any criticism towards them. Hence, it is likely Barbie never became a mother out of controversy rather than out of feminism and the creation of a career-focussed Barbie is not feminist because it does not recognize or reflect the material barriers marginalized individuals face in career progression. Therefore, Handler's claim that 'Barbie

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[23] Ruth Handler, 'Forward', *Barbie: A Visual Guide to the Ultimate Fashion Doll*, eds. Marie Greenwood, Jacqueline Jackson, Robert Opie and Carol Spencer (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2000), p. 7.
[24] Susan Shapiro, 'Barbie, Like Her Creator, Is a Feminist: Barbie Turns 60 Today. When Her Creator Was That Age, She Launched a Business Making Comfortable Prosthetic Breasts. On the Dick Cavett Show, She Asked the Host to Feel Them', *The Daily Beast* (New York: The Newsweek/Daily Beast Company LLC, 2019), Proquest Online, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2189241422> [Accessed 23 March 2022]
[25] Handler, p. 7; Shapiro; Jill McCorkle, 'Introduction', in *The Art of Barbie*, ed. by Craig Yoe (New York: Workman, 1994), pp. 11-15 (p. 11).
[26] Handler, p. 7; McCorkle, p. 13.
[27] Christina Caron, 'Barbie "Obsession": Collectors Reflect on Hobby as Pregnant Midge Doll Is Reported Stolen', *ABC News* (2011) <https://abcnews.go.com/US/barbie-obsession-collectors-reflect-hobby-pregnant-midge-doll/story?id=13912462> [Accessed 10 October 2022]
[28] Ibid.

mirrored a girl's world' does hold true, as long as the girl was white, heterosexual, able-bodied, slim and middle-class.[29]

Such attempts to promote Barbie as a feminist icon illustrate Barbie as a symbol of white Girl Boss feminism, which celebrates the capital gains of women, often 'privileging white heterosexual middle-class femininity', a third wave notion that is critiqued by Angela McRobbie as 'anti-feminist'.[30] Mattel's promotion of Barbie's career through the #YouCanBeAnything Campaign is the epitome of Girl Boss feminism as it implies the post-feminist belief that there are no longer barriers for women in the workplace.[31] For Riley and Pearce, 'there is currency […] in presenting the Barbie girl as a success: a fact that is deeply troubling for feminism'.[32] Mattel's romanticization of Barbie as a post-feminist, pro-capitalist success story is harmful because it perpetuates the notion that feminism is no longer needed if women can become financially successful. Postfeminism 'builds on the idea of the enterprising self, that is, the assumption that human nature is essentially entrepreneurial – active, individualist, competitive, and growth oriented', and is now associated with 'Girl Boss Feminism' or 'white feminism', as well as pro-capitalism.[33] McRobbie 'understands post-feminism to refer to an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s come to be undermined.'[34] Postfeminism is dangerous as it assumes, like some third-wave feminists, that because some women can now be financially successful, we have reached gender equality, which is inherently false, and meaning postfeminists do not critique capitalism, but

[29] Handler, p. 7.
[30] Anna Alexandersson, and Viktorija Kalonaityte, 'Girl Bosses, Punk Poodles, and Pink Smoothies: Girlhood as Enterprising Femininity', *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 28.1 (2021), 416–38 (p. 419); Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: SAGE, 2008), p. 157.
[31] Barbie (@Barbie, 28 July 2020), 'From the polls to the podium, #Barbie knows that girls are made to lead. #Barbie2020 #YouCanBeAnything' (tweet) <https://twitter.com/Barbie/status/1288172439608766465> [Accessed 1 June 2022]
[32] Catherine Riley and Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and Women's Writing: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 72.
[33] Alexandersson and Kalonaityte, p. 417.
[34] Angela McRobbie, 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture', *Feminist Media Studies*, 4.3 (2004), 255–64 (p. 255).

celebrate it. Barbie stands as a symbol of this postfeminist, Girl Boss success, only catering to middle-class families globally and signifying capitalist, and therefore patriarchal, celebration as capitalism is by nature patriarchal.

Backlash against the pro-capitalist message of Girl Boss feminism from social media in 2021 has caused Mattel to move away from this image and attempt to be more diverse and inclusive to increase profit. According to Alex Abad-Santos, the posting of memes that critique Girl Boss feminism by highlighting 'the hollowness of capitalism' illustrates 'the last gasps of the girlboss.'[35] Barbie has adapted to reflect the death of the girl boss with a refocus on identity over career, as seen in Mattel's production of queer Barbies, Barbies of colour and Barbies with differing body types. Handler notes how Barbie reflects the 'fashions and attitudes of the times', but this is only to remain popular and profitable rather than feminist.[36] As of March 2024, the Barbie X (formally Twitter) account has never posted the word 'feminist' or 'feminism' and yet its attempt to appear more feminist through its film and marketing campaigns that are more diverse and inclusive have led to the renewed popularity of Barbie.[37] By the summer of 2022, Barbie culture and 'Barbiecore' fashion (a hyperfeminine and hyper-pink style of dress) were trending due to the *Barbie* film in production and the promotion of ground-breaking signature and collector's edition Barbies such as the first transgender Barbie, modelled after Laverne Cox, and the first Queen Elizabeth II Barbie to celebrate her Platinum Jubilee.[38] The Queen Elizabeth II Barbie seems

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[35] Alex Abad-Santos, 'The Death of the Girlboss', *Vox* (2021) <https://www.vox.com/22466574/gaslight-gatekeep-girlboss-meaning> [Accessed 10 October 2022].
[36] Handler, p. 7.
[37] Mattel have attempted to reflect different backgrounds and cultures in Barbie, evening tweeting in Spanish instead of American English. Barbie (@Barbie, 15 September 2022), 'Barbie celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month because it's important for kids to see themselves in their toys and in the people, they look up to, so they can imagine how their own dreams can come true.', translated from Spanish by Google (tweet) <https://twitter.com/Barbie/status/1570461685470855169> [Accessed on 11 October 2022].
[38] Hikmat Mohammed, 'How Barbiecore Is Sweeping Fashion', *WWD* (2022), 14-14; Matt Donnelly, 'Margot Robbie's 'Barbie' Sets 2023 Release Date, Unveils First-Look Photo', *Variety* (26 April 2022) https://variety.com/2022/film/news/margot-robbie-barbie-release-date-1235241864/> [Accessed 27 April 2022];

less for women's empowerment due to her unrelatability and more for profiting from collectors who wish to purchase limited edition items, the £95 doll selling out in three seconds at John Lewis, with many purchasers hoping to re-sell her for over double this price on eBay.[39] Mattel have realised the increased profit margin of selling limited edition Barbies to adults, rather than just as children's dolls and so have adapted Barbie in order to create the largest profit margin, rather than for feminist change. As Delvaux notes, 'Barbie is one of the faces of this state-fuelled commodification of women built on their serialization'.[40] Delvaux is critical of Mattel as a company, noting that their insincere attempts to create more 'feminist' iterations of Barbie only show their 'crocodile tears' for the fate of women.[41] Instead of feminism, Mattel's Barbie model is driven by populism, consumerism and capitalist greed. In what follows, I explore how these critiques manifest in women's fiction, particularly in the nineties, starting with capitalism and consumerism.

Capitalism and Consumerism

Mattel's focus on profit over gender, race and class equality is exemplified in the cleverly titled short stories 'Barbie-Q' (1991) and 'Free Barbie' (2010) discussed below, which exposes Mattel's perpetuation of class inequalities and appalling record on workers' rights. Mattel's motive for diversifying Barbie is always to add value and money to their already vast enterprise, initially selling Barbie at a low price and then selling her outfits separately for

Jonny Yates, 'Laverne Cox is finally getting her own Barbie doll as the trailblazing icon makes history', *Pink News* (25 May 2022), <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2022/05/25/laverne-cox-barbie-doll-where-to-buy/> [Accessed 26 May 2022]; Barbie (@Barbie, 21 April 2022), 'With 70 years of service, Queen Elizabeth II is the longest serving British monarch, and first to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee. #Barbie observes the landmark occasion with a doll in her likeness, dressed in an ivory gown, blue riband, and a regal crown.' (tweet) <https://twitter.com/Barbie/status/1517171309842628608> [Accessed 27 April 2022].

[39] Zoe Wood, 'Platinum jubilee Queen Barbie sells out in three seconds', *Guardian* (13 May 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/may/13/platinum-jubilee-queen-barbie-doll-sells-out-three-seconds> [Accessed 1 June 2022].

[40] Delvaux, p. 42.

[41] Delvaux, p. 31.

more.[42] In the 'Barbie' entry for *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Consumption and Consumer Studies,* Agnes Nairn notes that Barbie 'is a ubiquitous and timeless consumer success story'.[43] In 2019, Mattel's image of power and monopoly through the Barbie doll came under question as it was revealed that Barbie™ was three billion dollars in debt and had lost two thirds of its value since 2016. [44] Jim Osman notes that Mattel 'appears to be grasping at straws' with their production of inclusive dolls.[45] Mattel's virtue-signalling for profit over being genuinely supportive of marginalized communities means that they market Barbie to those who can afford to buy her, even if the Barbie itself is being remarketed as racially and culturally diverse to a Western audience. Carol L. Magee notes, 'Mattel's marketing of Barbie with a sari or other regionally marked ethnic costumes targets the middle and upper classes in India, for instance, as they have the economic ability to partake in a consumer lifestyle.'[46] Barbie only reflects what is afforded to middle to upper class individuals, such as being able to live in a dream house and dress up in any luxury outfit of their choosing. Consequently, Barbie only caters to wealthy communities, and so is superficially inclusive.

Sandra Cisneros' short story 'Barbie-Q', published in Chicana-feminist short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991), reveals how Barbie is deployed to nurture American consumer participation and the erasure of non-American cultural identity from a young age. 'Barbie-Q' is narrated by an unnamed girl and the title refers to the scorched

[42] As Marvin Barab observes, '"It's the Gillette razor approach. Give away the razor and sell the blades."' Jerry Oppenheimer, *Toy Monster the Big, Bad World of Mattel* (Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2009), p. 30.
[43] Agnes Nairn, 'Barbie', *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Consumption and Consumer Studies*, eds. Daniel Thomas Cook and J. Michael Ryan, (2015), pp. 30-32 (p. 30). The idea that Barbie is 'timeless' alludes to her inability to move away from her image of blondeness, thinness and whiteness, despite re-marketisation.
[44] Jim Osman, 'Mattel's Time Is Running Out Amid Federal Securities Probe, And Not Even Barbie Can Save It', *Forbes* (22 October 2019) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jimosman/2019/10/22/-mattel-federal-securities-probe-bankruptcy/?sh=3fb7ccc85cb8> [Accessed 26 May 2022]
[45] Ibid.
[46] Carol L. Magee, *Africa in the American Imagination Popular Culture, Racialized Identities, and African Visual Culture* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), p. 88.

Barbie dolls the girl can now buy at the market after a local toy factory burns down.[47] The description of the material junk surrounding Barbie as the girls are searching for her at the market exposes Barbie as no more than well-marketed rubbish and highlights the effect of Barbie's commercial propaganda on young girls:

> *There!* Lying on the street next to some tool bits, and platform shoes with the heels all squashed, and a fluorescent green wicker wastebasket, and aluminium foil, and hub-caps, and a pink shag rug, and windshield wiper blades, and dusty mason jars, and a coffee can full of rusty nails. *There!* Where? Two Mattel boxes […] next to the boxed pipes, and bright orange toilet brushes, and rubber gloves, and wrench sets, and bouquet of feather flowers, and glass towel racks […] *there!* And *There*, And *there!* And *there!* And *there!* And *there!* And *there!* [48]

The artificial colours of 'florescent green', 'pink', and 'bright orange' highlight the superficiality of consumer culture. The items associated with domestic labour such as 'toilet brushes', 'rubber gloves' and 'towels racks' also underscore the role dolls like Barbie play in socializing consumer and domestic expectations on young girls.[49] The passage emphasizing and repeating '*there!*' ironically mimics the excitement consumers feel when purchasing items, and the exclamation mark further underlines the thrill that Barbie's marketing socializes from a young age. The technique of listing also connotes a shopping list, alluding to the consumerist mindset the girl has adopted through living in a capitalist and consumer-orientated society. As Cecilia Donohue observes, in her analysis of *Woman Hollering Creek*, 'playing with Barbie, it seems, is a rehearsal for consumerism.'[50] Donohue also notes that

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[47] The term 'Barbie-Q' also describes Barbie's 'Barbie-Q' outfit which featured an apron and cooking utensils, a stereotypically feminine role. Yet the illusion to the more 'masculine' role of barbequing problematizes the gendered connotations of the term. This particular doll does not feature in the story but the parodied allusion to the doll satirises Barbie's stereotypical femininity. Robin Gerber, *Barbie Forever: Her Inspiration, History, and Legacy (Official 60th Anniversary Collection)* (United States: Epic Ink, 2019), p. 124.

[48] Sandra Cisneros, 'Barbie-Q', *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin Round House, 1991), p. 15. Subsequent references in parentheses.

[49] This is similar to Molly Rosner's point that many toys and games from the 1980s and '90s 'prepared girls to shop and find a date with the cutest boy […] and suggest stereotypical activities for girls— shopping, dating, and if she were professional she would likely be a teacher'. Molly Rosner, *Playing with History: American Identities and Children's Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), p. 125.

[50] Cecilia Donohue, *Sandra Cisneros' Woman Hollering Creek* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), p. 80.

‘Barbie-Q’ is the only story in the short story collection which is exclusively in English (the rest being partly in Spanish) and ‘the children have no names at all’, exposing Barbie’s erasure of children’s cultural identity in order to socialize an American consumerist identity.[51] ‘Barbie-Q’ shows how Barbie stands in as a symbol of American consumer culture, as well as cultural and class erasure for children.

‘Barbie-Q’ highlights the class disparity in Barbie ownership, illustrating how Barbie is a symbol of inequality in American consumer culture. Before she heads to the market, the girl’s lower class status is highlighted as she says two outfits are ‘all we can afford’ for Barbie and that she has ‘a dress invented from an old sock when we cut holes here and here and here, the cuff rolled over for the glamorous fancy-free, off-the-shoulder look’ (p. 14). The contrast of ‘glamorous’ and the use of a sock emphasizes the children’s creativity despite their lack of spending power, showing how childhood fun does not have to involve consumerism. The ‘Career Gal’ and ‘Sweet Dreams’ Barbies on offer at the market before the factory burns down highlight how Barbie is a façade for the American dream (p. 15). Barbie sells a materialistic lifestyle to communities who cannot afford it without recognizing the consequences or barriers to their career success or dreams. Barbie is explicitly emphasized as the Girl Boss here by embodying and catering towards white, middle-class communities. As highlighted by Rogers in *Barbie Culture*, the unequal access to Barbie and her accessories amongst different social classes ‘points toward the connections between the harshness of many American childhoods and the cruelties of the American class structure.’[52]

Barbie is also a symbol of capitalist destruction in ‘Barbie-Q’, directly harming marginalized communities through devastation, pollution and climate change. The girl only has access to an array of ‘water-soaked and sooty’ Barbies from the burnt down toy factory,

[51] Donohue, p. 81.
[52] Rogers, p. 82.

illustrating how capitalism leaves poorer communities with the remnants of disaster (p. 16). This is further highlighted by the scene of the burning factory in the background of the market: 'the smoke still rising and drifting across the Dan Ryan expressway' (p. 15). The, likely toxic, burnt Barbies and the burning factory which pollutes the air of the surrounding communities is symbolic of the way pollution affects poorer communities the most. This also alludes to the wider issue of how emissions from Western capitalism, of which Mattel is an enormous contributor, adversely impacts non-white, impoverished countries and communities (primarily the global South) the most through climate change.[53] The girl dressing her charred and melted dolls in her new 'Proms Pink' outfit and declaring 'who's to know' at the end is a sardonic exposure of how Barbie's image of pink perfection hides a more sinister capitalist system of exploitation and pollution which harms marginalized communities the most (p. 16).

Like the exposure of American class inequalities through Barbie in 'Barbie-Q', 'Free Barbie' from Eve Ensler's *I am an Emotional Creature* (2010) exposes the inequalities in Barbie possession and production, but globally, particularly in relation to the West exploiting the East. Set in Kwai Yong, China, and narrated by a 13-year-old factory worker, Chang Ying, who puts the heads on Barbie dolls, the story follows her present tense thoughts. As in 'Barbie-Q', Chang Ying highlights the class disparity between Barbie and herself, comparing 'Barbie's dream house' to her 'nightmare house' and how one Barbie costs more than what she earns in a week. [54] The contrast between Barbie's superior treatment as a plastic doll and Chang Ying's poor treatment as a human being in the supply chain highlights the value placed on the product over the worker under capitalism and its subsequent dehumanization of workers. This dehumanization of humans and veneration of dolls is also clear in Oates' 'The-

[53] Kehinde Andrews, *The New Age of Empire How Racism and Colonialism Still Rule the World* (UK: Penguin, 2021), p. 166. Kindle Edition.
[54] Eve Ensler, 'Free Barbie', in *I am an Emotional Creature* (New York: Villard Books, 2010), pp. 82-86 (p. 84). Subsequent references in parentheses.

Doll-Master' and demonstrates how the figure of the doll can reduce female agency. The term 'Free Barbie' is ambiguous, alluding to Barbie's cheap value as a commodity, as well as freeing Chang Ying and Barbie herself from the production line. Chang Ying notes how Barbie's body is made 'perfect' (p. 83):

> Her body comes from Taiwan. Her hair gets stuck on in Japan. Then she comes to China to get clothes and get her head put on her body. They say that 23,000 trucks a day go back and forth to the harbor crammed with Barbies so they can all sail to America and get packed in pink and sent out (p. 83).

Here, the fantasy of Barbie is reserved for white, wealthy western consumers, whilst non-Western countries are exploited. The violent verbs 'stuck' and 'crammed' contrasted with the appealing descriptors 'perfect' and 'packed in pink', shows the differing experiences of the East and the West in the production line of Barbie, and serves as an artificial mirage surrounding Barbie's attractiveness for America. The passage is also reflective of Mattel's manufacturing and sales location as, although the vast majority of their sales are in North America, their manufacturing plants are primarily in China, Indonesia and Mexico.[55] Chang Ying's listing of the countries in the production line exposes the extent of the East's exploitation by the West and sets up the story as one of resistance against Western consumerism.

Chang Ying utilizes Barbie as an attempt to articulate protest. Through using Barbie as a communication device, she invents the idea of 'head send', where she believes she can plant her thoughts into each Barbie's head, and the new owner of that Barbie will hear the message (p. 83). It is revealed at the beginning of the text that Chang Ying cannot read or write her message, so the entire text is articulated to the reader in English through head send,

[55] D. Tighe, 'Revenue of Mattel worldwide from 2018 to 2021, by region', *Statistica* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/198722/international-revenue-of-mattel-by-region/> [Accessed 6 October 2022]

illustrating how the Western reader is the target audience for this narrative of protest (pp. 82-3). She says, 'If you listen very closely to your Barbie – put her head to your ear like a shell – you will hear what I have to say' (p. 83). The shell is a metaphor for communication across boundaries and its connection to nature shows a resistance against manufactured commodities. She attempts to 'head send' 'Free Barbie' to the rest of the world. However, this is a cry for help from Chang Ying herself, who wishes to escape her oppressive and exploitative situation. The final words of the short story are: 'Head Send: *Free Chang Ying!* Head Send: *Free Chang Ying! Let her out of this dirty sweaty factory.* Head Send: *Please*' (p. 86). Chang Ying's desperate and powerful plea to escape the life of the factory through Barbie illustrates how Ensler has created a narrative of resistance to the economic slavery that Barbie represents.

Chang Ying can be critical of Barbie and Mattel because her relationship to Barbie is one of exploitation and she has not been exposed to the Western marketing and consumer culture that surrounds the doll. Unlike many girls in the West, Chang Ying is not affected by the beauty and body expectations of Barbie and does not see her as loveable. She says, 'I do not think anyone really looks like Barbie' and thinks about how Barbie is hard to love because 'she is very tough, so much plastic' and 'very greedy and needy' (p. 84). Chang Ying is specifically critical of Mattel, differentiating the doll from the manufacturer and so 'Free Barbie' also stands for freeing Barbie from the grips of Mattel. Chang Ying insists 'it's not Barbie's fault' as 'so many people control her' and that 'she has less freedom' even than herself (p. 84). Chang Ying directly blames Mattel for creating and controlling Barbie and wants Barbie to go from 'makeover to takeover' and expose the horrors of Mattel's exploitative production line (p. 85). However, the use of catchy marketing language shows the impossibility of liberating Barbie from the consumerist forces that have constructed her and how, like Barbie, Chang Ying cannot escape her role as a permanent feature of the supply

chain. Both 'Barbie-Q' and 'Free Barbie' highlight Barbie's oppression of poor and working-class people of colour. However, 'Barbie-Q' shows how Barbie nurtures American materialism and consumerism in young girls in the West, whilst 'Free Barbie' shows how young girls in the East are critical of and resistant to this socialization. Chang Ying's critical voice towards Mattel illustrates her protest against the exploitative capitalist production line, as well as the beauty standards, materialism and consumerism pushed through Western marketing.

Beauty and Femininity

Western consumer culture and marketing promote unattainable Western beauty standards which are perpetuated through Barbie's disproportionately thin frame, hairless body, small nose, and perfectly made-up face. Natasha Walter's feminist text *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (2011) notes:

> Living a doll's life seems to have become an aspiration for many young women, as they leave childhood behind only to embark on a project of grooming, dieting and shopping that aims to achieve the bleached, waxed, tinted look of a Bratz or Barbie doll. [56]

The cosmetics and diet industry promote a 'perfect', and deliberately unattainable, version of womanhood which can only be achieved through self-hatred, and the subsequent spending of money on cosmetic surgery, makeup or dieting products. Lisa B. Herskovits' 'How Barbie Warped Me' (1993), from *Mondo Barbie*, notes the 'warping' effect of Barbie on young girls and how she socializes them to believe 'Barbie is Correct', and anything outside of Barbie's aesthetic is abnormal.[57] As in 'Free Barbie', in 'How Barbie Warped Me' the protagonist

[56] Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago, 2011), p. 2.
[57] Lisa Herskovits, 'How Barbie Warped Me', *Mondo Barbie*, ed. by Richard Peabody and Lucinda Ebersole (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 78-81 (p. 81). Subsequent references in parentheses.

cannot escape this warping effect of Barbie's influence, and blames Mattel for this: 'Didn't they know what they were doing to generations of females? Didn't they care?' (p. 81). The desperate questions show how Barbie cannot escape her marketisation as a tool of patriarchy built to pressure young girls into conforming to sexist beauty standards. For Bordo, society teaches women to be 'insecure bodies, constantly monitoring themselves for signs of imperfection, constantly engaged in physical "improvement"'.[58] Even feminist linguistic research shows that 'women are encouraged to engage in beautification processes that involve "fixing" problems in their appearance in order to uphold ideals of femininity and, ultimately, please men'.[59] Barbie's thinness, large bust and facial symmetry feed into the profits made by exploitative industries and only encourage constant body modification, despite Barbie's look being unachievable. In this section a variety of women's literature is drawn upon which highlights the beauty standards Barbie perpetuates, and the focus of Barbie's harmful ideals of femininity is explored in a short story titled 'Beauty' (1992) by Lynne Barrett, from *Mondo Barbie*.

Women's writing from the nineties, such as Roberta Allen's flash fiction 'Barbie' (1992) from *Mondo Barbie* and Barbara Walker's 'Barbidol' from *Feminist Fairytales* (1996), emphasizes how the 'impossible-shaped Barbie' has 'helped train American girls to be forever dissatisfied with themselves'.[60] Allen's 'Barbie', no longer than half a page, is told from the point of view of an anonymous narrator who is watching a talk show about a woman who has spent fifty thousand pounds on plastic surgery to look like Barbie. [61] This evokes

[58] Bordo, p. 57.
[59] Laura Coffey-Glover, *Men in Women's Worlds: Constructions of Masculinity in Women's Magazines* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2019), p. 2.
[60] Walker notes this in her forward to 'Barbidol'. Barbara G. Walker, 'Barbidol', in *Feminist Fairytales* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 71-8 (p. 71). Kindle Edition.
[61] This reflects real-life instances of a 'Human Barbie', for example Valeria Lukyanova. Micheal Idov, 'This Is Not a Barbie Doll. This Is an Actual Human Being', *GQ* (12 July 2017) <https://www.gq.com/story/valeria-lukyanova-human-barbie-doll> [Accessed 1 June 2022]

the cultural phenomenon of, what Susan Jake Gilman describes in *Body Outlaws* as, 'the woman whose goal is to transform herself, via plastic surgery, into a real Barbie'.[62] The narrator brings a literal perspective to the talk show, saying that the woman is unable to look like Barbie because she still appears 'flesh-and-blood' instead of 'plastic'. [63] The narrator's interpretation of the 'human Barbie' uncovers the impossibility of Barbie's plasticity and proportions taking shape in human form and mocks the cosmetic industry which assures a Barbie doll look through 'plastic' surgery. The narrator describes the woman as having 'long hair, bangs, and a curvaceous figure' and wearing 'a short skirt, high heels, and sunglasses', similar to the manufactured (through surgery and photoshop) celebrity images of Kim Kardashian or Megan Fox. For the narrator, 'if no one had said she was supposed to look like Barbie, I bet no one would have seen the resemblance', suggesting that Barbie promotes beauty standards that are impossible for women to achieve, even after spending obscene amounts of money on cosmetic surgery. On another note, Walker's 'Barbidol' repurposes the fairy tale form's attempt to moralise young girls. 'Barbidol' is more surrealist in the doll's coming to life in the story and uses the traditional fairy tale third-person narration and plot of the female protagonist straying from the right path (by dating violent toy soldier Gijo), but ending up living happily ever after with her prince, Ken. The text uses satire to mock the fairy tale of Barbie's perfection to young girls, emphasizing at the beginning of the text that it was Barbie's job to show women the 'proportions they should desire but never achieve'.[64] 'Barbidol' illustrates that Mattel is aware of the impact of her proportions on young girls, while 'Barbie' underscores how, not only Mattel, but the cosmetic surgery industry profit from girls and women yearning to look like Barbie dolls, and never being able to achieve it.

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[62] Susan Jane Gilman, 'klaus barbie, and other dolls i'd like to see', *Body outlaws: rewriting the rules of beauty and body image*, ed. by Ophira Edut (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2004) pp. 14-21 (p. 18).
[63] Roberta Allen, 'Barbie', *Mondo Barbie*, ed. by Richard Peabody and Lucinda Ebersole (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 170. All subsequent references to text from same page of the collection.
[64] Walker, p. 78, 73.

Dieting to achieve the Barbie doll body type now associated with celebrities and social media influencers has led to an increase in eating disorders, especially among young women, which is also reflected in women's writing of the nineties.[65] The body shaming Barbie causes is directly addressed in 'Barbidol' when an animated Barbie in a toyshop critiques real women's bodies: 'their waists were too wide, their busts too small or droopy, and their feet were monstrously huge.'[66] Barbie's relationship to body image issues and eating disorders is also highlighted in the story 'Free Barbie' by Ensler (discussed above) when Chang Ying states, 'my cousin who lives in America told me that Barbie makes the girls who own her stop eating because they try and look like her' (p. 84). Furthermore, Barbara Kingsolver's *Pigs in Heaven* (1993) explores Barbie's effect on eating disorders as a size-six Barbie-obsessed waitress 'always ate Cheese Doritos and then went and throwed up in the bathroom.'[67] Barbie's association with thinness and fatphobia is also clear in Barrett's 'Beauty', as 'Barbie could never change shape, thicken'.[68] The multi-billion-dollar diet industry wants women consumers to think 'that thin is inherently beautiful and fat is obviously ugly', which is spread through dieting 'propaganda'.[69] Studies have shown that 'early exposure to dolls epitomizing an unrealistically thin body ideal [such as Barbie] may damage girls' body image, which would contribute to an increased risk of disordered eating and weight cycling'.[70] Psychological research has also found that young girls who play with thin dolls are more likely to restrict food intake and eating disorders have the highest

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[65] Pilar Aparicio-Martinez, Alberto-Jesus Perea-Moreno, María Pilar Martinez-Jimenez, María Dolores Redel-Macías, Claudia Pagliari, and Manuel Vaquero-Abellan, 'Social Media, Thin-Ideal, Body Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating Attitudes: An Exploratory Analysis', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16.21 (2019), 1-16 (p. 1).

[66] Walker, p. 73.

[67] Barbara Kingsolver, *Pigs in Heaven* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 325.

[68] Lynne Barrett, 'Beauty', *Mondo Barbie*, ed. by Richard Peabody and Lucinda Ebersole (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 177. Subsequent references in parentheses.

[69] Marilyn Wann, 'Foreword', *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther Rothblum, Sondra. Solovay, and Marilyn. Wann (New York: NYU Press, 2009), pp. ix-xxv (p. ix).

[70] Helga Dittmar, Emma Halliwell, and Suzanne Ive, '"Does Barbie Make Girls Want to Be Thin? The Effect of Experimental Exposure to Images of Dolls on the Body Image of 5- to 8-Year-Old Girls": Correction to Dittmar, Halliwell, and Ive (2006)', *Developmental Psychology*, 42.6 (2006), 1258–1258 (p. 1258).

mortality rate of any mental health condition, showing how Barbie's impossible standard of thinness has extremely serious and deadly material consequences for girls and women in America.[71]

The harmful association of Barbie with women's beauty and behavioural ideals is further highlighted in Barrett's 'Beauty', a short story which utilizes the third-person comedic narration of Susan, a 33-year-old woman, to show Susan's resistance to her mother's 'toxic femininity' through the rejection of her mother's Barbie doll collection.[72] Hannah McCann notes that toxic femininity 'refers to the gender expectations that keep women subservient, quiet, and submissive to men's domination and aggression', traits idealized by Susan's mother who dresses up Barbie as a 1950s housewife: 'the first one, 1959, wore the full skirt and prim blouse of a fifties housewife' (p. 176).[73] The fifties housewife aesthetic designed for Barbie by Susan's mother contrasts with the striped swimsuit worn by the first Barbie released in 1959, demonstrating how the mother projects her feminine ideals onto Barbie, as well as Susan. As described in Chapter One, the 1950s housewife represents the feminine ideal of the time, and alludes to, what Friedan calls, 'The Feminine Mystique', which 'permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity.'[74] Susan's mother attempts to live up to this obsequious femininity by constantly doing housework as a domestic housewife, even for her sons who have moved out, having 'a life spent in preparation and cleanup, with too little event' (p. 175). Just as 'Barbie-Q' exposes the way Barbie is a rehearsal for consumerism, this story exposes the way Barbie supports women and

[71] Doeschka Anschutz and Rutger Cme Engels, 'The Effects of Playing with Thin Dolls on Body Image and Food Intake in Young Girls', *Sex Roles* 63 (2010), 621 - 630; Nathalie Auger, Brian J. Potter, Ugochinyere Vivian Ukah, Nancy Low, Mimi Israël, Howard Steiger, and others, 'Anorexia Nervosa and the Long-term Risk of Mortality in Women', *World Psychiatry*, 20.3 (2021), 448–49 (p. 448).
[72] Hannah McCann, 'Is There Anything "Toxic" About Femininity? The Rigid Femininities That Keep Us Locked In', *Psychology and Sexuality*, 13.1 (2022), 9–22 (p. 9).
[73] Ibid.
[74] Friedan, p. 53.

girls in the cultivation of toxic femininity, through embodying patriarchal standards of femininity.

This story also highlights how Barbie's cultivated femininity can influence parents to harbour harmful expectations of their daughters in relation to gender roles, like Ira Early's expectations of Doll in Joyce Carol Oates' 'Doll: A Romance of the Mississippi'. After falling pregnant outside of marriage, Susan feels as though she does not meet 'her mother's strenuous vision of perfection' exemplified by her Barbie doll collection (p. 178). Feminine gender stereotypes have been forced on Susan since she was born as a result of her mother buying her a Barbie for every year of her birth. In her thirty third year, Susan 'look[s] up at the ranked figures of her thirty-three Barbies, each on her stand on the long white shelf, each costumed by Susan's mother in an outfit handmade to represent the year, beginning in 1959, her first birthday' (p. 171). The 'handmade' costumes show how Susan's mother constructs and projects her own expectations of femininity onto Susan, showing how, even without participating in consumer culture, toxic femininity can be socialized generationally. The 'long, white' shelf above her evokes the heavenly imagery of purity, which indicates how her mother worships Barbie's feminine perfection and intactness. The Barbies being 'costumed' also illustrates their femininity as performative, as suggested by Judith Butler, and the description of them being 'ranked' and displayed on a shelf implies that her mother also views them as trophies of femininity.[75] Nurturing feminine gender roles through Barbie results in Susan's identity being repressed through her mother's obsession, exhibited through the Barbies being put on a pedestal above her.

[75] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Florence: Routledge, 2007), p. 43. *Gender Trouble* (1990) was published two years before 'Beauty' (1992).

Despite pressure from her mother to conform to the gender stereotypes of Barbie, Susan rejects her mother's gender expectations, and instead, explores her shifting desires and identity. Susan's rejection of Barbie's feminine perfection and domesticity is shown earlier in the text when 'each time Susan left home, the dolls stayed here, waiting for her to screw up and return' (p. 171). The contrast of the dolls staying and Susan returning further symbolizes the feminine idealization of domesticity and the stay-at-home housewife, as well as Susan's rejection of this. Susan's colloquial use of 'screw up' also implies that she does not take her mother's expectations of her seriously and her playful and comical tone throughout the text parodies her mother's expectations of feminine perfection, enabling Susan to reject Barbie's fixed image of femininity. Susan performs, satirises, and rejects femininity through her work as a makeup artist, enabling her to shift her appearance through makeup and as a theatre actor. Butler notes that 'woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end', alluding to the notion of the feminine and womanhood as ever-evolving.[76] Susan embodies the feminist notion of womanhood as malleable, shown when she performs in a play called '*Woman is Liquid* in which all she did was cry'(p. 172). The play's title is a radical take on the shifting nature of womanhood, which is ironic as Susan highlights the emotional labour expected of women at work, as well as at home, with her having to cry throughout the play. Susan's shifting nature and her radical representation of womanhood as changing emphasizes her moving away from the idealization of Barbie's and her mother's fixed and passive femininity which conforms to patriarchal standards of womanhood and motherhood.

Although Susan's mother perpetuates toxic femininity, she does hold proto-feminist beliefs in relation to women's active role in the home, highlighting how feminist intentions

[76] Butler, p. 43.

do not always correspond with feminist outcomes. Susan's mother says, 'you can tell God was a male because he rested' and aligns rest with masculinity because women 'were alert, ready to jump up at a child's cry' (p. 176). This example problematizes her otherwise patriarchal view of femininity, suggesting that women take on an active and protective role once they become mothers, and further stating, 'Labor. A woman's word to start with' (p. 176). The mother's proto-feminist views and humorous tone show that she is not fully demonized in this story. Instead, the mother reminds the reader of what Woolf calls 'think[ing] back through our mothers', where women writers' texts will always include the perspectives of their mothers because of generational upbringing.[77]

Whilst the similarities of Susan and her mother are expressed through their parodic scrutiny of patriarchal systems, her mother still holds patriarchal views which harm Susan. For example, Susan's mother's romanticization of the patriarchal notion of women only being valued and appreciated through their youth and virginity is highlighted through her romanticization of Barbie's purity. The innocence associated with Barbie is illustrated by the 'sixty-six doe eyes' (p. 173) that gaze at Susan from her doll collection and her mother's preservation of Barbie's intactness, which is shown through Susan not being allowed to touch her dolls in case it would 'wear her, diminish her' (p. 176). Susan, subsequently, compares her non-virginal status to Barbie's intactness. Barbie was 'virginal' and 'intact' (p. 177) in her wedding gown whilst Susan refers to her pregnant body as 'interestingly unintact', suggesting that there is a sense of damage in women having sex or becoming pregnant, as insinuated by her mother (p. 177). Susan herself mocks the idea that, 'Barbie, of course, was very, very careful' (p. 177), hyperbolically repeating 'very' to parody Barbie's lack of choice in her judiciousness. Susan combats her mother's flawed proto-feminist view that keeping her

[77] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, eds. David Bradshaw, and Stuart Nelson. Clarke (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), p. 56.

daughter in a state of arrested development (personified by Barbie) is a kind of resistance to the oppression that accompanies entry to full womanhood.

Susan fully escapes her mother's oppressive expectations of womanhood by leaving the family home and disposing of the Barbie dolls, gifted to her by her mother, out of the car window at the end of the text. Susan replaces the dolls with something else her mother can look after and nurture, thinking to herself: 'she'll forgive me […] when she knows about the baby' (p. 178). In this sense, the dolls stand in as surrogate children, even though Mattel's aim was to move away from the values of motherhood that many dolls before Barbie cultivated. Susan disposes of the Barbies her mother holds so dear, a metaphor for her removing her mother's pressure of perfection, not just for herself, but for her unborn child:

> She reached into the bag beside her, pulled a doll from its nest of tissue, held it in her hand. Thin, hard, light. She balanced it like a weapon and then flicked it out the window. She laughed. It must be hormones. Through later afternoon, early twilight, every hundred miles or so, she flung another Barbie into the rush of air' (p. 179).[78]

Susan removing the dolls from their 'nest', again, alludes to their role as substitute children for her mother. Yet, the bird imagery is also a classic symbol of trapped womanhood in feminist literary discourse so the Barbies 'flying the nest' so to speak is representative of Susan breaking free from the cage of her family home. Susan also turns Barbie into a 'weapon' in order to reclaim the doll's significance, highlighting Barbie's role in the subjugation of women. Susan flinging the Barbies out of her window has a humorous effect through its absurd use of slapstick and the ironic contrast of the serious weapon and flippant use of 'flicked', showing how Susan uses comedy to mock Barbie and belittle Barbie as a feminine idol. The repetition of 'it must be hormones' also highlights that her choice to reject Barbie is tied to her new role as a mother. Ultimately, Susan mocks and critiques the sexist

[78] The allusion to being 'thin' and 'light' once again highlights how Barbie embodies thinness and dieting.

gender roles projected onto her by her mother through sarcasm and removing her mother's image of feminine perfection from the home, in order to adopt a more feminist motherhood devoid of Barbie dolls.

Allen's, Walker's and Barrett's short stories parody and critique the harmful beauty expectations and toxic femininity of Barbie encouraged by lipstick feminism, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Like McRobbie, Barrett critiques the third-wave notion that feminism should have a 'particular style of femininity folded into it'.[79] Although all three stories draw on Barbie to highlight her influence on harmful feminine beauty and behavioural ideals, Allen's 'Barbie' and Walker's 'Barbidol' critique the influence patriarchal cosmetic and media industries have on the unattainable beauty standards which Barbie perpetuates, while Barrett's 'Beauty' comments on how Barbie can uphold patriarchal expectations of womanhood within the family home. While Barbie can be physically removed from the home in 'Beauty', 'Barbie' underscores how there is no escaping the Barbie ideal while celebrity, dieting and cosmetic industries romanticize and profit from it.

Hyper-sexualization and Male Violence

Although Barrett's comedic story 'Beauty' presents how Barbie's young feminine desirability is found in her purity and virginity, Barbie was originally modelled after the sex symbol, Bild Lilli, first featured in German tabloid magazine *Bild* (1952-present), illustrating her connection to hypersexuality. Tracy Quan writes that Bild Lilli was 'an ambitious hooker', denoting the immediate sexualization of Barbie from her creation, and argues that Barbie cannot escape her past.[80] Barbie's large breasts and lack of pubic hair mimic the groomed, simulated look of porn stars. Likewise, Barbie never being able to get pregnant, menstruate or

[79] McRobbie, *The Aftermath of* Feminism, p. 157.
[80] Tracy Quan, 'The Littlest Harlot: Barbie's Career as a Role Model', *Whores and Other Feminists*, ed. by Jill Nagle (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 119-124 (p. 119); Barbie has no visible nipples or pubic hair.

age also categorizes her as, what Delvaux calls, 'the wet dream of misogynist kitsch'.[81] Walter further notes that 'while it's hardly new for women to want to be sexy, it's new that even childhood playthings should look so sexy.'[82] Like a sex doll, she becomes the misogynist male fantasy of a subservient woman who is always open to sex, always stays young and attractive, and never suffers the consequences of sex, such as pregnancy or contracting STDs. Mattel has never successfully been able to 'unsex Barbie' even with the removal of her nipples.[83] Market research found that mothers hated Barbie because 'sex was the big message', so Barbie's hyper-sexualization points to Mattel's attempt to capitalise on her image through sex appeal, which is harmful because it further feeds into the sexual objectification of women.[84]

Another story featured in *Mondo Barbie* is A. M. Homes' 'A Real Doll' (1990) which explores an unnamed male teenage narrator's sexual obsession with his younger sister's Barbie and the impact of his Barbie fantasy on his use of violence against women. 'A Real Doll' was originally published in Homes' provocative short story collection, *The Safety of Objects* (1990), an uncanny and unsettling collection that subverts the suburban American dream with a twist of humour. The text's title alludes to RealDoll, a famous sex doll brand released in 1996, showing how the term already had associations with the hyper-sexualization and objectification of women throughout the nineties. The teenage narrator imagines his sister's, Jennifer's, Barbie doll as animate (being able to talk and think for herself) and fetishizes, objectifies and sexualizes Barbie from his first-person perspective.[85] The narrator sexually objectifies several Barbies when he visits Toys R Us, for example, he wonders if

[81] Delvaux, p. 31; Ariel Levy directly compares Barbie dolls for children to porn stars for adults, suggesting that they both socialize desirability. Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Woman and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (Riverside: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 130.
[82] Walter, p. 3.
[83] Erica Rand, *Barbie's Queer Accessories* (Duke University Press, 2012), p. 193.
[84] Ibid.
[85] The narrator's lack of name presents his identity as ambiguous, showing how his horrific actions could be enacted by any boy or man.

Magic Move Barbie's legs were 'spreadable'.[86] Here, he only cares about the doll's sexual use, rather than its supposed use as a children's doll, demonstrating how Barbie's provocative form is a vessel for sexual fantasies. Barbie is shown, through the narrator, to teach men to treat women as sex objects, encourage sexual subordination and sexism towards women. This is further displayed when the brother fantasises about using Barbie as a sex object in Toys R Us:

> Barbie row was aisle 14C. I was a wreck. I imagined a million Barbies and having to have them all. I pictured fucking one, discarding it, immediately grabbing a fresh one, doing it, and then throwing it onto a growing pile in the corner of my room (p. 163).

The repetition of 'I' emphasizes the brother's focus on his own sexual pleasure over a woman's autonomy, and the verb 'having' and description of himself as a 'wreck', implies he is compelled to objectify Barbie and has no control over his impulses, taking no responsibility for his actions. The list of violent verbs, 'fucking', 'discarding', 'grabbing' and 'throwing' establishes the sadistic, unrelenting and unapologetic nature of the brother's misogyny and sexual objectification of proxy women. Here, Barbie exemplifies the ultimate woman as object, to be used, defiled, and discarded. The protagonist's statement that he's 'practicing for the future' (p. 155) at the beginning of the text is a shocking and disturbing revelation, showing how the portrayal of women as sex objects influences misogyny from a young age.[87]

'A Real Doll' highlights how male fantasies surrounding female objectification and hyper-sexualization leads to male violence towards women through his treatment of Barbie. The brother only desires to sexually harass Barbie when, in his imagination, she adheres to

[86] A. M. Homes, 'A Real Doll', *The Safety of Objects* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), p. 163. Subsequent references in parentheses.
[87] The idea that the doll can facilitate sexual violence towards women is also examined in Chapter Three on the sex doll.

the misogynistic expectations of women perpetuated by the sex industry, such as women's voices being sexually appealing, or completely silent, and their bodies being unmarked and hairless. For example, the brother is critical of Barbie's voice for 'squeaking' and becomes upset when Jennifer makes cuts all over Barbie's body and burns her breasts off, because he is only attracted to one version of 'perfect' womanhood.[88] The brother considers manipulation and violence to perfect her imperfections by sandpapering the cuts on her body, despite Barbie being unbothered by these physical changes, saying "It's just a reduction […] Jennifer and I are even now" (p. 173). [89] This shows how the narrator only sees his own perception of a woman's appearance as important, not her own. The brother even says he could make the sandpapering into 'an S&M kind of thing' (p. 171). The brother sexualizes violence and torture here, a sentiment often depicted in violent pornography, which has been shown to lead to increased male sexual violence.[90]

Similarly, in Belinda Subraman's 'The Black Lace Panties Triangle' (1993), from *Mondo Barbie*, Ken and Barbie are portrayed as animate beings and Ken sexually harasses and assaults Barbie after she wears a pair of black underwear he buys her for Valentine's Day, Barbie stating that 'lust was turning into abuse'.[91] The black underwear not only stands as a symbol of rape culture, as an object of clothing which has been associated with victim-blaming, but it also represents the commodification of sex, as shown through the underwear being advertised on a 'mannequin in a sexual position' and the fact that Ken buys it for a

[88] The idea of feminine perfection also relates to the plastic, unchanging nature expected of the doll which women cannot physically live up to as established in Allen's 'Barbie'.
[89] Barbie saying, "Jennifer and I are even now", also shows how young girls compare their appearance with Barbie in a damaging way (p. 173).
[90] Kelly Cue Davis, Jeanette Norris, William H. George, Joel Martell, and Julia R. Heiman, 'Men's Likelihood of Sexual Aggression: The Influence of Alcohol, Sexual Arousal, and Violent Pornography', *Aggressive Behavior*, 32.6 (2006), 581–89 (p. 582).
[91] Belinda Subraman, 'The Black Lace Panties Triangle', in *Mondo Barbie*, ed. by Richard Peabody and Lucinda Ebersole (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 82-3 (p. 83). Subsequent references in parentheses.

holiday which operates on the commodification of love and sex (p. 82).[92] Ken only stops sexually assaulting Barbie when she removes her underwear, presenting how sexualizing Barbie, as well as feminized objects (like mannequins) leads to the hyper-sexualization of women, and male violence. Both 'A Real Doll' and 'The Black Lace Panties Triangle' align the hyper-sexualization of Barbie with male violence, particularly sexual violence, as both male characters stop their sexual assault when they no longer find Barbie sexually appealing or sexually open. This highlights how, like porn stars, Barbie's hyper-sexualization endorses the problematic notion of female sexual appeal meaning sexual openness, as promoted by the sex industry.

The danger of the brother's misogynistic actions transferring to real women in 'A Real Doll' is stressed when he drugs his sister, after initially drugging Barbie. At the beginning of the text, the brother drugs Barbie with Valium to 'calm' her so she would 'trust' him 'sooner' (p. 153), which makes Barbie speak in a 'slow slurred way, like she was so intoxicated that if they made a Breathalizer for Valium, she'd melt it' (p. 153). The sibilance slows the pace of the sentence, mimicking Barbie's drugged nature to draw attention to the gravity of the action and the satirical hyperbole of melting the Breathalyzer highlights how the dark humour of the text emphasizes the brother's indifference to harming women. Near the end of the text, when he does not like how his sister is acting, he makes her one of his 'special diet cokes' as he did with Barbie, once again using a light-hearted euphemism to make his action seem less serious, ironically making his actions even more disturbing (p. 166). He then reveals that he 'felt guilty about having used a whole Valium', illustrating the

[92] Barbie Latza Nadeau, 'Panty Protests Across Ireland After Victim-Blaming Lawyer Cites Rape Accuser's Thong: Irish Women Have Come Out in Force after a Rape Defendant's Lawyer Used the Underwear the Alleged Victim Wore before the Attack as Evidence That She Was Asking for It', *The Daily Beast* (New York: The Newsweek/Daily Beast Company LLC, 2018) <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2133048893?accountid=14693&parentSessionId=ibi%2FOc4JZjTgxahCS5dB2d2BCzHlSb2AYWwVXhQKKH8%3D&sourcetype=Blogs,%20Podcasts,%20&%20Websites> [Accessed 23 September 2024].

danger of his actions to women, and his lack of realisation of the harm he is causing until it is too late (p. 177). The story shows how imagined violence towards Barbie can lead to real male violence towards women when they do not conform to patriarchal standards of femininity.

Consequently, 'A Real Doll' utilizes the tradition in women's writing of highlighting toxic and problematic masculinity through male aggression and sexual violence towards women, and the Barbie doll becomes a stand-in for real women.[93] On returning Barbie to his sister's room, the brother assaults her by sticking Barbie's head in his mouth, which swiftly turns into a scene of horror as he says, 'I could hear her screams in my throat' and he pressed his 'teeth lightly into her neck, leaving marks Barbie described as a scar of her assault, but which I imagined as a New Age necklace of love' (p. 155).[94] Here, what Barbie sees as violent assault, the brother perceives as love. This representation of toxic masculinity which aligns assault with desire illustrates the female literary practice of showing 'a problematic masculinity [which] is negotiated through textual slippages from rape to seduction'.[95] The verb 'screams' and the brother biting her neck connotes vampiric imagery, a gothic illustration of sexual transgression, violence and assault. The trope of the vampire to represent sexual violence has also been used by women writers to explore 'aggressive masculinity and male sexuality'.[96] The brother then explains how he 'refused to put her back in Jennifer's room until she forgave' him (p. 156). This controlling, violent and manipulative

[93] Homes maintains 'textual masculinity', a tradition of women writers focusing on men or masculinity in their texts. Jakob Winnberg, Anna Fåhraeus, and AnnKatrin Jonsson, 'Introduction: Female Masculinity or Textual Masculinity', *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 7.1 (2008), 1–7 (p. 1).
[94] The reference to the 'throat' and 'screams' may allude to the pornographic films *Deep Throat* (1972) and the controversy surrounding its star, Linda Lovelace, who originally categorized her involvement in the film as a liberating experience and then later said she had been sexually coerced and assaulted during production and that it was rape pornography. This disturbing incident is what helped propel the anti-pornography movement pioneered by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 51. VLE eBook.
[95] Winnberg, Fåhraeus, and Jonsson, p. 7.
[96] Ibid.

behaviour, spurred on by his disregard for Barbie's feelings, shows how Barbie becomes a vessel for violence, which ultimately transfers to real women, as is also shown in Chapter One.

The brother's contempt for Barbie and, by extension, the blame he puts on women for his abusive behaviour, establishes him as an involuntary celibate (in contemporary parlance, an incel).[97] In *The Right to Sex* (2021), Amia Srinivasan describes incels as 'a certain kind of sexless man: the kind who is convinced he is owed sex, and is enraged by the women who deprive him of it'.[98] Like incels, the brother sees himself as the subjugated within an 'oppressive matriarchy' as he blames Barbie and Jennifer for his violent actions, when it is he who reinforces patriarchy by imagining causing harm to women.[99] The brother takes no responsibility, saying, 'I saw myself becoming a slave to Barbie' after the Toys R Us scene (p. 163). The noun 'slave' implies he has no control over his sadistic desires, instead he sees himself as the victim of women's sexual allure, rather than the perpetrator of violence against women. Incels also show right-wing sentiment and a 'concomitant hatred of women' because they will not meet their gender or sexual expectations.[100] When Barbie responds to the brother with confusion, he says 'I was starting to hate her. I was being perfectly clear and she didn't understand me' (p. 168). His hatred stems from his belief that he is superior to women and so he thinks that they should always be submissive and accommodating to him. Likewise, in Walker's 'Barbidol', Barbie's temporary boyfriend, a violent, right-wing toy soldier named Gijo, also has misogynistic incel sentiments. Gijo verbally abuses Barbie, calling her a 'crazy pinko bleeding-heart parlor liberal' and a 'dumb broad', and assaults her when she will not be

[97] According to Merriam-Webster, the first known use of incel was only in 1999, which is nine years after the publication of 'A Real Doll'. Anon, 'Incel', *Merriam-Webster* (n. d.) <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/incel> [Accessed 14 July 2022].
[98] Srinivasan, p. 73.
[99] Bruce Hoffman, Jacob Ware and Ezra Shapiro, 'Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 43.7 (2020), 565–87 (p. 573).
[100] Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro, p. 569.

quiet.[101] Through their Barbie narratives, both Homes and Walker are highlighting the dangers of misogynist, right-wing sentiment and incel culture to women's safety.

Barbie is the victim of misogynist violence in all the 1990s women's stories discussed; she is a vessel through which the male characters can enact their hatred and violence. Therefore, women's writing of the nineties which features Barbie reprises the arguments made by radical feminists of the second wave in their analysis of 'violence as a tool that men used to maintain women's subordination'.[102] All three stories highlight how Mattel profits from the hyper-sexualization of Barbie in a similar way to the sex industry which profits from porn stars and sex dolls, and instilling rape culture. Ultimately, Barbie is represented as a product that is inherently sexualized, objectified and sexist, which can lead to the perpetuation of violence against real women.

Race

Several scholars have noted that Barbie is an overt symbol of whiteness. As Delvaux states, Barbie is 'a blond, blue-eyed, long-legged white woman' and according to Rogers, 'Barbie is stubbornly white. […] Barbie strikes me as white-identified, as a beneficiary of white-skin privilege, as cultural evidence of white domination'.[103] In *Body Outlaws*, Gilman goes further and describes Barbie as 'an icon of Aryanism', noting that Barbies 'instill in legions of little girls a preference for whiteness, for blond hair, blue eyes and delicate features, for an impossible uberfigure, perched eternally and submissively in high heels'.[104] Barbie's association with white dominance is also apparent in the underrepresentation of people of colour in Barbie culture. Rogers notes that 'black Americans and other people of color are

[101] Walker, p. 76.
[102] Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 38.
[103] Delvaux, p. 28; Rogers, p. 47.
[104] Gilman, p. 18.

grossly underrepresented among Barbie collectors.'[105] There is also an issue with the racial diversity of women's writing which focuses on Barbie, with only a couple women of colour (Cisneros and Youngblood) featuring in this chapter due to the limited fiction on Barbie by people of colour available. *Mondo Barbie* does not feature any black authors and while its editors lament not having more input from writers of colour, they do not discuss why or how they could have addressed this issue.[106] Shay Youngblood's *Black Power Barbie* (2013) is a rare example of the exploration of Barbie by a black author. Through an analysis of this novel, I discuss how, despite the potential for Barbies of colour to briefly relate to and empower women and girls of colour, Barbie is, ultimately, a symbol of whiteness that, more often, socializes 'racial self-hatred'.[107]

Despite Mattel's attempts to racially diversify Barbie, she still contributes to the othering of people of colour because the white Barbie doll is marketed as the ideal. Mattel have tried to 'reshape' Barbie's position as a symbol of whiteness with the first African American Barbie and Hispanic Barbie coming to the market in 1980, as well as 'The Dolls of the World' series which featured several Barbies of colour.[108] However, as Rogers suggests, 'for most people, "real" or "authentic" Barbies are white. Other dolls are precisely that – "others," who are treated as different or even exotic'.[109] The casting of white Barbie as more desirable is further shown by Nairn, who notes that, for Mattel, non-white Barbies are only allowed to exist if they do not threaten or 'displac[e] white, blond Barbie'.[110] Mattel treats

[105] Rogers, p. 48.
[106] Peabody and Ebersole, p. xvi.
[107] William E. Cross Jr. and David M. Frost, 'Black Identities, Internalized Racism, and Self-Esteem', in *Meaning-making, internalized racism, and African American identity*, ed. by Jas M. Sullivan (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), pp. 229-242 (p. 231).
[108] Elizabeth Chin, *Purchasing Power Black Kids and American Consumer Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 143; Greenwood, Jackson, Opie and Spencer, *Barbie: A Visual Guide to the Ultimate Fashion Doll*, pp. 24, 94.
[109] Rogers, p. 49.
[110] Nairn, p. 31.

white Barbies with more favour than the dolls of colour because they are treated as 'aspirational' career girls, rather than 'crass national stereotypes'.[111] The packaging of Barbies of colour, as Gilman suggests, 'reinforces their status as "Other." These are "special" and "limited" edition Barbies, the labels announce: clearly not the standard'.[112] Furthermore, the devaluation of Barbies of colour over white Barbies illustrates an inherent bias towards whiteness in Mattel's production line, shown by the 'Dolls of the World' Barbies being readily available in toy stores at half price after their release, unlike their white counterparts.[113] Rand notes that 'Mattel makes Barbie products more attractive by emphasizing the consumer's ability to choose among many options while simultaneously casting one Barbie, the white, blond version, as the norm and investing it with the greatest apparent value.'[114] This is shown clearly in the *Barbie* film, where, despite the cast of Barbies being relatively racially diverse, the protagonist of the show, 'stereotypical' Barbie, is played by white, slim, blonde Margot Robbie. This establishes the inherent bias of Mattel towards the initial white, blonde Barbie doll which gave Mattel it's fame, and illustrates it as the doll with the greatest prestige, painting Barbie as an emblem of white supremacy.

Some of the short stories by women writers featured in this chapter demonstrate the superficial nature of Mattel's diversification of Barbie and Mattel's lack of interest in authentically and realistically creating Barbies of colour, instead using Eurocentric moulds. For example, for the Barbie doll collection that features in Barrett's story 'Beauty', the protagonist's mother had 'researched the daishiki for 1968's Black Barbie, a mocha Barbie really. Her features were the same, of course, the nose no one could breathe through, the egret neck.'[115] Also, the brother in 'A Real Doll' says, 'I wondered if black Ken was really white

[111] Ibid.
[112] Gilman, p. 18.
[113] Magee, p. 87.
[114] Rand, p. 15.
[115] Barrett, p. 177.

Ken sprayed over with a thick coating of ironed raisin plastic.'[116] This is representative of real-life Barbie manufacturing as, according to Barbie Wiki, Barbie's white friend, Steffie's, Eurocentric face mould was used for Barbie's first Black friend, Francie, released in 1968. Emily R. Aguiló-Pérez also discusses the 'sameness' of the white Barbie and Barbies of colour as 'problematic', as they lacked 'changes to her hair texture, facial features, or body type'.[117] Mattel's lack of interest in authentically and realistically creating dolls of colour is also shown in media and pop culture.[118] For example, in hit TV series *Pose* (2018-2021), the iconic protagonist Elektra says: **'**f*ck Barbie. They had Olympic Barbie, Malibu Barbie, Doctor Barbie. All kinds of Barbies, but they only had one black Barbie, Christie, and she was still built like a white girl.'[119] Media and women writers, therefore, highlight how Mattel's attempts to racially diversifying Barbie and Ken are disingenuous and apathetic.

Black Power Barbie also critiques the superficial nature of Mattel through its form as a graphic novel which uses words to describe scenes rather than pictures. Deborah Elizabeth Whaley asserts that comics are 'a visual space in which women's bodies often serve as exploitive signifiers' and Youngblood resists this space by using brackets and descriptions (similar to stage directions) to narrate panels, actions and speech rather than images.[120] The text's resistance to the Western visual culture which Mattel have profited from - through Barbie's whiteness, prettiness and slimness – illustrates *Black Power Barbie* as a text which challenges Barbie culture through its content and form.

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[116] Homes, p. 163.
[117] Emily R. Aguiló-Pérez, 'Commodifying Culture: Mattel's and Disney's Marketing Approaches to "Latinx" Toys and Media', *The Marketing of Children's Toys: Critical Perspectives on Children's Consumer Culture*, eds. Rebecca C. Hains, and Nancy A. Jennings (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 143-164 (p. 145).
[118] Anon, 'Steffie', *Barbie Wiki*, (n.d.) <https://barbie.fandom.com/wiki/Steffie> [Accessed 5 August 2022]
[119] 'Giving and Receiving', *Pose*, FX, 17 June 2018. The queer drama *Pose* (2018-2021), which follows the lives of a group of transgender women of colour in 1980s and 90s New York City, shows how the Barbie doll cannot escape her correlation with white eurocentrism.
[120] Deborah Elizabeth Whaley, *Black Women in Sequence: Re-Inking Comics, Graphic Novels, and Anime* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2016), p. 148.

Black Power Barbie's form as a graphic novel is also illustrative of its publication in the fourth wave of feminism, which began in 2010 and used 'digital media to rekindle feminist activism and to reconnect feminist politics with everyday life'.[121] However, once again, its resistance to using digital imagery, also shows a resistance to fourth-wave feminist activism, which has mainly made feminism more accessible for white, middle-class women in the West in the context of the #MeToo movement. As Srinivasan notes, 'black women resented being asked to stand in solidarity with white women when their own protests against sexual harassment had been ignored for so long'. [122] Srinivasan describes an instance of the #MeToo digital-age double standard when white women stood in solidarity with Rose McGowan when she was deplatformed on Twitter for exposing Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein as a sexual abuser, in using #WomenBoycottTwitter, but rarely stood in solidarity with women of colour with hashtags such as #OscarsSoWhite.[123] Srinivasan highlights that one problem with #MeToo is 'a lack of "consistent" application of concern and outrage across racial lines'.[124] Youngblood's resistance to this new digital age of the fourth wave of feminism through her written graphic novel form is therefore representative of her critique of the racial double-standard surrounding Barbie and the feminist movement as a whole.

Black Power Barbie explores the relationship of the black female protagonist, Tabitha X, to her Black Power Barbie (BPB) doll, a Black Barbie given to her by her father as a means of empowering her when she was a young girl.[125] The text focuses on Tabitha, a woman in her mid-twenties who attends therapy with her brother, Jackson Five (who is four years younger), to process the trauma of witnessing the murder of their African American

[121] Catherine Riley and Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and Women's Writing: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 4.
[122] Srinivasan, p. 169.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Black Power Barbie is referred to as BPB throughout the text, such as on page 34 and 54, so I will shorten her name to BPB where appropriate.

Civil Rights Activist parents as children. At times there are flashbacks to when Tabitha and Jackson are younger. Before his death, Tabitha's father evokes black power movements by teaching her that there is empowerment in fighting against the oppressor, saying, 'I'm teaching our little girl how to take care of the guns' (p. 28) and 'I'm gonna teach my little girl, my little warrior, how to put him to sleep' (p. 30). BPB, as her name suggests, is meant to be a symbol of the Black power movements which 'rekindled possibilities for disenfranchised groups' in America.[126] His gift of BPB is an embodiment of black empowerment and resistance for Tabitha, which is shown when she is first introduced: 'A black Barbie doll (with a large afro, wearing a black mini dress and leather boots), is tucked into the waist of her belted dress' (p. 3). Here, BPB is imagined as a weapon she can use to protect herself. Tabitha also sees BPB as a source of inspiration, saying 'Me and BLACK POWER BARBIE against the world' (p. 7). Tabitha's repetition and romanticization of BPB as a 'hero' who can solve any problem illustrates her aspirational associations with BPB.[127] Tabitha brings BPB to every therapy session, using her as a coping mechanism and saying that 'she keeps me calm', 'she keeps me focussed' (p. 26). Although BPB seems to be a source of empowerment for Tabitha, her idealization of and attachment to BPB causes her to only momentarily 'aid in processing trauma', as Jennifer Krystyniak argues in relation to dolls in therapy.[128] In her review of *Black Power Barbie*, La Toya Hankins discusses how 'a plastic version of womanhood' is sometimes needed for the healing process, showing how dolls, or surrogate women, are sometimes therapeutic.[129] However, *Black Power Barbie*

[126] Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tool's Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider* (London: Penguin Classics, 2019), pp. 52-3 (p. 64).
[127] Shay Youngblood, *Black Power Barbie* (South Carolina: Blue Cloud Press, 2013), pp. 4, 54. Subsequent references in parentheses.
[128] Jennifer Krystyniak, 'The Use of Dolls and Figures in Therapy: A Literature Review', *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses* (2020) <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/321> [Accessed 22 July 2022]
[129] La Toya Hankins, 'Black Power Barbie Volume 1: love lives of heroes', *The BLLC Review* (15 February 2018), <https://blacklesbianliterarycollective.org/black-power-barbie-volume-1-love-lives-of-heroes/> [Accessed 23 May 2022].

shows how momentary liberation using the oppressor's instruments can never complete the healing process or replace dismantling the systems of power that the Barbie industry benefits from.

In Youngblood's text, Tabitha initially sees BPB as a symbol of black power, but the narrative raises questions central to Audre Lorde's essay 'The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House' (1979), displaying Barbie as a symbol of 'the master's tool'.[130] Barbie's representation as the false ally who appears to support the movement (the master's tool) but, instead, reinforces racism and patriarchy (the master's house), is exemplified in Tabitha's fantasy BPB action scenes. In these scenes, Tabitha imagines transforming into BPB 'in sexy 70's drag' (p. 61) and enacting revenge on her parents' murderers, but is never able to catch the perpetrator and fulfil her revenge. The scenes feature heavy action with Tabitha as BPB being chased, and 'throw[ing] punches' (p. 102), before she usually 'speeds away' in an expensive car such as a 'Ferrari' (p. 62) or 'Porsche' (p. 100), having achieved nothing.[131] The theatrical movie imagery of the action scene implies the superficial nature of Barbies of colour ever helping to dismantle or even discourage real-world racism. Her never being able to defeat her parents' murderers in the scenes is representative of BPB, as an overt symbol of whiteness and patriarchy (master's tool), never being able to conquer the racist and patriarchal systems that oppress Tabitha (the master's house). As Lorde says, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.'[132] BPB is a representation of the master's tool, which brings

[130] Lorde, p. 64.
[131] Barbie's power being imagined through the romanticization of wealth (expensive outfits and cars) harkens back to Barbie's promotion of white girl boss feminism and the oppression and violence against more marginalized groups this generates.
[132] Lorde, p. 64.

temporary comfort for Tabitha, but, ultimately, is still used to uphold patriarchy and white supremacy through racism and violence.

BPB is a vessel for violence, causing Tabitha to imagine Barbie as a harmful instrument she can use to take revenge, as exemplified by the BPB action scenes. This leads to her perpetuating the master's house rather than resisting racism and patriarchy. Tabitha's father, Hannibal, teaches Tabitha that violence is the only way to survive in a world where violence against black people is normalised. Tabitha's father teaching Tabitha how to enact violence causes her to associate the gift her father gives her, of BPB, with a weapon. For example, Tabitha imagines BPB as a gun to harm her therapist when the therapist questions whether BPB can really help Tabitha: 'TABITHA points BPB at the therapist as if pretend bullets could make her go away' (p. 54). However, because Barbie is already a weapon of patriarchy and white supremacy, Tabitha cannot use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, instead she perpetuates it. Tabitha uses BPB as a means to be violent towards her brother, shown when she is cruel to Jackson out of fear that he will take her Barbie, similar to the brother's attitude to Jennifer in 'A Real Doll'. Tabitha brands Jackson with a potato masher when they are children, saying, 'He screamed and we laughed, BLACK POWER BARBIE and I. We laughed like the wicked witch of the West in the movie the Wizard of Oz' (p. 25). Here, Tabitha uses BPB as an excuse to enact violence, and imagines perpetuating this violence with Barbie. Branding is particularly associated with the oppression of black people during colonialism and slavery, illustrating how, though BPB is meant to protect Tabitha from violence, Barbie is actually being used as a tool for white supremacy and racialized violence by Tabitha.

BPB stands in as a symbol of wealth and white supremacy which feeds into Tabitha's racial self-hatred, and subsequently, her low self-esteem, in the same way Barbie influences

negative body image issues in women.[133] The positive correlation between 'racial self-hatred' and 'low self-esteem' in African American individuals is identified by William E. Cross Jr. and David M. Frost in *Meaning-making, internalized racism, and African American identity* (2016). Tabitha suffers from white idealization and internalised racism, especially towards her brother, Jackson. She scrutinizes him as 'so black' because he chose his Westernised name after one of the black panthers, a black power political group, whilst Tabitha names herself after Tabitha from *Bewitched*, a character with white skin, blue eyes and blonde hair (p. 19). Yet, the X after her name alludes to African American human rights activist, Malcolm X, illustrating how she is in conflict with the expectations of a white supremacist society and her own black identity. Tabitha also exposes the structural racism which puts them in danger for being black, and pushes her towards embracing whiteness, saying to Jackson: 'you could have been John Doe or Jack Smith. You could have gotten us killed trying to be so black' (p. 19). Tabitha's internalised racism comes from a real fear of violence against the black community if they do not conform to white, patriarchal social standards, such as choosing a white-conforming name and playing with Barbie dolls.

BPB's negative influence on Tabitha's internalised racism and racial self-hatred is removed when she no longer relies on BPB and embraces queer, multiracial love. The eventual rejection of BPB allows her to fall in love with a Latina woman called Madonna and embrace a 'multicultural inclusive identity' which, according to Cross and Frost, leads to 'higher levels of self-esteem'.[134] Tabitha expresses the love she has found in her multiracial, queer relationship with Madonna: 'We wrap our languages around each other trying to know each other, really know each other.' (p. 96). Her embrace of queer love here is illustrative of her outgrowing BPB because Tabitha associates BPB with being 'in the closet', which has a

[133] Cross and Frost, pp. 231, 314.
[134] Cross and Frost, p. 234.

double meaning. [135] For Tabitha, staying in the closet brings heteronormative safety, but it also provides racial and physical safety as she believes her hiding in the closet with BPB and her brother when her parents were killed saved her from the racialized violence which took her parents. Tabitha acknowledges the closet as a place of safety because she associates it with BPB keeping her within the protected confines of white, heteronormativity: 'I like to lie down in the closet […] it feels safe when I'm inside. […] it smells like moth balls and dust, old things and lavender. […] But its dark and its lonely in there' (p. 90). The melancholic tone at the end illustrates how, although staying in the closet may be safe, it can never bring Tabitha happiness. Tabitha's eventual rejection of white heteronormativity is clear when Madonna replaces BPB in accompanying Tabitha to therapy. Tabitha metaphorically exits the closet in embracing her queerness and racial identity, when she finally says she loves Madonna at the end of the text (p. 110), with the final line of the text being, 'of all the possibilities, how do you choose to love?' (p. 111). After meeting Madonna, as Hankins notes, '[Tabitha] is able to break free and begin to explore a life where she doesn't have to buffer her feelings with a doll.'[136] The sense of liberation from feelings of racial self-hatred and white, heteronormative conformity comes in the form of rejecting what Barbie stands for through replacing BPB with queer and racial self-love.

Ultimately, Barbie is presented as an unhealthy coping mechanism for Tabitha throughout the text, leading to violence, racial self-hatred and a fear of non-conformity. This shows how ethnically diverse Barbie dolls do not align with being anti-racist. Rather, Barbie contributes to internalised racism and low self-esteem. Youngblood does show how black children can turn to racially authentic dolls as coping mechanisms in instances of trauma. However, this is a trauma caused by the white supremacist culture Barbie symbolizes and

[135] Closeted is a metaphor for LGBTQ+ people who have not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender.
[136] Hankins.

through which she has been created. The rejection of Barbie is the first step in Tabitha rejecting the master's tools: patriarchy, white supremacy and heteronormativity.

Queering Barbie

Though Mattel has attempted to move away from Barbie as a symbol of whiteness and patriarchy by introducing several black, hijab-wearing and disabled Barbies, Mattel has been tentative to release an explicitly queer Barbie, insisting that Barbie is a LGBTQ+ ally rather than queer herself. Mattel have always cast Barbie as a symbol of femininity and heterosexuality, only ever having a boyfriend, Ken (and briefly Blaine), and never having queer relationships with any of her female friends, despite there being dozens of them. While Barbie herself is straight, Mattel released a Barbie doll in support of gay marriage with 'love wins' on her t-shirt in 2017 and have donated to and partnered with several LGBTQ+ organisations.[137] Although these organisations would welcome the support, it is not new or radical to profit from the support of causes once they become more popular and mainstream, and Mattel only seems to support queerness through rainbow capitalism. Rainbow capitalism is a term used to describe the commodification of LGBTQ+ culture, particularly Pride. Phoebe North stresses the profitability of rainbow capitalism to enterprises, noting that 'gay Barbie collectors have often been a potent market segment for a brand mostly explicitly focused on little girls.'[138] Consumers have pushed for new queer iterations of Barbie, such as the 2019 release of Mattel's BMR1959 Barbie collection with a 'subtle and queer-appealing androgyny', and the first transgender Barbie modelled after Laverne Cox released in 2022.[139]

[137] Anna Livsey, 'Barbie comes out in support of same-sex marriage', *Guardian* (2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/nov/29/barbie-comes-out-in-support-of-same-sex-marriage> [Accessed 14 November 2022].
[138] Sara M. Moniuszko, '"It Remains Purely Symbolic": Why Rainbow Capitalism Can be Harmful to LGBTQ People', *USA Today* (2021) <https://eu.usatoday.com/in-depth/life/2021/06/04/what-rainbow-capitalism-and-and-how-does-impact-lgbtq-people/7492381002/> [Accessed 5 July 2022]; Phoebe North, 'Barbie Comes Out — But Is It Too Late?', *Medium* (2020) <https://phoebenorth.medium.com/barbie-comes-out-but-is-it-too-late-688b2f502089> [Accessed 6 April 2022].
[139] Yates; North.

Yet Mattel does not label the BMR1959 collection as LGBTQ+ and only released a transgender doll four years after a public petition for the doll in 2018, establishing Mattel's resistance to intentionally queering Barbie.[140] Although Mattel has recently released one explicitly queer Barbie doll, more frequently Mattel 'unintentionally sponsor[s]' Barbie as queer.[141]

Despite Mattel's intentions, queer artists and authors have interpreted and re-interpreted Barbie as queer. As Rogers notes, 'Barbie's world allows for nonstraight readings, just as many other "straight" cultural products do.'[142] Consumers have interpreted a Ken doll as resembling a queer comedian and, in 1990, a mysterious 'cross-dressed Ken' was discovered in Toys 'R' Us, which was later found to be a hoax by one of their workers, who was fired for daring to publicly queer Ken.[143] Furthermore, Rogers describes the popularisation of 'anti-Barbies' in the 1990s, which are Barbies that have been queered through consumer customisation to subvert Barbie's middle-class, pretty and straight associations, such as 'Trailer Trash Barbie', 'Exorcist Barbie', 'Big Dyke Barbie' and 'Drag Queen Barbie'.[144] Erica Rand argues in *Barbie's Queer Accessories* (2012) that the queering of Barbie is a common practice in art and society and Barbie has become synonymous with 'camp', an aesthetic that became a marker of 'pre-stonewall queerdom', which has led to Barbie's appeal, particularly amongst gay men.[145] Youngblood's *Black Power Barbie* illustrates this queer male affection towards Barbie in a scene with Jackson's boyfriend, Paolo, who says 'I wanted to be Barbie', with Jackson responding with 'I wanted to possess her' (p. 67). However, Tabitha's queer love in *Black Power Barbie* demonstrates the

[140] Ibid.
[141] Rogers, pp. 41, 47.
[142] Rogers, pp. 42, 41.
[143] Vega; Anon, 'The Cross-Dressing Ken Doll', *Hoaxes* (n. d.) <http://hoaxes.org/archive/permalink/the_cross-dressing_ken_doll> [Accessed 6 April 2022].
[144] Rogers, p. 46.
[145] Rand, pp. 151, 194; McCorkle, p. 15; Fabio Cleto, *Camp* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 1; Rogers, p. 42.

possibility of escaping the 'habitual and violent presumptions' of binary gender roles and heterosexuality which Barbie embodies.[146] In contrast, in 'A Real Doll', Barbie and Ken become vessels to express queerness, the brother swapping Barbie's and Ken's heads and then ejaculating into Ken's headless body, like he 'never could with Barbie' (p. 168). Both paint Barbie as a figure which queerness can be projected onto, but ultimately, Tabitha's rejection of the heterosexuality Barbie represents in *Black Power Barbie* only highlights Barbie's association with straightness and patriarchy.

Lisa B. Herskovits' 'How Barbie Warped Me' (1993) and Rebecca Brown's 'Barbie Comes Out' (1993), both short stories featuring in *Mondo Barbie*, are examples of women's writing which highlight Barbie's straightness in the act of queering her. Barbie embodies 'compulsory heterosexuality' and any attempt to subvert and therefore 'queer' Barbie only highlights her straightness.[147] As Rand notes, 'self-identified queers bent on queering Barbie imply her straightness in the act of subverting'.[148] I demonstrate how Herskovits and Brown queer Barbie through the same queer lens as Rand: 'the narrow sex/gender sense of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender and the broader sense of odd, irregular, and idiosyncratic.'[149] Both texts are from *Mondo Barbie* and yet the collection's queer aspects have been largely ignored by reviewers and Barbie adorers such as *Barbie Bazaar* (1988-2006).[150] Rogers, however, supports *Mondo Barbie*'s queer associations calling it a 'not-so-straight book' with 'lesbigay character', and further suggesting that it can be found 'on library shelves among work on lesbigay issues and queer theory'.[151] *Mondo Barbie* can therefore be read as a book which attempts to queer Barbie, as a text which highlights Barbie as 'the problem' who

[146] Butler, p. viii.
[147] Butler, p. 202.
[148] Rand, p. 194.
[149] Rand, p. 11.
[150] Rogers, p. 45.
[151] Rogers, p. 46.

'warped' so many.[152] Herskovits' contribution to *Mondo Barbie* establishes how queerness can only be projected onto Barbie because she epitomizes patriarchy and heteronormativity, and how Barbie's overt straightness also has a 'warping' effect on young girls. As Rand notes, 'no amount of demystification, queer accessorizing, or subversion can erase the dubious ideological effect of Barbie' on girls and women.[153] Brown's more surreal text displays how Barbie's queerness can only be found in her subversion through parody and the absurd. Drawing on Rand's *Barbie's Queer Accessories*, Rogers' *Barbie Culture* and Paulina Palmer's *The Queer Uncanny* (2012), I discuss how both Herskovits and Brown queer Barbie through satire and subversion, therefore, emphasizing Barbie's inherent straightness.[154]

Herskovits' 'How Barbie Warped Me' satirises Barbie's straightness as the girl protagonist in the story believes that Barbie's superiority as a global icon has made her sexually attracted to women, subverting the heterosexual connotations of the doll. The title is, once again, ambiguous as the term 'warped' has many meanings, from physically bending or twisting something out of shape, to figuratively turning from the 'straight path'.[155] Both interpretations allude to queerness, as 'bent' can signify as a homophobic slur, and being opposite to straight, a synonym for heterosexuality, also indicates queerness. The title's use of the term 'warped' is subverted through irony and 'reverse discourse' when we consider the girl protagonist's queerness and because 'humour and irony' are often tools of reverse discourse.[156] The girl speaks in the past tense, as an adult, about her childhood, and discusses

[152] Peabody and Ebersole, p. xvi.
[153] Rand, p. 194.
[154] Paulina Palmer, *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic* (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2012)
[155] Entry 'Warp', The *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d. <https://www.oed.com> [Accessed 20 July 2022].
[156] 'Reverse discourse' in the Foucauldian sense, seeks to change the direction of power of language, often through reclamation (e.g., the word 'queer'), in the name of resistance. See: Tiina Seppälä, '"No One Is Illegal" As a Reverse Discourse Against Deportability', *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations*, 36.3 (2022), 391–408 (pp. 392, 403); Mikael Baaz and Mona Lilja, '"Reverse Discourse" Revisited: Cracks, Formations, and a Complex Understanding of Power', *Global Society*, 36.3 (2022), 301-308 (p. 306).

how her idealization of Barbie as a child has made her sexually attracted to women, rather than wanting to be Barbie. She says, 'by the time I was a teenager, I found myself lusting after women, instead of men. After all, Barbie was a woman, and wasn't Barbie superior to Ken. Of course she was!' (p. 81). Through reverse discourse, the protagonist uses the effervescent language of Mattel, who paint Barbie as the 'it girl', to subvert and parody Barbie's straight, feminine relatability, using the same language to illustrate Barbie's effect on queer female sexual attraction. Here, instead of exploring 'fantasies' of straight, normative womanhood which Mattel first envisioned, Barbie enables the girl to explore queer sexual fantasies, which shows how queer projection can subvert Mattel's heteronormative intentions for Barbie and, therefore, highlight them.[157]

The girl uses Barbie to express her queerness through experimenting with dressing her doll. She suggests Barbie is a rehearsal for womanhood, like in 'Beauty', using Barbie as a precursor for her adulthood and recognizing how the girl's creation of a gender-non-confirming Barbie has led to her queer identity. She says that her Barbie was a 'rebel' and outside of the usual feminine gender stereotypes adhered to by Barbie:

> My Barbie liked to wear pants, and she also liked to wear a green satin evening gown to work as a waitress. She had lots of style and never conformed to the boring rules of dress that everyone else had to (p. 80).

The protagonist lists the subversive potential of Barbie as outside of gender and social norms, her Barbie mimicking the queer and 'camp' aesthetic of not conforming to traditional dress codes and wearing extravagant gowns to work. Here, Barbie's queerness is projected on to her through subversive masculinity and overt femininity, showing how 'Barbie demonstrates that femininity is a constructed reality'.[158] Rogers argues that Barbie is 'an icon of drag',

[157] McCorkle, p. 11.
[158] Rogers, p. 42.

shown by her ‘long legs’, ‘slim hips’, ‘shimmering evening gowns’, ‘high heels’ and ‘heavyhanded makeup’, illustrating how Barbie can be interpreted as queer through her hyperfeminine dress.[159] The ability of Barbie to be changed and queered is unintentionally enabled by Mattel through their marketisation of and capitalisation on Barbie’s accessories and dress up.

Brown’s ‘Barbie Comes Out’ uses elements of body horror and the uncanny to highlight the absurdity of Barbie’s straight implications in a comic celebration of queer identity. Palmer suggests how the tenets of the uncanny, of being other, or outside of the normative align entirely with the queer experience, and ‘Barbie Comes Out’ embodies this premise entirely.[160] The surrealist, comical short story, narrated by Rebecca, a lesbian waiting for her friend at a gay bar, depicts Barbara (or Barbie) as queer. Barbara is waiting in the same gay bar for her lover Kendra, a transgender woman, and the text uses humour and the absurd to reimagine the queer transformation of Barbie in an optimistic light. Barbara is unusually stiff, plastic-looking and ‘doesn’t blink’.[161] Rebecca farcically tries to rationalise Barbara’s unnerving stiffness, initially thinking she is disabled or has cancer, demonstrating the dark humour of the story. One of the most unexpected scenes in the story is when Barbara wipes her eyes entirely off, leaving a ‘blue-black smudge’ (p. 158). The removal of the eyes alludes to Sigmund Freud’s alignment of the uncanny with ‘being robbed of one's eyes’, and alludes to another doll story, ‘The Sandman’, whose titular villain is notorious for stealing the eyes of children.[162] Rebecca, again, comically grounds the surrealism of the situation in reality by convincing herself that her drink has been ‘spiked’ (p. 158) and amusingly

[159] Rogers, pp. 42, 41.
[160] Palmer, p. 3.
[161] Rebecca Brown, ‘Barbie Comes Out’, *Mondo Barbie*, ed. by Richard Peabody and Lucinda Ebersole (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1993), pp. 152-163 (p. 151). Subsequent references in parentheses.
[162] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, eds. David McLintock and Hugh Haughton (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 85; E. T. A. Hoffman, *The Sandman* (London: Penguin Classics, 2016).

remarking ‘her eyes are adios’ (p. 158), lowering the severity of Barbie’s condition and turning the uncanny into the absurd. Barbara’s uncanny stiffness grants further comic relief when she swings her head ‘halfway around like in The Exorcist!’ (p. 163) when Kendra enters the bar at the end of the text.[163] Rather than being terrifying like the film *The Exorcist* (1973), the description of the movement is comical and more akin to the dark comedy in *Death Becomes Her* (1992), where the immortal and eternally youthful Madeline falls down the stairs before standing up again with her head twisted backwards. Like *Death Becomes Her*, overt body horror turns into the absurd through slapstick comedy in ‘Barbie Comes Out’, which parodies and queers Barbie’s anatomy and straightness through horror and the absurd.

Barbie’s doll-like perfection is also queered through uncanniness and horror. Rebecca describes how ‘her skin is smooth, no lines at all. Cool. Hairless. It felt a little creepy’ (p. 156). Like the character of Doll in Joyce Carol Oates’ ‘Doll: A Romance of Mississippi’ (2005), the representation of Barbie’s flawlessness as ‘creepy’ de-sexualizes her, challenging her hypersexuality, as highlighted in ‘A Real Doll’, through the Gothic. Barbie’s beauty, instead, has an element of horror to it, as Rebecca notes ‘her makeup is smooth. Her skin is utterly flawless. Perfect. Eerily perfect’ (p. 153). Tension is generated through the description of Barbie’s perfection, creating an unsettling gothic tone to her ‘flawless’ feminine features. This uncanny perfection is almost vampiric in its description, also evoking the uncanny perfection of characters in gothic novels such as Dorian in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).

[163] The Exorcist has been read as queer by Daniel Humphrey who notes: ‘*The Exorcist* offers up the possibility of an appalling horror that few have recognized, and one that ultimately begs a key question: is The Exorcist haunted by a queer spirit or a homosexual demon?’, illustrating the film as homophobic. Daniel Humphrey, ‘Gender and Sexuality Haunts the Horror Film’, *A Companion to the Horror Film,* ed. by Harry M. Benshoff, (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 38-55 (pp. 47-8).

Like in ‘How Barbie Warped Me’, the romanticization of heteronormative Barbie play is also subverted and queered in ‘Barbie Comes Out’. However, instead of subverting Barbie’s heteronormative associations through dress up like in Herkovits’ story, ‘Barbie Comes Out’ queers the inherent heteronormativity of Barbie play through presenting it as problematic rather than pleasant. This more accurately evokes the brother’s treatment of Barbie in Homes’ ‘A Real Doll’. But, unlike Homes’ story, ‘Barbie Comes Out’ exposes the harm of doll play from Barbie’s perspective. Rebecca says that Barbara ‘tells me horrifying stories of how they made her wear all these costumes. How they obsessively dressed and undressed and dressed her. […] they never saw her as a person, just a thing’ (p. 160). Instead of presenting Barbie play as light-hearted children’s entertainment, the story highlights how it inherently encourages female objectification, underlining it as a heteronormative, patriarchal practice. The patriarchal harm of Barbie play is taken even further when it is aligned with sexual abuse and torture through Barbara:

> she remembers having her limbs yanked out, then crammed back in. […] she tells me about the scissors and the needles and the matches, glue and dirt. The places where they put her hands. The holes they put her head in (p. 160).

The body horror of her limbs being ‘yanked’ and ‘crammed’, as well as the dangerous instruments used to maim her destabilizes the good-natured expectations of a child’s plaything. This highlights how the objectification of women leads to violence, as ‘A Real Doll’ shows, but from the woman’s perspective. Furthermore, the final line of the extract implies Barbie is used for queer sexual experimentation, which queers Mattel’s socialization of heterosexual femininity in children. Barbie’s potential as a children’s doll which nurtures heteronormative values is, therefore, queered through horror and experimental child’s play.

Though Barbie has been read as queer and empowering through her hyperfemininity expressing campness and drag, some queer circles reject or objectify Barbie and femmes, because they recognize Barbie’s hyperfemininity as conforming to heterosexual gender

expectations.[164] 'Barbie Comes Out' highlights the ostracization and objectification of femmes in the queer (particularly lesbian) community through Barbie. Rebecca highlights the fact that the fetishization and hyper-sexualization of femininity can be found in queer, as well as heterosexual, circles: 'Pat goes for the trad femme type: long hair, heels, purse, makeup, the works' (P. 152). Rebecca then objectifies and demeans Barbara because she is hyperfeminine, calling her a 'female' who she is 'meant to acquire for Pat' (p. 153). Removing Barbara's agency and using 'female' as a noun is derogatory because it relegates women to their reproductive function, with the term 'females' often being used by incels to describe women.[165] Brown further highlights the anti-femme sentiment in queer spaces when Rebecca says, 'this one isn't a bimbo – just strange', in relation to Barbara, illustrating how the Barbie doll aesthetic of hyperfemininity is associated with unintelligence and superficiality (p. 157). As Adina Bresge asserts, a bimbo has long been understood as 'a well-manicured ditz'.[166] Mattel even perpetuated the idea of feminine equating to bimbo when they released the 1992 Teen Talk Barbie which said, 'math class is tough'.[167] As Rand notes, 'the difficulty of making Fem Barbie visible as such has more to do with heterosexual presumption in dominant culture and antifem prejudice among dykes than with the artifact-or its producers, who perpetuate both but invented neither.'[168] Barbie's feminine appearance is, therefore, either presumed as straight by a heteronormative consumer base or disdained by

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[164] 'Barbie, for better or for worse, is a symbol of hyper femininity that doesn't allow any room for toxic masculinity in her world. Being able to get in touch with my feminine side and interests was a big contributor to accepting my sexuality as being an intrinsic aspect of myself that didn't need to be changed," @dolljunk said.' Sage Anderson, 'Barbie may not be out of the closet yet, but her fans sure are', *Mashable* (2019) <https://mashable.com/article/barbie-doll-collecting-gay-culture> [Accessed 15 November 2022].

[165] Srinivasan, p. 74.

[166] Adina Bresge, 'The "New-Age Bimbo" Has No Thoughts (or That's What They Want You to Think)', *The Canadian Press* (Toronto: Canadian Press Enterprises Inc, 2022) <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2676161488?accountid=14693&cid=CID:20230108155722798:210664&fromOL=true&parentSessionId=KmpVfA%2Bp7SHfXsfJvGsTPJlYmLGyvCYwnVowXfUGV74%3D&pq-origsite=primo> [Accessed 9 January 2023]

[167] The Associated Press, 'Company News: Mattel Says It Erred; Teen Talk Barbie Turns Silent on Math', *The New York Times* (1992) <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/21/business/company-news-mattel-says-it-erred-teen-talk-barbie-turns-silent-on-math.html> [Accessed 16 November 2022]

[168] Rand, p. 194.

queer folk as not challenging female gender roles. Rebecca's contempt for Barbie's femininity highlights the disdain for (presumed) heteronormative femininity in queer spaces, as exemplified by Barbie.

Brown underscores Barbie's fixed heteronormative femininity and then illustrates her escape from this rigid heteronormativity as empowering. Barbara's stiffness is symbolic of straightness and the rigid gender binaries she must conform to as a doll. When Rebecca first sees Barbara, she calls her, 'straight as a can opener' and describes how 'her left foot and leg swing forward perfectly straight' (p. 154). The simile of comparing Barbie to a 'can opener' further follows the tradition of comic relief being used by queer authors to challenge heteronormativity. The repetition of 'straight' emphasizes Mattel's heterosexual vision for Barbie. However, Barbie's inherent heteronormativity is subverted when Barbara sees Kendra at the end of the text and they become human instead of doll-like, allowing them to 'come out' of the closet, as the title suggests.

'Barbie Comes Out' subverts Barbie's heteronormativity through queer transformation in order to emphasize how 'the border between homosexuality and heterosexuality is permeable and unfixed [which] problematizes the notion of a stable sexual identity'.[169] Barbie's queer love is illustrated as pure and fairy tale-like, painting a picture of idealistic love, rather than the tragedy and monstrosity often depicted in twentieth-century fiction and film which feature trans and queer people.[170] When Barbara and Kendra see each other, they turn from doll-like to human, evoking the trope of transformation from beast or object to human in fairy tales such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1756). Their transformation evokes, what Gina Wisker discusses in relation to lesbian Gothic horror, that 'the ability to metamorphose,

[169] Palmer, p. 153.
[170] Palmer, p. 153.

transform and break boundaries and taboos leads to new versions of self and relationships.'[171] Brown also follows the tradition of writers of lesbian fiction appropriating fairy-tale tropes and story lines, drawing on the magical and romantic transformational element of fairy tales, as when Barbara and Kendra see each other and become human, it is as though 'a spell were broken' (p. 164).[172] Their stiffness meant they could not be sexually intimate in doll form, which alludes to their physical patience in waiting to fully embrace their queer sexuality as they 'willed their bodies stiffly wait until they got the bodies they were always meant to have' (p. 164). It is only when Kendra has transitioned, and they become human, that they can physically engage in their queer sexuality, showing Barbie's inability to participate in queer culture as a 'straight' doll.

Nonetheless, Barbie's queer transformation is still through a heteronormative and capitalist lens, highlighting how, ultimately, Mattel virtue-signals for profit. Barbie's queer love is shown as magical, freeing and glamorous through commercial and Hollywood-movie, as well as fairy-tale, imagery: 'the air around them turns to smoke, that purple stuff, like from the same hair dye commercial' (p. 164). The magical realism is substantiated through the alignment with contemporary popular media and advertising, identifying Barbie's queer transformation as artificial. The allusion to publicity illustrates how Barbie's queerness is never hers, but a tool which is used for rainbow capitalism and virtue-signalling by Mattel. Although Barbie is queered in a comic mode throughout the text, Barbie cannot remain queer as a doll, highlighting how Barbie can only be queer if she escapes Mattel's well-marketed doll image, as Barbara and Kendra attempt to do.

[171] Gina Wisker, 'Devouring Desires: Lesbian Gothic Horror', *Queering the Gothic*, Eds. William Hughes and Andrew Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 123-141 (p. 125).
[172] Palmer, p. 12.

Consequently, though Mattel often profit from the queering of Barbie through rainbow capitalism and queer doll collectors, the queering of Barbie only further highlights her as a symbol of heterosexuality. These women writers parody the queering of Barbie through the Gothic and the absurd to highlight Mattel's image of Barbie as an emblem of heteronormativity. 'Barbie Comes Out' is a parody of Barbie coming out of the closet and shows the impossibility of her ever being queer or feminist because she must escape her dollness to become queer, implying that her dollness is ingrained in heteronormative patriarchy and capitalism rather than feminism. 'How Barbie Warped Me' underscores Mattel's heteronormative intentions by demonstrating that queerness can only be projected onto Barbie through repurposing Mattel's accessories, as well as reclaiming the language surrounding her critique. Though both stories could be read as representing Barbie's potential to invoke queer empowerment, the subversive implications of the stories, through satire and reverse discourse, imply that they are emphasizing Barbie's heteronormative foundations through queering her. Queering Barbie will always be difficult and problematic because she is a core element in Mattel's heteronormative, patriarchal and capitalist production line. As Rand notes, 'Subvertors […] will always face limited audiences and antisubversive readings until Barbie's real-life social and cultural contexts, both mainstream and subcultural, get reaccessorized and refashioned for justice.'[173]

Conclusion

Though the women's writing under investigation is from the third and fourth wave of feminism, it reflects second-wave feminist thinking in its critique of Barbie's negative effect on the beauty and behavioural standards placed on women. In particular, through parody, subversion and the uncanny, the stories analysed above highlight the harmful connotations of

[173] Rand, p. 194.

Barbie in relation to body image, hyper-femininity, heteronormativity, patriarchy, whiteness and consumerism. Ultimately, women writers critique Mattel's 'remaking' of 'modern young womanhood' under the guise of feminism promoted by third-wave feminists.[174] Instead, the texts highlight Mattel's role in the commodification of female perfection, perpetuated by patriarchal industries, which oppress marginalized communities through capitalism and the idealization of slim, straight, white, able-bodied female bodies. 'Barbie-Q' and 'Free Barbie' explicitly show Barbie as an instrument of patriarchy and capitalism through her production line and consumer base, blaming Mattel's manufacturing and marketing of Barbie for perpetuating inequality amongst marginalized communities, and the global market. These texts also emphasize how Barbie directly oppresses people of colour, as shown in *Black Power Barbie*, where Barbie perpetuates white supremacy and racial self-hatred. Furthermore, the stories show how Barbie has a 'warping' effect on their owners, whether that is through her perpetuation of racial prejudice in 'Barbie-Q', 'Free Barbie' and *Black Power Barbie*; anti-queer sentiment in 'A Real Doll', *Black Power Barbie*, 'How Barbie Warped Me' and 'Barbie Comes Out'; or, body image issues in 'Barbie', 'Beauty' and 'Free Barbie'. Many of the texts also exhibit how Mattel replicate the harmful influence of highly lucrative industries (television, media, diet, cosmetic, porn) on children through Barbie. In 'Barbie', Barbie perpetuates the unrealistic expectations of female bodies in films and magazines, and 'Free Barbie' and 'How Barbie Warped Me' directly and explicitly blame Mattel for propagating these standards. 'A Real Doll' highlights how Barbie contributes to the misogyny towards and hyper-sexualization of women, which is perpetuated by the sex industry. Tabitha in *Black Power Barbie* is heavily influenced by white American movie and pop culture, showing how media, as well as Barbie, socializes the glorification of whiteness. Additionally, *Black Power Barbie* and 'Barbie Comes Out' highlight the preservation of

[174] McRobbie, p. 81.

heteronormativity by Mattel because the characters must reject the doll or escape dollness in order to embrace queerness. Ultimately, these stories blame the commodification of women's 'perfection', through the sex, media, and marketing industry – which promotes being slim, white, able-bodied, heterosexual and middle-class - as the root cause for a Barbie owner's subordination. Women writers of the nineties and twenty-first century exclusively scrutinize the structures of power that Mattel stands for and position Barbie as a symbol of patriarchy.

Chapter Three.
The Sex Doll:
From Female Sexual Liberation to Female Objectification

The term 'sex doll' typically conjures up the image of a blow-up doll associated with stag nights and pranks, a passive device used for comedic effect, as well as displaying male sexual dominance. However, the sex doll (and more recently the sex bot) in recent years has become a more realistic commodity used for companionship and sex, almost a surrogate partner made from silicon. This chapter examines the figure of the sex doll in Daphne du Maurier's short story 'The Doll' (1937), in the context of early twentieth century discourses surrounding female sexuality and spinsterhood, and in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) in the context of late twentieth and twenty-first century debates around pornography, the sex positive movement and #MeToo. A renewed interest in women's inequalities and rights between 2011 and 2015 points to the republication of du Maurier's radical and subversive short stories in 2011, which explore themes such as domestic abuse and sexual assault. 'The Doll' is a sorely neglected, rare and radical example of female sexual liberation through a male sex doll in British literature. Conversely, *The Heart Goes Last* presents the sex bot as a tool for female objectification, sexual violence and the commodification of the body in near-future dystopian America.[1]

The sex doll in literature is heavily influenced by primarily male heteronormative representations, such as the Greek myth of Pygmalion. Through a close analysis of du Maurier's and Atwood's texts, my goal is to show how each author subverts and highlights the patriarchal narratives and structures which allowed the sex doll to become a mainstream

[1] Atwood's text tackles concerns relating to many contemporary feminist critiques of the sex bot. See: Kathleen Richardson, 'Sex Robot Matters: Slavery, the Prostituted, and the Rights of Machines', *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine*, 35.2 (2016), 46–53; Sinziana M. Gutiu, 'The roboticization of consent', in *Robot Law*, ed. by Ryan Calo, Michael A. Froomkin and Ian Kerr (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), pp. 186–212.

commodity in the twenty-first century. Analysing these texts alongside one another will demonstrate how these authors subvert, scrutinize and rewrite patriarchal narratives in completely contrasting and unexpected ways through the figure of the sex doll. This chapter will show how du Maurier's sexually liberal representation of the sex doll in comparison to Atwood's more pessimistic representation challenges the assumption of historical progress in relation to women's sexuality and liberation, as well as the assumption that Atwood, an anti-capitalist feminist, would be more liberal than du Maurier, who has been noted for her 'conservatism'.[2]

The patriarchal and misogynistic ideas that led to the creation of the modern-day sex doll were first found in male-authored literature such as the Greek myth of Pandora from Ovid's narrative poem *Metamorphoses* (AD 8). The myth of Pygmalion set the tone for the patriarchal and misogynistic ideals of man-made women which gave rise to the modern sex doll. The story of Pygmalion is one of the first tales of artificial companionship. In the narrative, Pygmalion carves a female statue from ivory, named Galatea, and falls in love with his creation. In *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (2013), Marquard Smith describes Pygmalion's misogynistic demonization of female sexuality before he creates Galatea. Smith notes that 'Pygmalion is desperate for a wife but horrified by the natural lasciviousness of women […] he despises the lives led by the Propoetides, the girls of Amathus who for daring to deny Venus' divinity are punished by being changed into the first prostitutes.'[3] Pygmalion implies not only that the perfect woman can only be created by man, but also that women should be sexually submissive only to him, like Galatea.

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[2] Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 167; Light also notes 'A woman's capacity to wield her own sexual power is always seen negatively in [du Maurier's] novels.' Light, p. 177; Paula Wieczorek argues that Atwood is critical of capitalism in her novel *The Year of the Flood* (2009). Paula Wieczorek, 'Women, Nature and Capitalist Patriarchy: An Ecofeminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's The Year of the Flood (2009)', *New Horizons in English Studies*, 3.1 (2018), 112–22 (p. 113).

[3] Marquard Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 36.

Bo Ruberg, in her recent text on the misunderstood origins of sex dolls, *Sex Dolls at Sea: Imagined Histories of Sexual Technologies* (2022), argues that the first commercial sex dolls were the *femmes en caoutchouc* which were rubber women first created and sold during the mid nineteenth century, rather than the seventeenth century sailors' dolls that are often noted as being the first sex dolls to exist.[4] According to Ruberg, the *femmes en caoutchouc* 'laid the groundwork for the later, more widespread sale of sex dolls'.[5] During the second wave of feminism, sex dolls began to make more of a mainstream appearance in sex shops and magazines, Devlin stating that 'the blow-up doll first made an appearance in the 1970s.'[6] The sex doll became a commodity during the third wave of feminism due to the mainstreaming of pornography which followed the invention and rapid growth of the internet. Devlin writes that 'it wasn't until the mid-1990s that the realistic sex doll became a more public commercial reality.'[7] Unrealistic beauty standards began to be explicitly perpetuated by the sex doll, as with mainstream magazines and pornography during the 1990s. Therefore, the commodification of the sex doll not only presents female bodies as products to be used but indicates unrealistic beauty standards.[8] Anthony Ferguson's *The Sex Doll: A History* (2010) argues that the sex doll shows the male desire for a more reliable and compliant companion than real women.[9] Ferguson also notes that, 'it is likely that the desire for absolute control over the sex partner plays an important role in the use of sex dolls', as well as the 'fear of emasculation, ridicule, rejection and particularly the loss of power or control'.[10] More recent texts on sex dolls, such as Caitlin Roper's *Sex Dolls, Robots and Woman Hating: The*

[4] Bo Ruberg, *Sex Dolls at Sea: Imagined Histories of Sexual Technologies* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2022), p. 115.
[5] Ruberg, p. 116.
[6] Devlin, p. 39.
[7] Devlin, p. 39.
[8] Figures which entered the mainstream in the 1950s and 60s, such as Marilyn Monroe and Barbie, have continued the feminist discourse surrounding female beauty standards in mainstream culture in the modern era and even influence beauty standards in contemporary society today.
[9] Anthony Ferguson, *The Sex Doll: A History* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2010), p. 3168. Kindle Edition.
[10] Ferguson, p. 154, 197.

Case for Resistance (2022) argues that there is an inherent misogyny in 'pornified female-bodied' sex doll use, as they are 'the literal objectification of women' and used by men as 'stand-ins' for women and children, to enact their violent fantasies.[11] As with the myth of Pygmalion, the modern sex doll highlights a patriarchal tradition in the history of doll depictions which consigns women to sex objects.

Nonetheless, some recent critics argue that the sex doll can be reclaimed as a feminist figure. Ruberg dismantles the patriarchal history of the original sex dolls from the seventeenth century called 'dames de voyage', showing the more feminine, queer and intersectional, as well as colonial, histories of these figures. For Ruberg, 'the tale of the dames de voyage presents a version of history that overwrites marginalized people and obscures actual histories, including histories of violence and oppression'.[12] Ruberg, therefore, concludes that for the origins and future technologies of the sex doll and sex robot, 'there remains a glimmer of radical potential in the story of the sailors' dolls itself, a potential for an intersectional feminist reclamation'.[13] Though du Maurier does present the radical potential of the sex doll in the 1930s, it is difficult to see, within the context of contemporary capitalism, gender essentialism, incel culture and hypersexual culture, how the sex doll, or sex robot, can be anything but harmful to women, as shown in Atwood's more contemporary speculative fiction.

Daphne du Maurier's 'The Doll' (1937)

Daphne du Maurier's short story 'The Doll' is one of her earliest and most radical works, written sometime before the 1930s whilst she was in her early twenties, and later published in *The Editor Regrets* (1937). After this it was largely forgotten until it was republished in *The*

[11] Caitlin Roper, *Sex Dolls, Robots and Woman Hating: The Case for Resistance* (Chicago: Spinifex Press, 2022), p. 2.
[12] Ruberg, p. 213.
[13] Ruberg, p. 216. This anticipates my argument in the final chapter of this thesis on The AI Doll.

Doll: The Lost Short Stories (2011), around the start of the fourth wave of feminism, along with twelve more of du Maurier's controversial stories which had been published in periodicals and collections throughout the twentieth century.[14] 'The Doll' is a gothic short story told through an unreliable and unnamed male narrator, who obsesses over the main protagonist, Rebecca, and her doll companion, Julio. The unnamed narrator's obsession with Rebecca appears to worry and frustrate her as he openly seeks to possess and control her. At the end of the narrative Rebecca reveals her use for Julio as a sex doll. Though the sex act is never depicted, it is implied by the narrator's reaction. On seeing Rebecca and Julio together, the narrator flees her flat, only to come back the next day to discover Rebecca has left with Julio forever. Amelia Yeates notes that a 'topic decidedly underexplored [...] is that of the female artist or writer as Pygmalion' and du Maurier's text contributes to this overlooked subject by subverting patriarchal narratives of female objectification through the sex doll.[15] Du Maurier writes about the sex doll well before it is brought to the mainstream market in the mid-twentieth century and what is even more unusual is that 'The Doll' stands as a rare representation of a woman having sex with a male sex doll, even by contemporary standards.

'The Doll' is reminiscent of the patriarchal Greek myth of Laodamia, which involved a woman's sexual attraction to a male statue, through the liberation of Rebecca's sexuality and autonomy at the end of du Maurier's text. The tale of Laodamia appeared in Hyginus' *Fabulae,* a collection of stories estimated to have been written before the late second century AD and was the first literary representation of artificial companionship. Hyginus outlines the story of 'Laodamia' who, after her husband's death, 'made a waxen statue in the likeness of

[14] These stories were published in *The Bystander* (1929), *Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan* (1931), *Illustrated London News* (1932), *Early Stories* (1955), *The Breaking Point* (1959) and *Rebecca Notebook* (1980), and included topics such as prostitution, domestic abuse, sexual assault, paedophilia and infidelity.
[15] Amelia Yeates, 'Recent Work on Pygmalion in Nineteenth-Century Literature', *Literature Compass*, 7.7 (2010), p. 591.

her husband Protesilaus, put it in her chamber under the pretense that it was a religious statue, and began to worship it.' [16] However, one morning Laodamia is found to be 'embracing and kissing the statue', thus Laodamia's statue becomes the first known sex doll.[17] Laodamia's ownership of a sex doll in her husband's image ends in despair as her father, Acastus, burns it on a pyre to 'prevent her from prolonging her torture' and Laodamia 'throws herself on the pyre along with it.'[18] Here, the original sex doll, like most Greek mythology, is presented within a patriarchal framework, as the woman is punished for expressing her love without a human male counterpart. Like the tale of Laodamia, du Maurier writes about a woman using a male sex doll. However, 'The Doll' subverts the tale of Laodamia, ending in female sexual liberation and freedom instead of female subjugation and death. Du Maurier's story focuses on the experience of her unmarried female protagonist, Rebecca, and her sex doll, co-opting the figure of the sex doll and rewriting the tale of Laodamia as a feminist narrative of sexual freedom. Instead of being punished, du Maurier's protagonist faces the realities of men attempting to control the sexuality of unmarried women, and then escapes it.

One well-known sex doll during the early twentieth century, an art piece of a life-sized doll commissioned by Oskar Kokoschka in 1918, is particularly pertinent to du Maurier's story. Kokoschka's doll was a human-sized doll made in his ex-lover, Alma Mahler's, exact proportions without her consent and used as his companion.[19] Rebecca's sex doll aligns with Kokoschka's in relation to their intimate and romantic relationship with a life-size doll; however, Kokoschka allows his sex doll to be destroyed, whilst Rebecca protects her sex doll from the threat of the male narrator, who wanted to 'trample on its sordid human body' (p. 25), by escaping him. Therefore, 'The Doll' subverts the patriarchal

[16] Stephen M. Trzaskoma and R. Scott Smith, *Apollodorus' Library and Hyginus' Fabulae: Two Handbooks of Greek Mythology* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2007), p. 132.
[17] Trzaskoma and Smith, p. 133.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Bonnie Roos, 'Oskar Kokoschka's Sex Toy: The Women and the Doll Who Conceived the Artist', *Modernism/Modernity*, 12.2 (2005), 291–309 (p. 291).

ideal identified by Liz Kelly, that 'men are subjects, women are objects'.[20] Kokoschka's female sex doll objectifies Mahler and is destroyed, whilst Rebecca's male sex doll persists, and the female protagonist, Rebecca, escapes her objectification at the hands of the male narrator.

Du Maurier's pattern of subverting patriarchal art and narratives, like Laodamia and the Mahler Doll, is also shown in her subversion of Hoffman's 'The Sandman'. [21] The narrator's obsession with Rebecca mirrors Nathaniel's obsession with Olympia in 'The Sandman'. However, du Maurier subverts the narrative through her representation of male hysteria and female sexual freedom. Du Maurier allows the female object of desire, Rebecca, to have her own desires, which enables her freedom at the end of the text. Though Rebecca is the male narrator's object of desire, she is not a mechanical doll like Olympia, rather Rebecca is the one with an object of desire in the form of a doll, which becomes the primary cause of the narrator's hysteria. Hysteria becomes a tool which du Maurier uses to undermine the male narrator as he is driven 'insane' by his 'obsession' with Rebecca, with him saying 'my brain is on fire'.[22] This subverts the male narrator's hysteria in 'The Sandman' as Nathaniel is presented as justified in his frenzied response to the discovery that his object of desire, Olympia, is an automaton. Allison De Fren aligns the doll with the debilitation of hysteria, saying 'the uncanniness of a mental and nervous illness, such as epilepsy or hysteria, is nearly universal, since it renders the autonomous human subject mechanical or puppet-like'.[23] However, du Maurier also subverts this by ensuring the reader interprets the male

[20] Liz Kelly, '"It's Everywhere" Sexual Violence as a Continuum', *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 191-215 (p. 211).
[21] 'The Sandman' is discussed in the Introduction.
[22] Daphne Du Maurier, 'The Doll', in *The Doll: The Lost Short Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), pp. 13-30 (pp. 21, 25). Subsequent references to text in parentheses.
[23] Allison De Fren, 'Technofetishism and the Uncanny Desires of A.S.F.R. (alt.sex.fetish.robots)', *Science Fiction Studies*, 36. 3 (2009), 404-40 (p. 418).

narrator as hysterical rather than Rebecca. Nathanial cannot accept that he desires a machine and goes mad, whilst Rebecca embraces her sexuality, ending in her freedom and fulfilment.

Du Maurier's use of the Gothic breathes new life into the first representation of a sex doll while liberating her female figure from the patriarchal script. Du Maurier's resistance to patriarchal narratives also aligns with female gothic literature, which attempts to rewrite the female victim as a heroine. 'The Doll' is a gothic short story, which draws on aspects of horror, hyperbole and uncanniness to highlight the 'horrors' of female sexuality to male heteronormative power. Diana Wallace notes that 'the Female Gothic is perhaps par excellence the mode within which women writers have been able to explore deep-rooted female fears about women's powerlessness and imprisonment within patriarchy.'[24] For du Maurier, the doll becomes a device through which her female protagonist can articulate something that is forbidden and transgressive in early-twentieth-century society, demonstrating how gothic short stories often 'reflect a broader social and cultural mind-set'.[25] In du Maurier's radical representation of heteronormative coupledom as dangerous to single women, she, as argued by Gina Wisker:

> scrutinise[s] and utterly undermine[s] any beliefs about harmonious coupledom, the security of relationships, betrothal, marriages, the dependability of family members, the trustworthiness of everyday relationships and domestic securities, revealing investment in these to be whimsical, short-sighted, and potentially destructive of stability and thus dangerous.[26]

Du Maurier explores the tensions between male anxiety and female sexuality through the sex doll to comment on wider social issues in relation to unmarried women, the repression of female sexuality and male (sexual) violence, through the Gothic.

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[24] Diana Wallace, 'Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story as Female Gothic', *Gothic Studies*, 6 (2004), p. 57.
[25] Jessica Cox, 'Gothic and Victorian Supernatural Tales', *The Cambridge History of the English Short Story*, ed. by Dominic Head (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 49-66 (p. 50).
[26] Gina Wisker, 'Haunting Relationships, Dark Visions, Personal Dangers and Encounters with Strangers in Gothic Short Stories by Katherine Mansfield (1920), Shirley Jackson (1946), Daphne du Maurier (1952), and Alice Munro (2012), in *Legacies and Lifespans in Contemporary Women's Writing*, eds. Gina Wisker, Leanne Bibby, and Heidi Yeandle, 1st ed. (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2023), pp. 11-4 (p. 27).

The sex doll has always had grotesque, uncanny and ominous connotations, which explains why the figure has found its place in gothic literature, and in du Maurier's short story. Du Maurier utilizes the gothic tones which underpin the first penetrable sex dolls in the nineteenth century, which were disembodied torsos advertised in magazines. According to Marquard Smith, who writes about the history of the erotic doll, the first sex dolls 'gave "the perfect illusion of reality", then, apart from one fact: their appearance. They were structured as a woman's abdomen without the legs, without arms, without a head. They are disembodied torsos'.[27] Sexually fetishizing a disembodied body part 'raises the specter of necrophilia', as De Fren notes, and indicates that the sex doll has incredibly grotesque, uncanny and gothic origins.[28] In *The Sex Doll: A History,* Ferguson also writes about the connection of necrophilia to the sex doll, saying 'both lack movement and life'.[29] He further argues how the improved realism of the sex doll that has come to increasingly resemble real women over the past couple of decades makes them look even more like a 'fresh corpse'.[30] For Ferguson, the fetish of the necrophiliac is to do with 'the need to have absolute and total control over an eternally silent, submissive and obedient sex partner.'[31] The wish to sexually own and dominate a silent and submissive sex partner is part of the fetish of the sex doll owner too, as Ferguson also argues, and so there are clear links between the sexual domination of women, necrophilia and the sex doll.[32] Rebecca's use of her male sex doll is different because it is about female sexual freedom rather than sexual domination. Instead, Rebecca takes back control of her own sexuality through her relationship with Julio.

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[27] Marquard Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 185.
[28] De Fren, p. 409; The Gothic has always had links with death and necrophilia. See: Laura Miller, 'Between Life and Death: Representing Necrophilia, Medicine, and the Figure of the Intercessor in M.G. Lewis' The Monk', in *Sex and Death in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. by Jolene Zigarovich (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 203-223.
[29] Ferguson, p. 2084.
[30] Ferguson, p. 2087.
[31] Ferguson, p. 2089.
[32] Ferguson, p. 154.

Rebecca also stands as a preliminary model of du Maurier's titular character in her famous gothic novel, *Rebecca* (1938), as argued by Donna Mitchell in one of the only literary analyses of 'The Doll'.[33] Though du Maurier's Rebeccas mirror each other in their overt sexuality, they succumb to entirely different fates, as a result of their differing reliance on men. Though the earlier Rebecca in 'The Doll' is a precursor for, as Alison Light notes, 'Rebecca's significance as a seductive but ultimately tabooed expression of femininity', the former Rebecca escapes her male oppressor and is not punished, unlike the latter Rebecca who is killed.[34] Mitchell identifies how Rebecca's sexuality is presented as monstrous, as she is depicted as a 'femme fatale' and 'pseudovampire', and states how 'this is reflected […] when du Maurier's female character attempts to practice the same sexual freedom as men and is condemned.'[35] Mitchell concludes that 'The Doll' is 'emblematic of the author's literary revolt against regressive societal notions through her experimentation with gender and sexuality.'[36] Further to this, Jan Stuart's review of 'The Doll' in *The New York Times* in 2012 paints Rebecca as 'perverse', presenting the male narrator as the victim of her 'taunt[ing]'.[37] Though the male narrator does condemn Rebecca, she has the agency to remove him from her life and, therefore, she is not perpetually condemned, rather she is able to escape her fate of oppression by the obsessive, controlling male narrator. My analysis of 'The Doll' departs from Mitchell's and Stuart's by rereading the monstrosity and perversity of Julio and Rebecca's sexuality as symptomatic of an unreliable, obsessive and abusive narrator, of whom Rebecca is the victim. Instead, my reading identifies Julio and Rebecca's relationship as a symbol of sexual liberation by focusing on Rebecca's ability to achieve unmarried sexual

[33] Donna Mitchell, 'Monstrous Femininity and Objectified Masculinity in Daphne du Maurier's "The Doll"', in *The Female Fantastic* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 22-34 (p. 27).
[34] Alison Light, ''Returning to Manderley' - Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class', *Feminist Review*, 16 (1984), 7-25 (p. 10).
[35] Mitchell, pp. 25, 23.
[36] Mitchell, p. 22.
[37] Jan Stuart, 'The Doll', *New York Times Book Review* (New York: New York Times Company, 2012), p. 23; For another Review, see: Mary Quinn, 'The Doll: The Lost Short Stories', *The Booklist*, 108.3 (2011), p. 28.

freedom through Julio, enabling her to leave the male narrator and achieve her autonomy at the end of the text.

Du Maurier utilizes the traditional gothic trope of an unreliable narrator to subvert gender stereotypes and to allow the reader to sympathise with Rebecca. The primary narrator, Dr E. Strongman, who writes the foreword to the unnamed male secondary narrator's diary-like entries which frame the text, alludes to the fact that the unnamed author was likely mentally ill, saying 'whether the wild improbabilities of the story are true, or whether the whole is but the hysterical product of a diseased mind, we will never know' (p. 13).[38] The unnamed narrator's madness is further referred to when he states, 'I want to know if men realise when they are insane' (p. 14) and 'you have made of me a madman' (p. 15). Therefore, this sets up the story as recounted by an unreliable narrator, a trope prevalently used in the female gothic tradition such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892), and used in du Maurier's other texts.[39] Furthermore, du Maurier subverts the pre-twentieth-century notion that 'hysteria is considered a woman's disease' and establishes the male secondary narrator as untrustworthy and the female protagonist as a victim of his hysteria and obsessiveness.[40] This demonstrates how du Maurier is progressive in her subversion of gender stereotypes during the interwar period, which is most significantly demonstrated by her representation of a male sex doll.

The fulfilment in her romantic relationship with her male sex doll enables Rebecca to remain single and mostly uninterested in the male narrator. During the interwar period, there

[38] The name Dr E. Strongman alludes to the strength and stability of the primary narrator, setting him as a foil for the mentally unstable secondary narrator.
[39] Diana Wallace states 'du Maurier's innovation in *Rebecca* is to make the nameless narrator unreliable in her misreading of the situation at Manderley.' Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 150.
[40] Cecilia Tasca, Mariangela Rapetti, Mauro Giovanni Carta, and Bianca Fadda, 'Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health', *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health: CP & EMH*, 8.1 (2012), 110-19 (p. 112).

were more women choosing to remain single rather than be married and this led to a growing stigma and anxiety surrounding single women in the 1920s and 30s, when du Maurier wrote 'The Doll'. Sheila Jeffreys writes about spinsterhood and celibacy in the early twentieth century and discusses how the feminist movement during this period, encouraged by feminists such as Christabel Pankhurst (1880-1958) and Cicely Hamilton (1872-1952), involved women remaining single as a 'strike' against degenerate male sexual behaviour and marital abuse.[41] This is illustrative of du Maurier's representation of Rebecca in 'The Doll' who avoids being in a relationship with a human male in order to avoid the abuse of the male protagonist. When the male narrator romantically pursues Rebecca, she 'shrugged her shoulder, she refused to be definite' and said, 'I don't know' (p. 20). The unnamed male narrator says, 'I found her strange, detached – she seemed bored at my being there', demonstrating that Rebecca is not interested in a relationship with the narrator, and the narrator's view that her disinterest is 'strange' (p. 20). Alison Oram notes, 'single and celibate women who lacked an outlet for their sexual and parental instincts were increasingly vulnerable to being seen as warped and unfulfilled'.[42] The narrator's view of Rebecca as 'warped and unfulfilled' shows how women such as Rebecca, who refused to conform to heterosexual marriage, were viewed during the interwar period. Though female sexuality outside of marriage was a radical topic for women to be writing about during the 1920s, du Maurier confronted the subject, nonetheless. Using her sex doll, Julio, as a surrogate partner enables Rebecca to be sexually fulfilled and liberated whilst avoiding aggression, abuse and control by men.

[41] Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930* (Melbourne: Spinifex, 1997), p. 90.
[42] Alison Oram, 'Repressed and thwarted, or bearer of the new world? the spinster in inter-war feminist discourses', Women's History Review, 1.3 (1992), 413-433 (p. 415).

Because Rebecca is an unmarried, single woman, who sexually satisfies herself, she is the ultimate sexual threat to patriarchal expectations of compulsory heteronormativity. Light writes, 'women are all the potential victims of a femininity which is not just endlessly defining us in terms of sexual status - we are wives, mothers, virgins, whores - but which marks us as representing "the sexual" itself'.[43] The male narrator threatens Rebecca and fetishizes her objectification and death because her sexuality endangers patriarchal heteronormative power dynamics:

> I remember thinking how easy it would be to tighten the scarf and strangle her. I imagined her face when dying – her lips parted, and the enquiring look in her eyes – they would show white but she would not be afraid (p. 17).

For the narrator, in death, Rebecca would become an object he can control. His obsession with controlling Rebecca and her sexuality is presented as sadistic and generates violence in this passage. In her essay on abjection, *Powers of Horror* (1982), Julia Kristeva suggests that the 'ritualization of defilement […] means giving men rights over women […] put in the position of passive objects'.[44] Through his violent fantasy of strangling Rebecca, he makes her abject by sexualizing her passive corpse and talking of her 'parted lips' and 'enquiring look'. This not only connotes the still gaze and features of the sex doll, but also necrophilia which, as already stated, is a fetish often associated with sex doll users.[45] Like Maxim in *Rebecca*, the male narrator feels that he can only feel sexually and emotionally free from Rebecca when she is dead, and she is no longer a threat to his masculinity.

Du Maurier uses the figure of the doll to subvert the narrative of men using women as passive sexual objects and to illustrate the sexual fulfilment women can experience if given

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[43] Light, 'Returning to Manderley', p. 17.
[44] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 70.
[45] See: Agnieszka Ogonowska, 'Hidden (symbolic) necrophilia. RealDoll, sexrobots and fembot, i.e. towards a new anthropology of sexuality and anti-cultural therapy' (trans. from Polish), *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Cultura*, 11.4 (2019), 90–107.

knowledge of sexual intercourse. Du Maurier was writing towards the end of the period usually identified with feminism's 'first wave', when Stopes published her pivotal text which explored female sexuality and pleasure, *Married Love* (1918). Stopes writes about the neglect of female sexual desire by husbands, leading to wives being used as 'a passive instrument for man's need' and the need for young, married couples to be given sexual knowledge in order to have a happy and fulfilling relationship.[46] Du Maurier uses Julio as a mechanism through which Rebecca can explore her sexuality safely and covertly. Like Stopes, du Maurier attempts to break the myth of female chastity by exploring female sexual desire through the figure of the doll. However, 'The Doll' is distinct from, and more radical than, Stopes' text in that Rebecca explores her sexuality outside of a marital relationship.

Rebecca's sexual desires are shown at the end of the text when the narrator discovers Rebecca sexually gratifying herself with Julio at the climax of the story. This is a radical depiction for its time, but also speaks to what Lesley A. Hall describes as, a depiction that followed the increased interwar 'articulation of the existence of, and discussions of the nature of, female sexual desire and women's potential to experience sexual pleasure.'[47] Nonetheless, the narrator paints a scene of horror, when entering Rebecca's flat as he compares it to 'the entrance of a tomb', which foreshadows the death of the narrator's unattainable image of Rebecca and their relationship (p. 28). Once again, the narrator is hyperbolic, saying 'something gripped my heart, cold, clammy fear' (p. 29). The scene builds tension and has an unmistakeably grotesque and gothic tone. When Rebecca is caught by the narrator having sex with Julio, he says:

> I heard a cry of fury from Rebecca, and she turned on the lamp. Oh! Christ, I shall never forget her eyes, the terrible light – the unholy rapture in her eyes, and her ashen

[46] Marie Stopes, *Married Love* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1918), p. 28.
[47] Lesley A. Hall, *Outspoken Women: An Anthology of Women's Writing on Sex, 1870-1969* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2014), p. 108.

> – ashen face. I saw everything – the room, the divan – I knew everything. I was seized with deadly sickness – a terrible despair (p. 29).

It is notable that the actual sexual act is never depicted, rather du Maurier paints the act as unspeakable itself by focusing on the 'unsaid' in this scene.[48] The oxymorons 'terrible light' and 'unholy rapture' demonstrate the narrator's confusion at Rebecca's sexual fulfilment with Julio and his continuing hysteria and repulsion towards Rebecca's sexuality. The repetition of 'ashen' demonstrates her alignment with Julio, whose complexion is also described as 'ashen' and vampiric, whilst also subverting the narrator's fetishization of her statuesque 'pale' skin (p. 15). The hyperbolic vocabulary, short sentences and ellipsis in the final lines only further illustrate his shock and inability to express what he has seen. Once again, he is an unreliable narrator here, rather than a character the reader can trust and sympathise with. Instead, sympathy lies with Rebecca, who is condemned so harshly by the narrator for wanting to sexually gratify herself without a human male counterpart in the privacy of her own home.

Rebecca's sexuality is continually othered and aligned with evil, which du Maurier presents as a desperate attempt by the narrator to condemn and control her sexuality. Rebecca's non-conformity to patriarchal heteronormative expectations of female sexuality is hyperbolically treated as distressing by the narrator. Rebecca describes herself as 'odd in some ways [...] [having] always disliked people rather than been attracted to them' (p. 21) and the narrator gravely says, 'she will never love any man' (p. 15). As with the narrator's demonization of Rebecca's sex doll, the narrator others her in an attempt to suppress her power, by painting her sexuality as malevolent. He describes Rebecca as the devil, saying she was dressed 'like Mephistopheles', aligning her with sinfulness and evil (p. 22). Du Maurier

[48] The theme of the unseen is also highlighted by the missing passages of the narrator's text throughout the story.

establishes Rebecca's perceived threat to the narrator in terms later theorised by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*:

> The attempt to establish a male, phallic power is vigorously threatened by the no less virulent power of the other sex, which is oppressed […] the feminine, becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed.[49]

The narrator is threatened by Rebecca's sexuality and so projects sinfulness onto her to regain his own control of her sexuality and to present her as evil rather than sexually liberated.

The narrator's wish to control Rebecca's sexuality is what leads him to demonize her sex object, Julio. Julio is painted as horrific but only through the eyes of the 'hysterical' male narrator. To the narrator, Julio is a sinister force for evil and is presented as an uncanny, dangerous and intimidating creature:

> I felt an eerie cold feeling in my heart, as if the room were haunted. […] His face was the most evil thing I had ever seen. It was ashen pale in colour, and the mouth was a crimson gash, sensual and depraved. The nose was thin, with curved nostrils, and the eyes were cruel, gleaming and narrow, and curiously still […] the eyes of a hawk. The hair was sleek and dark, brushed right back from the white forehead' (p. 23).

The description of Julio is vampiric and similar to the description of Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897):

> His face was […] aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arch nostrils, with loft domed forehead […] his mouth […] was fixed and rather cruel-looking […] whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality […] the general look was one of extraordinary pallor.[50]

The descriptions of Julio and Dracula are strikingly similar and so the narrator's description of Julio paints the doll as the antagonistic threat in the tale, despite this being proven false later in the story, which adds to the narrator's unreliability. There is also an element of sexual

[49] Kristeva, p. 70.
[50] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Apple Books Classics, 1897), p. 75.

intimidation that is connoted by the vampiric descriptions as well as the doll's 'sensual' mouth. Ultimately, the reference to Dracula adds to the gothic tone of the story and also alludes to the threat of the 'other' to male heteronormativity which both Julio and Dracula embody.

The narrator's repulsion at Julio is because of his association with Rebecca's sexual freedom. Rebecca is only able to be sexually aroused when around Julio as the only time she is freely intimate with the narrator is whilst Julio is present, demonstrating the sex doll's connection to her sexuality and her lack of sexual attraction to real-life men.[51] The first sexual and romantic encounter between the narrator and Rebecca is in the presence of Julio. The narrator describes the darkness of the room and the vampiric nature of Rebecca's kiss on his throat alludes to their sexual transgression as she seduces him in front of Julio.[52]

> the next moment the room was in darkness. I felt her arms around my neck, and her mouth upon mine. […] she clung to me and kissed my throat, I could feel her fingers at the back of my neck. I let her hands wander over my body, and she kissed me again. It was devastating – it was madness – it was like death. […] when I raised my eyes above her head I looked straight into his eyes - his damned doll's eyes (p. 24).

Though physical contact is what the narrator seems to desire from Rebecca, the sensation of it is more ominous as the narrator calls it a 'madness' and compares it to 'death'. The narrator looking into the eyes of the doll after the sexual encounter reminds him of its evil and the sinfulness of Rebecca's overt sexuality. Further to this, the narrator shows a desire to destroy Julio because he symbolizes Rebecca's sexual freedom and transgressive desires: 'I wanted to leap at it, and smash its beastly grinning face, trample on its sordid human body' (pp. 24-5).

[51] Rebecca even says 'How can I care for you, or any man? [...] I loathe you. I loathe you all. I don't need you. I don't want you' (pp. 29-30) later in the text.
[52] The vampiric descriptors used for both Rebecca and Julio align the two as sites of sexual transgression and sexual threats.

Here, the narrator wishes to destroy Rebecca's 'sordid' sexual desires as it breaks his fantasy of feminine chastity.

Though the male narrator demonizes Julio, he fetishizes Rebecca's statuesque and transgressive characteristics. In *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock* (2008), Victor Stoichita discusses how the supernatural beauty of sculptures is attributed to their chromatic contrasts of black and white, light and darkness.[53] As with these binaries, the narrator fetishizes Rebecca's beauty as a mixture of innocence and transgression, and light and darkness. The narrator describes Rebecca:

> Rebecca – Rebecca, when I think of you with your pale, earnest face, your great wide fanatical eyes like a saint, the narrow mouth that hid your teeth, sharp and white as ivory and your halo of savage hair, electric, dark, uncontrolled (p. 15).

The light, statue-like descriptors 'pale', 'ivory' and 'like a saint', and their contrast with her 'dark' features connote the statuesque Pygmalion attributes that Stoichita describes. The narrator also contrasts the pure associations of 'saint' and 'halo' with the more transgressive adjectives 'fanatical', 'savage' and 'uncontrolled', which demonstrates the narrator's anxiety surrounding his lack of control of Rebecca. He also uses racialized language to describe Rebecca's hair to further paint her as uncontainable and to exoticize her. His repetition of Rebecca's name demonstrates an obsessive desire for her, whilst his description turns from doll-like and innocent to descriptors that imply uncontrollability and angst. This description overall demonstrates his obsessive Pygmalion desires to possess her as his own, as Pygmalion fetishizes and possesses Galatea.

Later in the story, the narrator attempts to infantilise Rebecca in order to project his feminine ideal of innocence and purity onto her, as Maxim attempts to do with Mrs de Winter

[53] Victor I. Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 180.

in *Rebecca*. The narrator compares Rebecca to a child frequently, describing her as speaking 'gravely, like a child' (p. 17), and saying 'she would stand straight and firm as a child' (p. 18). The narrator seems to fetishize and project child-like innocence onto Rebecca and is disappointed when these traits prove inaccurate. The narrator doubts Rebecca's character by questioning 'whether she was like a child asleep […] or whether she was lying to me throughout', implying that his desire is for her to be like a naïve child (p. 21). He holds Rebecca up to an unattainable standard of child-like innocence and purity, an unrealistic trait (and fantasy) expected of women.[54] This further exposes his desire to control her completely through infantilization like the male antagonist in *The China Doll* attempts to with Penelope as is shown in Chapter One of this thesis.[55]

For Rebecca, Julio is the only 'man' she can love because he is not a physical threat to her. Du Maurier presents the potential for sex with a human male to be threatening and about power as Rebecca is sexually threatened by the narrator. At one point when Rebecca pushes the narrator away after he attempts to kiss her, he says 'I tried to seize her and break down her iron restraint. […] She lay cold and still in my arms. Her mouth was icy. I left her in despair' (p. 26). Rebecca is physically, and potentially sexually, assaulted here by the narrator, and yet the narrator expects pity for his 'despair'. Afterwards Rebecca 'would not let [the narrator] touch her', which is a trauma response to the violence she now associates with male human interactions (p. 26). Yet, the narrator is completely ignorant of his own abusive behaviour towards Rebecca and cannot understand why she does not want him near her. Rebecca's boundaries are crossed, and this is all she can expect from men who seek to possess her. With Julio, Rebecca can be herself and exert her own sexual desires without the

[54] This is illustrative of the virgin/whore dichotomy prevalent in gothic literature and feminist criticism. See: Leah M. Wyman and George N Dionisopoulos, 'Transcending the Virgin/Whore Dichotomy: Telling Mina's Story in Bram Stoker's Dracula', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 23.2 (2000), 209–37.
[55] Margaret Yorke's *The China Doll* (1960) is examined in the first chapter.

threat of violence. Julio is the safer option for her as a single woman, and the male narrator's violence only highlights this further.

Du Maurier uses the female Gothic to illustrate that the narrator is a sexual threat to Rebecca. The narrator continually sexualizes Rebecca and alludes to his desire to sexually dominate her, regardless of her consent. He casually states, 'I told her I was going to be her lover' (p. 26). In this instance, Rebecca is passive, and the narrator is domineering, deciding their relationship without Rebecca's agreement. He also describes one of Rebecca's violin performances as though it is a sexual encounter:

> We were climbing, the flying, higher – higher. At one time the violin seemed to protest, and it was as if she was refusing me, and I were pursuing her – then there came a torrent of sound, a medley of acceptance and denial, a confusion of notes in which were mingled desire and sweetness, and intolerable pleasure. I could feel my heart beating like the throb of some mighty vessel […] We had reached the summit, we could go no further […] it was fulfilment (p. 18).

The performance aligns with the narrator's continual 'pursuing' whilst Rebecca seems to 'protest'. The 'medley of acceptance and denial' demonstrates Rebecca's conflicted feelings toward the narrator and yet he insists on their romantic relationship regardless. The end of Rebecca's performance, as Mitchell argues, alludes to a sexual climax which the narrator projects onto her actions.[56] This sexual metaphor illustrates the female gothic trope of figuratively representing male sexual threats against women. Carol Davison suggests that the female gothic tradition presents threats 'in veiled, sexualized terms, in keeping with the nature of the threats experienced by women.'[57] The symbolic and veiled sexual threats of the narrator pursuing Rebecca, whilst she stands as conflicted or indifferent to his advances for

[56] Mitchell, p. 28.
[57] Carol Margaret. Davison, 'The Female Gothic', in *Gothic Literature 1764-1824* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 83-110 (p. 95).

most of the story, illustrates the narrator's complete disregard of Rebecca's desires and autonomy.

Du Maurier repurposes the doll in radical and destabilizing ways and brings the myth of female chastity and sexual ignorance to the fore. Rebecca's violin playing is a metaphor for her sexual activity, once again using the female gothic tradition of 'veiled' transgressions. The motif of Rebecca's violin playing is used throughout the story as she also says '"I played for you," […], "I wanted to see what it was like to play to a man."' (p. 19). This is a double entendre which represents her will to experiment with the male narrator sexually on her own terms, which is thwarted later when he sexually assaults her. The narrator is confused at Rebecca never having played for another man, not being able to comprehend that Rebecca would play only to please herself. The narrator asks, 'Do you use your gift just to satisfy your-self? I don't understand' (p. 19). Rebecca seems apprehensive to imply that she sexually satisfies herself so says, 'perhaps, it's like that, I can't explain' (p. 19). This parallels the shame that surrounds female masturbation as well as her sexual attraction to a doll. When Rebecca declares that she has never been in love with a man, the narrator protests that 'you play as if you knew everything – everything' (p. 21). Her 'playing' is a metaphor for her sexuality and so the narrator is implying that because she has not been in love with a man, he believes she would not have sexual knowledge. For the narrator, sexual knowledge relies on the involvement of a human male counterpart and so he cannot understand how else she could gain sexual knowledge. Rebecca breaks these heteronormative and sexist presumptions in relation to female sexuality through her ownership of a sex doll for masturbatory purposes and so Julio becomes a means through which these forbidden acts and desires can be articulated.

Rebecca does not conform to heterosexual female expectations of the interwar period because of her resistance to being controlled, romantically, sexually and financially through

heterosexual marriage. Rebecca is, what Emma Liggins called the 'bachelor girl', whose image, which began to appear in the press in the early 1890s, helped to 'normalise female singleness'.[58] Rebecca's sexual and financial independence and her gender-non-conforming appearance are demonstrated through her successful career as a violinist, her male sex doll and her unfeminine look as 'she looked like an elf, a sort of boy' (p. 16). What also defines Rebecca's spinsterhood and independence is the fact that 'she lives entirely alone' in her own flat, a private space for herself (p. 17). As Liggins notes:

> the spinster flat is initially presented as an unwelcoming place before it assumes the comfort of 'her own domain' […] Private space is essential for the aspiring glorified spinster, whose chintzy Bohemian 'den', modelled on Newnham students' rooms, is a place of liberty, guaranteed by her salary, in which to entertain friends and to work unencumbered by family duties.[59]

The male narrator is painted as a threat to this private space because he, on several occasions, forces entry without Rebecca's permission, which ultimately, ends in her leaving to find a new 'place of liberty'. Rebecca's disdain for the narrator's attempts to control her desires and autonomy is clear when she cries out, 'How can I care for you, or any man? [...] I loathe you. I loathe you all. I don't need you. I don't want you' (pp. 29-30). Here, her frustrations with men and the patriarchal ideals of what she should be, a faithful partner in a heterosexual marital relationship, come to a head. The repetition in her speech of 'loathe' and 'don't' emphasize the refusal of the male narrator to listen to her desires, and Rebecca's exasperation with this. For Rebecca, the sex doll enables the activation of her independence and autonomous desire, and the preservation of her private space, whilst the male protagonist

[58] Emma Liggins, *Odd Women?: Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women's Fiction, 1850s-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 84. ProQuest eBook.
[59] Liggins, p. 86.

only hinders them, highlighting the conflict between female autonomy and heterosexual marriage during the early twentieth century.

Both Rebecca and Julio are presented as other through their foreignness. Julio is also a foreign name which adds to his sense of being outside of British social norms. This alludes to the colonialist roots of the sex doll as identified by Ruberg: 'sexual technologies, and sex dolls in particular, have always been inextricably bound up with colonial and racial violence, as well as fantasies about racialized and colonial subjects'.[60] For Rebecca, Julio could be part of an exoticized fantasy. However, Rebecca is from Hungary, and it is implied that she is likely not white. This is shown in the description of her skin as the colour of 'pale coffee, and clear, clear as water' (p. 17) and she 'held out her thin brown hands to the stove' (p. 22). Therefore, Rebecca and Julio become racialized others and their treatment by the, presumably white, male narrator is representative of the 'white mythos' of racialized hypersexuality, where racialized women become unrapable and racialized men are a sexual threat, as noted by Amia Srinivasan in *The Right to Sex* (2021) in relation to the white mythos of black hypersexuality.[61] Rebecca's otherness is linked to her race, and this may also be why the narrator exoticizes and fetishizes her, similar to how East Asian women are treated in Lisa See's *China Dolls* (2014). Both Rebecca and Julio are, therefore, used to symbolize the 'two sides' of the coin of racialized hypersexuality.[62]

Rebecca's overt sexuality is further symbolized by the motif of the mouth. Du Maurier uses the mouth as a symbol for female sexuality, a symbol that also resembles the female sexual organ, which invokes the vagina dentata trope. As Erich Newman notes, 'fear of the Feminine is concentrated in fear of the female body, either because the body itself is

[60] Ruberg, p. 171.
[61] Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 14, VLE eBook.
[62] Ibid.

taboo, or because women, especially the female genitals, are feared as the terrible, castrating "vagina dentata"'.[63] The narrator focuses on Julio's 'evil scarlet mouth distorted' which, like before, symbolizes Rebecca's sexuality as sinful and horrific to the male narrator (p. 14). Interestingly, Elaine Showalter also uses the mouth as a motif for female sexuality when discussing its threat to the male gaze, calling it 'a silent but terrible mouth'.[64] Furthermore, in *The Sadeian Woman* (1978), Angela Carter says 'as a woman, my symbolic value is primarily that of a myth of patience and receptivity, a dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled.'[65] This image of female passivity and silence that is associated with the toothless mouth resembles the female sex doll's open and toothless mouth which is often used as a sexual orifice. Therefore, du Maurier subverts the traditionally harmless, alluring mouth of the female sex doll by alluding to the male sex doll's mouth as dangerous, invoking the trope of the vagina dentata as a signifier of the threat of female sexuality to men. Here, Carter's female sex doll-like mouth is harmless because it does not threaten male sexual power rather it facilitates it. In contrast, du Maurier and Showalter present the mouth as a symbol of overt female sexuality which stands as a threat to male sexual dominance and, therefore, it is painted as 'terrible' and 'evil' to a patriarchal society.

Du Maurier brings female sexuality and the sex doll from the private to the public domain through her representation of Rebecca and Julio. The secrecy of female sexuality and masturbation is clear as the narrator has to break down the locked door of Julio's room in order to make the shocking discovery of Rebecca having sex with Julio. The narrator says 'I kicked against the panel, and tore at it with my nails. It gave way beneath my weight' (p. 29). Once again, the narrator is crossing Rebecca's boundaries by animalistically breaking down a

[63] Erich Neumann, *The Fear of the Feminine and Other Essays on Feminine Psychology*, trans. by Boris Matthews (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 259.
[64] Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the "Fin de Siecle"* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 146.
[65] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (New York: Penguin, 2001), pp. 4-5.

locked door in her own flat. Carter explains how de Sade brings the graphic mutilation and abuse of women in eighteenth-century society from the private to the public in his texts.[66] In the same way, du Maurier brings the taboo of women having sexual desire in the early twentieth century to the public domain through the sex doll. The clandestine becomes known through the secondary narrator, primary narrator and du Maurier herself. Du Maurier portrays a female sexual relationship with a male sex doll as a safer and more liberating option for women in the early twentieth century when women could not express their sexuality as freely. In contrast, the male use of sex dolls in the twenty-first century is a sign of female sexual subordination and objectification in the context of patriarchy and hypersexual culture.

Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* (2015)

Margaret Atwood is famous for her brutal dystopian depictions of the sexual oppression of and violence towards women under patriarchy, in texts such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *The Testaments* (2019). Atwood's texts are widely read as feminist, with Fiona Tolan noting, 'feminist discourse proves to be a valuable and constructive backdrop to Atwood's writing.'[67] Atwood is influenced by several eras of feminist debate, having lived through them, and draws on her experience of second and third-wave feminism during the fourth wave of feminism in her speculative fiction *The Heart Goes Last* (2015). Though this novel mainly illustrates the sex bot as harmful to women, it also depicts female sexual desire through male sex dolls, like du Maurier's 'The Doll', which enables an analysis of the changing attitudes towards female sexuality and sex dolls during the twentieth and twenty-first century. *The Heart Goes Last* departs from du Maurier's representation in that it primarily focuses on the male ownership of female sex bots, and how the sex bot industry commodifies and objectifies the female body. The novel

[66] Carter, p. 23.
[67] Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood Feminism and Fiction* (Amsterdam; Rodopi, 2007), p. 297.

also brings together Atwood's interests in the dangers of patriarchy and capitalism by exploring the sex industry.[68] On the other hand, du Maurier's subversion of patriarchal narratives during the first wave of feminism presents the reader with a sex doll that initiates female sexual liberation for her unmarried female protagonist in the post-First World War era. These representations allow us to see how relevant these earlier feminist debates are to present discourses surrounding female sexuality and the sex doll today.

The Heart Goes Last is a dystopian novel set in near-future America where advances in technology have led to human-like sex bots being used as a mainstream commodity, not too dissimilar from the sex doll industry today. Atwood's dystopian texts have been noted for their gothic retellings of Shakespearean comedy, and *The Heart Goes Last* is no different.[69] Tolan describes Atwood's use of parody in the novel as 'a continual slippage between horror and comedy'.[70] Like du Maurier, Atwood uses the Gothic to comment on the sex doll but embellishes the novel with Shakespearean parodic episodes of out-of-control sex bots and romantic and sexual misunderstandings. Coral Howells writes that *The Heart Goes Last* is an example of Atwood's 'spooky Gothic tales of obsession, now enhanced by advanced robotics and biotechnology'.[71] Though Atwood does use aspects of the Gothic, I will focus on Atwood's use of the sex doll in relation to feminist debates, commodification and the technological advancements of the sex doll.

The most crucial cultural moment in the history of the sex doll which expedited its transformation into a mainstream commodity was the invention of the internet in the 1990s, and the subsequent popularisation of internet pornography. Though there is scarce literature

[68] Tolan, pp. 162, 186.
[69] Coral Howells, 'True Trash: Genre Fiction Revisited in Margaret Atwood's Stone Mattress, The Heart Goes Last, And Hag-Seed', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 11.3 (2017), 297–315, p. 299, 302, 303.
[70] Fiona Tolan, 'Feminist Utopias and Questions of Liberty: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale as Critique of Second Wave Feminism', *Women (Oxford, England)*, 16.1 (2005), 18–32 (p. 308).
[71] Howells, p. 306.

on the use of sex dolls during the 1990s, the increase and normalisation of masturbation at home during this period as a result of online pornography presumably benefited and advanced the use of sex dolls during and after this period.[72] Some liberal theorists have argued that pornography could be beneficial to people, suggesting 'that pornographic materials provide a way of releasing strong sexual urges without causing harm to others.'[73] However, many of the feminist debates which critique the sex doll align with the feminist anti-pornography movement, which began between the second and third-wave of feminism. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott write:

> a specifically feminist critique of pornography arises from wider concerns about women's control of their own bodies. It entails women's refusal to be reduced to their physical sexuality and resistance to our subordination as objects for male use and pleasure.[74]

The resistance to female subordination and objectification is the primary reason for feminist opposition to the sex doll too. As with feminist critiques of pornography, Atwood utilizes the figure of the sex doll to highlight its effect on female sexual subordination. Andrea Dworkin, a key figure in the anti-pornography movement who published *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* in 1981, asserts that the true meaning of pornography is 'the graphic depiction of women as vile whores'.[75] The critical perspectives offered by *The Heart Goes Last* represent an extension of the second-wave and third-wave feminist response to

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[72] Nicola Döring and Sandra Pöschl have noted that 'in comparison to the large body of pornography studies […] research on sexual products, their users and uses and their outcomes is scarce.' Nicola Döring and Sandra Pöschl, 'Sex Toys, Sex Dolls, Sex Robots: Our Under-Researched Bed-Fellows', *Sexologies: European Journal of Sexology*, 27.3 (2018), 51–55 (p. 52); Daniel. Linz and Neil M. Malamuth, *Pornography* (Newbury Park: SAGE, 1993), p. 39.

[73] Linz and Malamuth, p. 37.

[74] Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, 'Sexual Skirmishes and Feminist Factions: Twenty-Five Years of Debate on Women and Sexuality', *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 1-34 (p. 21).

[75] Andrea Dworkin, 'Pornography', *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader, ed. By* Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 297-299 (p. 297).

pornography, but adapted to the new dangers that have emerged with the development of the sex doll into the sex bot.

The move from sex dolls to sex robots is a consequence of growing technological advancements and a concerning desire to more accurately replicate real-life women, and this is reflected in *The Heart Goes Last*. The sex doll has traditionally been perceived as a still, lifeless object used for sexual pleasure, as is the case with Rebecca's ownership of Julio in 'The Doll', but the sex bot brings further concerns to the forefront of feminist discourse. Interviews with sex doll users tend to show that they desire a passive sexual partner, a trait Mitchell Lancaster-James also identifies in his survey of sex doll owners, as nearly 25% of them were attracted to their sex doll because of 'sexual performance'.[76] In the one-hour docuseries *The Sex Business: Me and my Sex Doll*, one sex doll user states '[Dolls] are not in your face but always good company', and in the short biopic 'Love Me, Love My Doll | Real Stories' another owner says, 'If you don't mind them being static, they're good fun'.[77] It is important to note that both sex doll owners were male and owned a female sex doll. This demonstrates a fetishization of female passivity, compliance and stillness amongst male sex doll owners that is fulfilled through the sex doll, perpetuating the myth of 'woman as object, not subject' and that 'women are created to serve men'.[78]

Since the sex doll is a primarily female-looking object owned by men, the perpetuation of female submission and the male ownership of female bodies is a concern regularly voiced by feminist scholars and critics of the sex doll. Contemporary media representations and the sex doll industry present the sex doll as almost solely catering for

[76] Mitchell Lancaster-James, 'Beyond the Sex Doll: Post-Human Companionship and the Rise of the 'Allodoll'', *Robotics*, 7.62 (2018), p. 8.
[77] *The Sex Business: Me and my Sex Doll*, 5Star, 17 June 2019, 22:00; Real Stories, 'Love Me, Love My Doll | Real Stories' (2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ukok0oeIFoQ> [Accessed on 17 December 2020]
[78] Nancy J. Chodorow, *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014), p. 20; Gutiu, p. 189.

men and sex dolls are more readily made and owned by men as 'doll companies derive most of their sales from male customers and market accordingly.'[79] Kate Devlin, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) specialist who is generally in favour of the use of sex robots for the purposes of therapy and sexual exploration, further states that 'by and large, all the sex dolls available today take a female form' and that 'sex robots are mostly geared towards penis-owners.'[80] Therefore, it is important that the commodification of female bodies for men, a topic at the centre of anti-pornography discourse, is scrutinized. Researchers have also found that men are generally far more accepting of the sex doll than women.[81] This implies that men do not consider the broader implications and harm the sex doll can cause in relation to the objectification of women, rather they see the sex doll merely as a fetish for men. There is also now empirical evidence for the links between the 'increasing human-likeness' of sex dolls and the objectification of and hostility towards women by sex doll users.[82] Furthermore, recent sociological studies have found that 'bestowing human qualities on inanimate objects' through the figure of the sex doll, 'represents the ultimate objectification of bodies, and not surprisingly, of female bodies in particular'.[83] This backs up Roper's view that the increased acceptance of sex dolls 'further entrenches men's sexual entitlement and women's status as subordinate objects, which will likely contribute to increased degradation and violence towards women.'[84] Consequently, the appropriation of women's bodies for male consumption

[79] Sarah Hathaway Valverde, 'THE MODERN SEX DOLL-OWNER: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS', (unpublished Masters thesis, California State Polytechnic University, 2012), p. 16.
[80] Kate Devlin, *Turned on: Science, Sex and Robots* (London: Bloomsbury Sigma, 2018), p. 4, p. 153.
[81] Natasha Shokri, 'Patriarchal Hierarchies of Power and the Subordination of Women: Real Doll as a Replacement of Woman Figure', *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6.4 (2015), 216–20 (p. 219).
[82] Jeanne C. Desbuleux and Johannes Fuss, 'Is the Anthropomorphization of Sex Dolls Associated with Objectification and Hostility Toward Women? A Mixed Method Study Among Doll Users', *The Journal of Sex Research*, (2023), 206–220 (p. 218).
[83] Desirée Ciambrone, Voon Chin Phua and Erin N. Avery, 'Gendered Synthetic Love: Real Dolls and the Construction of Intimacy', *International review of modern sociology*, 43.1 (2017), 59–78 (p. 76).
[84] Roper, p. 165.

and domination through the sex doll is a fundamental feminist issue, which is also examined through the sex robot in Atwood's text.

Though many sex doll owners fetishize female passivity, the growing demand for sex dolls that interact actively with their owners has led to the creation of technology-driven robotic sex dolls. Roxxxy, created by the company New Companion and promoted as the first sex robot to be sold to the mass market, was introduced to the public in 2010.[85] Since then, technology has progressed to create a more realistic sex bot that can react to external factors and interact with its owner. For example, brought to the mass market in 2017 and retailing at just over $6,000, Harmony X is one of the most recent models of the sex robot and includes technology which enables her to blink, make subtle movements with her head, talk and react to sexual encounters.[86] Harmony X moves and speaks like a human, and could potentially, in the future, give consent.[87] Though the main defence of the realism of the sex robot is that it can be used in sex therapy and could 'help decrease […] rape and molestation', Robert Sparrow suggests that allowing a robot to consent will 'facilitate rape fantasy' rather than stop sexual violence.[88] Moreover, 'The Campaign Against Sex Robots', initiated in 2015 by Professor of Ethics and Culture of Robots and AI and feminist scholar, Kathleen Richardson, opposes the creation of these sex robots because they believe that, like sex work, sex bots 'will be damaging to society, leading to women being treated as objects and destroying human-human relationships.'[89] Therefore, there are issues surrounding the ethics of the sex bot especially in relation to the programming of female obedience and subordination, with Roper arguing that sex robots could increase harm to women and girls because of their

[85] Devlin, p. 142-3.
[86] Anon, 'Harmony X', *RealDoll*, <https://www.realdoll.com/product/harmony-x/> [Accessed 14 April 2021].
[87] Chandrshekhar Shrivastava, 'Rise of the Sex Bot', *Alive* (August 2017), 20-27 (p. 23).
[88] Smith, p. 195; Robert Sparrow, 'Robots, Rape, and Representation', *International Journal of Social Robotics*, 9.4 (2017), 465–77 (p. 466).
[89] Devlin, p. 210.

'interactive nature'.[90] *The Heart Goes Last* engages with and scrutinizes the rise of the sex bot to highlight the issues technological progressions can enable, particularly for women.

While there have been some movements such as 'The Campaign Against Sex Robots', there has been little mainstream media backlash to the sex doll or sex bot, the media industry being a predominantly patriarchal institution. The sex doll or bot is often presented as a niche device that will never become a mainstream commodity, because of the stigma that surrounds owners of sex dolls. Nonetheless, academic literature and sex bot advancements suggest otherwise. David Levy argues, in his seminal text on sex robots, *Love and Sex with Robots* (2009), that 'love and sex with robots on a grand scale are inevitable'.[91] Many scientists and scholars have identified the potential dangers of the sex bot both in the present day and in the future in facilitating the objectification of women and the disregard of sexual consent, as well as causing unrealistic beauty standards for women and girls. [92] In their recent essay collection titled *Man-Made Women: The Sexual Politics of Sex Dolls and Sex Robots* (2023), Kathleen Richardson and Charlotta Odlind show explicitly the divergence between mainstream accounts of sex robots as 'socially beneficial' and their true role in 'propping up an existing socioeconomic order which relies on sexed inequality, female subordination and violence against women and girls as entertainment'.[93] Therefore, the concerns amongst scientists and scholars are apparent, yet not recognized or scrutinized by the mass media, which tends to illustrate the sex robot as a fantasy rather than a reality.

[90] Roper, p. 165.
[91] David Levy, *Love and Sex with Robots: The Evolution of Human-Robot Relationships* (HarperCollins e-books, 2009), p. 22.
[92] Craig A. Harper and Rebecca Lievesley, 'Sex Doll Ownership: An Agenda for Research', *Current psychiatry reports,* 22.54 (15 August 2020), p. 2; Döring, Mohseni, and Walter, pp. 4-5.
[93] Charlotta Odlind and Kathleen Richardson, 'The End of Sex Robots—For the Dignity of Women and Girls', *Man-Made Women: The Sexual Politics of Sex Dolls and Sex Robots*, ed. by Kathleen Richardson and Charlotta Odlind (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2023), pp. 1-16 (p. 3).

Media representations of the sex bot back up the misogynistic views associated with the female-looking sex bot. A content analysis of media representations of sex robots found that 'the majority of the population only learns about love and sex with robots through media representations, be they fictional (e.g., movies and TV series) or non-fictional (e.g., newspaper and magazine articles'.[94] Representations of female robots as sex objects in media include *Ex Machina* (2014), *Humans* (2015-2018), Russian sci-fi *Better Than Us* (2018-2019), and *Westworld* (2016- 2022). This supports Devlin's assertion that 'our perception of the sex robot as an alluring, seductive, attractive female is fuelled by years of influence from science-fiction books and films.'[95] However, these female sex bots are also presented as dangerous and a threat to humans; nonetheless, most of the series above are set in a dystopian fantasy world which the reader would not recognize as the world today, and so would not align the sex robot with reality. Atwood, however, sets *The Heart Goes Last* in the metropolitan city, a setting familiar to most Western readers, and creates a world not much different from today: an economic crash has led to abject poverty and the people in power are able to take advantage of those who have suffered economically. This enables readers to connect with the real dangers of normalising sex robot ownership in the near future.

Atwood utilizes the developments in technology which have led to the progression of the sex doll to the sex bot in *The Heart Goes Last*. Atwood critiques the sex bot as a tool which oppresses women by propagating patriarchal myths about female sexuality, instigating harmful practices towards women and preserving, as Walter notes, 'the sexism that values women primarily as sexualised objects'.[96] Carter suggests that, 'to be the *object* of desire is to

[94] Nicola Döring and Sandra Poeschl, 'Love and Sex with Robots: A Content Analysis of Media Representations', *International Journal of Social Robotics*, 11.4 (2019), 665–77 (p. 665).
[95] Devlin, p. 167. Feminism and science fiction will be discussed further in The Posthuman Doll Chapter.
[96] Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago, 2011), p. xvii. This text is a 21st-century critique of postfeminism, a movement coined in the 1980s that argues that feminism is no longer needed as the majority of its goals have been achieved.

be defined in the passive case.'[97] Therefore, the sex doll symbolizes female passivity and compliance which is fetishized when women are consigned to sexual objects. Furthermore, sexual hesitance, the myth that women are always sexually willing and are created to please men, and the encouragement of male violence and the commodification of the female body, are also all factors perpetuated by the female sex doll. Therefore, the elements that will be most prevalently explored in Atwood's text in relation to the sex bot are passivity, consent, violence and commodification.

The Heart Goes Last follows the married protagonists, Stan and Charmaine, who, due to an economic collapse, find themselves living dangerously out of their car. Out of desperation, they join the social program, Consilience, where they must spend every other month in Positron Prison in exchange for a job and home, a responsibility shared with their 'alternates', Max and Jocelyn. Whilst Max and Jocelyn are in prison, Stan and Charmaine are living in their home and vice versa, enabling them to stay within the rules of forbidden contact and knowledge of one another. Consilience is a combination of the words 'cons' and 'resilience', indicating how the scheme has placed positive connotations onto the prison system, a PR stunt that paints the scheme as reliable rather than corrupt. Whilst Charmaine is working as a secretary for the Director of Consilience, Ed, he creates a sex bot double of her without her consent and uses it for his own sexual gratification. The sex bot malfunctions and injures Ed, and so he does not fulfil his sexual obsession with Charmaine. In consequence, Ed destroys the doll and plans to use neurosurgery that will force Charmaine to sexually desire him indefinitely if he is the first person she sees when she wakes up, creating his own living sex doll in the process. The sex bot never prevents Ed from wishing to take his fantasies of sexual violence, domination and ownership further, rather it enables his desires and leaves

[97] Carter, p. 76; Carter praised Marquis de Sade's representation of pornography and female sexuality in *The Sadeian Woman,* a work later criticised by Dworkin. Though their views on pornography differ, they were both considered part of the second-wave feminist movement.

Charmaine at his disposal. When Stan escapes Consilience to find Charmaine, he comes across a sex bot escort service called Prostibots which reflects how the mainstream commodification of sex, through sex bots and sex work, could lead to a society that disregards consent and organic human relationships and relies on sex dolls, escorts, and neurosurgery for sexual fulfilment. The name Prostibot directly combines the word prostitute and sex bot. Here, Atwood is further aligning sex work with the sex bot in order to illustrate how both are complicit in the harm of women and men through the commodification of female, as well as male, bodies.

Atwood's representation of the sex doll critiques postfeminist views concerning the achievement of gender equality by establishing how the existence of male sex dolls does not mean that gender equality has been achieved and warns that the commodification and objectification of male bodies in patriarchal systems is still a feminist issue. In *The Heart Goes Last*, a worker at the Elvis sex bot factory says: 'We're all for gender equality. If the ladies want sex-for-cash, we provide it'.[98] The worker claims the sex doll industry is 'for gender equality' and yet the existence of the sex doll does not support this claim as in the course of the novel both Stan and Charmaine are harmed as a result of objectification and commodification. The patronising reference to 'ladies', despite arguing for 'gender equality', alludes to Banyard's concept of the equality illusion, namely that 'the equality that so many people see existing between women and men is an illusion'.[99] Banyard's text is a critique of postfeminism - a movement which claims equality has been achieved between men and women and denies feminism is still necessary - Banyard arguing that feminism is 'one of the most vital social justice movements of our time'.[100] Atwood's representation of the worker

[98] Margaret Atwood, *The Heart Goes Last* (London: Virago, 2016), p. 341. Subsequent references in parentheses.
[99] Kat Banyard, *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today* (London: Faber, 2011), p. 2.
[100] Sarah Gamble, 'Postfeminism', in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. by Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 36-45 (p. 38); Banyard, p. 2.

primarily warns us of the illusion of equality perpetuated by postfeminists and the potential for the sex doll to perpetuate the patriarchal ideals that relegate both women and men to the status of objects.

Like du Maurier, Atwood also uses gothic elements to highlight the disturbing aspects of the sex doll. When Ed is injured by the Charmaine-lookalike sex bot, his co-director of Consilience, Jocelyn, says to Charmaine: '"[Ed] was fairly mad at you, though," […] "He sent you back to the shop. He ordered you to be destroyed"' (p. 325). Here, Charmaine is directly aligned with the sex doll in a moment of gothic doubling and uncanniness. Though Charmaine refutes the sex doll as her double by attempting to separate her 'fabricated' self and her real self and continually protesting to Jocelyn that 'It's not *me*!', her protestations are ignored (p. 324). Charmaine's boundaries are continually disregarded, demonstrating the gothic trope of transgressing borders. Another scene where the image of the sex bot is unsettling is when Stan sees them as dead body parts on a conveyor belt:

> There are moving belts conveying thighs, hip joints, torsos; there are trays of hands, left and right. These body parts are man-made, they're not corpse portions, but nonetheless the effect is ghoulish. Squint and you're in a morgue, he thinks; or a slaughterhouse. Except there's no blood' (p. 255).

Atwood aligns the sex bots to disembodied corpses here, directly linking the sex doll once again to necrophilia and the Gothic. The grotesque imagery of corpses, death and slaughter illustrates the sex doll as an unsettling object and what makes this scene even more horrific is the uncanny absence of blood. The juxtaposition of the clean, bloodless limbs and their disembodiment is particularly unsettling and captures a gothic image of unease. Atwood anticipates the grotesque slaughterhouse imagery feminist opposers of the sex doll would use in more recent scholarship on the sex doll, with Roper describing sex dolls as 'hanging from

meat hooks in multiple factories around the world', and Richardson and Odlind, noting how they are also 'hanging off metal hooks, dismembered, divided into genital parts'. [101]

The difference in the form of Atwood's novel to that of du Maurier's story is particularly notable. The comedy of Atwood's text (from the malfunctioning of the sex bot to creative wordplay, such as Consilience and Prostibot) is a markedly different fictional strategy from du Maurier's use of the Gothic, but no less serious in its intent. Though Stan and Charmaine are both primarily in dangerous positions throughout the text, there is plenty of satire through their frank and candid inner thoughts, which are often ironic under the circumstances, exposing the social and political power dynamics between them and other characters in the novel. As Mehnaaz Momen notes, 'satire has always functioned as a political tool in American history' and 'there is ample global evidence that satire can work as a tool of resistance'.[102] Furthermore, Atwood presents a kind of dystopian twist on Shakespeare's Romantic Comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1605), as identified by other critics of the novel.[103] Atwood's text draws on real-world concerns surrounding female autonomy and robo-sexuality (the fetishization of turning people into robots) through the possibility of Charmaine being turned into a 'sex slave by neurosurgery' (p. 388). This narrative aligns with Shakespeare's in that the result of the neurosurgery is that the recipient desires the first person (or thing with eyes) they lay their eyes upon after waking up, mimicking the magic love potion in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Atwood's novel is, therefore, a technological and comedic take on Shakespeare's play. Atwood seems to follow the Shakespearean form of restoring order from confusion and transgression when Charmaine thinks Stan being the first person she sees after her neurosurgery has caused her to desire Stan

[101] Roper, p. 2; Richardson and Odlind, p 7.
[102] Julie Webber, Mehnaaz Momen, Jessyka Finley, Rebecca Krefting, Cynthia Willett, and Julie Willett, 'The Political Force of the Comedic', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 20.2 (2021), 419–46 (p. 421).
[103] Howells, p. 306; Naomi Alderman, 'A captivating prospect', *The Spectator* (2015) <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/a-captivating-prospect> [Accessed 15 June 2021].

perpetually and lives in happily married bliss with him and their child. However, Atwood subverts this at the end of the play when Jocelyn tells Charmaine that she did not undergo the neurosurgery which leaves her unsettled and unresolved. In this fashion, Shakespeare's form is disrupted by Atwood, and uncertainty is reinstated at the end of the text.

Comedy is the main device used to highlight the absurdity of sex bots in *The Heart Goes Last*, as well as the damage they can cause, quite literally. One of the most comedic moments in the texts is when Ed's sex bot double of Charmaine malfunctions and injures him. Jocelyn reports to Charmaine:

> he got a little bent out of shape […] the thing went into spasm, trapping Ed in it, and then it started thrashing around. […] don't be surprised if you see him walking like a duck. (pp. 324-5).

The crude double entendre of being 'bent out of shape' and the slapstick of Ed being thrown around by the sex bot presents a comic scene of violence instead of a serious one. The irony of a pre-programmed, passive object enacting violence on the intimidating Ed is also a powerful and hilarious dynamic which underscores the dangers of the sex bot. The comparison of Ed to a duck also undermines his authority and emasculates him. There is a link between the feminist use of comedy and the deflation of patriarchal power, with Rebecca Krefting noting that 'jokes reveal myriad strategies for dissembling the powerful and corrupt' and that 'examining comedy as resistant to patriarchy, white supremacy, and imperialism has long been at the center of feminist comedy studies'.[104] Here, comedy causes a false sense of security by removing Ed's threatening power for a couple of pages, only for it to be reinstated when it is revealed that Ed destroyed the doll and seeks to sexually possess Charmaine through neurosurgery.[105] The sex bot is, therefore, merely a substitute for Ed's fantasy. After

[104] Julie Webber, Mehnaaz Momen, Jessyka Finley, Rebecca Krefting, Cynthia Willett, and Julie Willett, 'The Political Force of the Comedic', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 20.2 (2021), 419–46 (p. 436).
[105] This mirrors Oskar Kokoschka's destruction of his Alma Mahler doll.

demanding the destruction of the sex bot, Ed says he is 'through with substitutes' (p. 325), which indicates that the sex bot does not deter his harmful sexual fantasies, rather it facilitates them. The novel reveals that enacting sexual fantasies on a sex bot can only lead to the harm and oppression of women, as the sex bot is only a replacement for the perpetrator, and this is ultimately never enough. Atwood's comedic relief highlights the seriousness of the dangerous situations Stan and Charmaine find themselves in, as well as the destructive implications of the sex bot throughout the text.

Atwood presents the sex doll industry as a harmful business that does not consider image consent and therefore imposes on moral and legal boundaries. Ed's fetishization of his Charmaine-lookalike sex bot leads to him treating the real Charmaine like an object and disregarding her boundaries or ability to consent, a bleak reminder of the harm the sex doll industry causes women.[106] Ed reduces Charmaine to an artificial body, taking images of her body without consent by hiding cameras in her bathroom to get a more accurate image. Because of this, Charmaine feels violated and protective of 'her fabricated self' (p. 320). Here, Charmaine must separate the sex bot from her own identity by calling it 'fabricated' and asserting that she is the 'real' Charmaine. This is not representative of current sex doll standards surrounding image consent and commodification. Whilst sex doll companies can customise a sex doll for a client's specific requirements, they will not replicate a sex doll using someone's image without their consent as this breaks current laws.[107] However, in Atwood's dystopian narrative, Prostibot will customize sex dolls based on someone's image without their consent: 'they'll get one made with the face of someone they're hot for but can't have' (p. 253). Here, Atwood presents a future where the laws that protect privacy and data

[106] As is the case with the unnamed narrator and Rebecca in 'The Doll'.
[107] For example, the sex doll company RealDoll 'will not […] customise a doll to look exactly like a person in a photograph – a celebrity, a model or someone's partner or ex-partner – without that person's explicit consent (the law prohibits this anyway).' Smith, p. 248.

are unheeded, and people's images and bodies can be sold as a commodity without their consent through the sex doll.

Through Ed's attempt to own Charmaine sexually via her sex bot double, Atwood's text demonstrates how the sex bot causes women to be relegated to sex objects that can be used without consent. Sinziana M. Gutiu asserts that the lack of consent between a human-robot sexual interaction 'raises questions about whether the use of sexbots that bypass consent could diminish the role of autonomy in sexual relationships and dehumanize sex and intimacy between individuals.'[108] Therefore, having sex with a female sex bot perpetuates the damaging gender power relations that oppress and dehumanize women, as well as propose that women are designed to appease men. In *The Heart Goes Last*, a manufacturer at Prostibot says, 'they'll never say no. Or they'll say no only if you want them to' (p. 146). Here, the idea of complete compliance and a rape fantasy is fetishized and enabled through the sex doll. This aligns with Sparrow's criticism that sex bots which can consent could 'facilitate [a] rape fantasy' and Richardson's opposition to sex bots because they lead to 'women being treated as objects' and ruin human interactions.[109] The ownership of a sex doll not only maintains the illusion of women as passive and subservient but perpetuates the notions that women do not and should not have the choice to consent based on their own desires and free will, rather Atwood shows how the sex bot preserves the notion that women should seek to sexually satisfy men.

Atwood further presents the programming of sexual hesitance and rape fantasies in sex bots as harmful through Ed's use of technology to pre-programme his sex bot to be 'Timid and Hesitant' and a 'Virgin' (p. 264). Here, sexual hesitance is fetishized, rather than perceived as a signifier of non-consent. The doll is programmed to say '"No! Don't touch

[108] Gutiu, p. 187.
[109] Sparrow, p. 466; Devlin, p. 210.

me!"' when Ed tries to be sexually aggressive with the bot, but then 'the eyes close, the head is thrown back in an attitude of surrender […] there's a moan from underneath Ed' (pp. 319-20). Here, the blurring of consent is encouraged and fetishized. Atwood's text, therefore, depicts the dangers pre-programmed sex bots can cause in enabling the owner to explore grey areas in relation to sexual consent, which could transfer into everyday human sexual encounters. Ultimately, obscuring consent can only lead to increases in the sexual assault of women, and therefore the sex bot damages the gains made by feminist movements that have promoted consensual clarity and actively opposed rape culture and sexual violence, such as #MeToo, Time's Up and, more recently, the Sisters Uncut protests.[110]

Atwood's representation of the pre-programmed sex bot challenges the myth that women are always open to sex, regardless of whether they have given consent, by highlighting how the performance of sexual unwillingness by sex bots preserves rape culture. Ed's sex bot illustrates these harmful representations as he knows the doll is performing sexual unwillingness and fetishizes the lack of explicit consent, which maintains the harmful narrative that women are sexually open even when their actions speak otherwise. This is an idea that can only cause harm to women because it assumes sexual consent in every instance. This critique of blurred consent aligns with the criticism of pornography by second and third-wave feminists. Jackson and Scott argue that '[pornography] helps to circulate and perpetuate […] the mythology of women as sexually available', and Dianne Butterworth says, 'one of the harmful ideas that is at the core of all pornography […] is that all women are sexually available to any man, at any time, and in any way he wants.'[111] The sex bot perpetuates the

[110] Rosemary Overell, 'More Than a Hashtag: Excitement, Anguish and the Semblant of #MeToo', Theory & Event, 22.4 (2019), 792–819; Anon, 'BREAKING: Sisters Uncut declare victory at halting police powers bill in Parliament', *Sisters Uncut* (18 March 2021) <https://www.sistersuncut.org/2021/03/18/breaking-sisters-uncut-declare-victory-at-halting-police-powers-bill-in-parliament/> [Accessed 19 April 2021].
[111] Jackson and Scott, p. 23; Dianne Butterworth, 'Wanking in Cyberspace: The Development of Computer Porn', *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 314-20 (p. 319).

illusion of female sexual availability in the same way as pornography does. Like the male secondary narrator in 'The Doll', Ed exemplifies the fetishization of dominating and objectifying women regardless of their choices and so further illustrates the sex doll as a mediator of rape culture.

Atwood's 'sex slave' narrative draws on real-world concerns for the future of women, sex bots and robo-sexuality (p. 388). The normalisation of robo-sexuality, the sexual attraction to robots, could lead to the normalisation of 'the desire to convert real people to robots, or be converted', as suggested by futurologist Ian Pearson.[112] Wanting to be converted to a robot is a preference that does not directly affect others. However, when robotisation is forced onto someone, then robo-sexuality becomes about non-consensual ownership and compliance, which is presented in Atwood's text. Ed wants to medically operate on Charmaine to turn her into a robot-like 'sex slave created by neurosurgery' (p. 388). Ed's intention is to control Charmaine's mind in order to own her body sexually, as he attempted to do with the sex bot. Charmaine expresses the concern of only being a body to Ed and how he wishes to literally turn her into his fetish of a mindless sex bot: 'She's mostly just a body to him, and now he wants to turn her into only a body' (pp. 375-6). This dystopian future explores what society will enable if it allows the normalisation of robo-sexuality through sex bot ownership. Therefore, Atwood's novel presents how the use of female bodies as passive objects, even if they are artificial bodies, could promote the reduction of female bodies to sexual objects to be owned, used and controlled like robots.[113]

The Heart Goes Last highlights how the treatment of sex dolls could transfer to violence against women through Ed's treatment of Charmaine. Ed's violence towards his sex

[112] Ian Pearson, 'The Future of Sex Report: The Rise of the Robosexuals', *A Futurizon Report – Bondara* (September 2015), 1-9 (p. 6).
[113] This is also evokes the robot wives in Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972).

doll is replicated in the violence he threatens Charmaine with, not just physically but medically through involuntary neurosurgery. Once again, Atwood is building on feminist debates from the second wave of feminism in relation to pornography as Scott and Jackson note that 'while pornography does not cause violence it does provide scripts which violent men can utilize.'[114] Atwood, therefore, shows how the sex doll can be utilized as an object which violence can be acted upon without consequence which, like pornography, may not cause violence directly, but could facilitate it in the future. This is illustrative of the links between pornography and physical violence, including, in recent years, women being killed as a result of asphyxiation during 'sex games gone wrong', even porn directors agree that 'strangulation and choking scenes now dominate porn'.[115] This suggests that there is a strong link between violence and pornography, and 'rough sex' is often used as a defence for violence and murder by men.[116] Therefore, if pornography leads to violence, there is a strong case for violence against sex dolls to lead to violence against women. For Smith, when one harms a love object, whether inanimate or human, 'dehumanisation ensues'.[117] Ed's violence towards the sex doll dehumanizes Charmaine for him and enables him to objectify her and enact violence upon her. The act of neurosurgery when it is not medically necessary is violence towards Charmaine. Therefore, the sex doll enables Ed to dehumanize Charmaine and take what he wants through violence, though it is not physically himself enacting the violence, he orchestrates it, and Charmaine remains fearful of rejecting him due to the possibility of violence.

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[114] Jackson and Scott, p. 23.
[115] Patrizia Romito and Lucia Beltramini, 'Watching Pornography: Gender Differences, Violence and Victimization. An Exploratory Study in Italy', *Violence Against Women*, 17.10 (2011), 1313–26 (p. 1314); Anna Moore and Coco Khan, 'The fatal, hateful rise of choking during sex', *Guardian* (25 July 2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jul/25/fatal-hateful-rise-of-choking-during-sex> [Accessed 1 July 2021].
[116] This defence has become such an issue that the campaign 'We Can't Consent to This' has been set up in response to the increased use of 'rough sex' as a defence for violence and murder. Anon, *We Can't Consent to This*, <https://wecantconsenttothis.uk/> [Accessed 1 July 2021]
[117] Smith, p. 250.

Charmaine's fear of rejecting Ed is what keeps her obedient to his demands because the male fear of rejection by women incites violence towards them. Charmaine knows 'powerful men don't take well to rejection. Rage could result' (p. 272). Ed's fear of rejection leads to his control of Charmaine and implies she should avoid rejecting him at all costs and comply to his desires. A review of the literature on sex doll ownership has found that 'a fear of rejection is associated with enhanced ratings of robot attractiveness'.[118] Ed is one of these sex doll owners and Charmaine's main concern here is violence as a result of refusal. Atwood shows how being passive and compliant is often a safety mechanism for women against male violence, rather than a gender role they willingly perform. Charmaine even says 'he could practically force me to do it' when discussing Ed wanting to have sex with her (p. 320). She is terrified that she will come to harm if she refuses Ed and so she is controlled by the fear of violence, and, ultimately, this fear enables Ed to treat her as his puppet.

Atwood demonstrates the impossible behavioural standards women need to conform to in order to survive in a patriarchal society, standards which are perpetuated by the sex doll. Charmaine's fear of Ed causes her to make choices based on what he desires. She must act sexually willing, but virtuous at the same time. Charmaine fears that Ed will not desire her if he discovers she had an affair with Jocelyn's husband, Max, and that this could lead to her redundance in his eyes. Jocelyn says to Charmaine 'he thinks you're modest. That's part of his obsession with you: so hard to find a modest girl these days' (p. 293). Jocelyn's sarcastic tone highlights the impractical expectations placed on Charmaine which sets her up to fail in her role as Ed's object of desire, as his sex bot does. Carter writes about the impractical expectations of the Good Bad Girl who has 'an air of continuous availability but, when the chips are down, she would never stoop to sell herself.'[119] Ultimately, the Good Bad Girl is a

[118] Harper and Lievesley, p. 2.
[119] Carter, p. 65.

fantasy which Charmaine must embody to please Ed.[120] She must give the impression she is sexually willing, but not promiscuous, in order to satisfy Ed's desire for a sexually hesitant and 'modest' sex object.[121] Therefore, Ed's desires and Charmaine's conformity show how the sex doll upholds the unreasonable behavioural standards of contemporary patriarchal society that both drives women to be sexually compliant, as well as demonizes them for it.

Atwood presents the sex bot as a benchmark for the standard of female compliance expected by men and when women do not meet this standard, they are treated with resentment and, sometimes, violence. Charmaine's fear of tarnishing her innocent and modest (Good Bad Girl) image comes to light through her husband, Stan. When Stan finds out about her affair, his idealized 'feminine' image of her as passive, innocent, and domestic is tainted, and he perpetuates the patriarchal and misogynistic view that women who are sexually active are uncontrollable. Stan shows his disdain for Charmaine's sexual disloyalty by saying 'maybe all women should be robots, he thinks with a tinge of acid: the flesh-and-blood ones are out of control' (p. 243). This disdain for real women, whose choices do not conform to patriarchal standards, is a sexist reason for many men turning to sex dolls and aligns with the ideology of incels too. Eleanor Dorfman and Elizabeth Alexandre interviewed over twenty owners of RealDolls and found that sex doll owners 'turning to [RealDolls] is a result of the cruelty of the nature of flesh-and-blood women.'[122] Like Ed and Stan, through the sex bot or neurosurgery, men can avoid the 'cruelty' of disappointment and rejection, and ensure their sexual partner is always sexually loyal and compliant to them. The dislike of real women among sex doll owners is harmful to women as it, once again, implies that women should comply to male sexual desires, rather than their own. Ultimately, the sex bot, contributes to

[120] This indicates that the fetishization of the Good Bad Girl stereotype, exemplified by Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s, also applies to recent (and potentially future) expectations of female sexuality.
[121] Similar to the narrator's expectations of Rebecca to be modest and innocent yet sexually available to him in 'The Doll'.
[122] Smith, p. 227.

the patriarchal culture of misogyny which instigates the hatred and harm of women who are not sexually submissive to male desires.

As with pornography, feminist arguments against sex work encompass the same ideals that Atwood uses to criticize the sex doll. Richardson, who organized the Campaign Against Sex Robots, 'sees a parallel with the sex worker-client relationship, which she views as detrimental and dangerous.'[123] Like Richardson, Atwood opposes sex work because it objectifies and commodifies women and pushes them into a profession that they would not choose for themselves. In his analysis of sex work in Atwood's texts, Tyler Dinucci argues that, 'to Atwood, these are not choices that would be made in a society that values women as equals to men.'[124] In a similar sentiment, sex work is not considered real work by sex workers in *The Heart Goes Last* and is portrayed as dangerous to women. Charmaine's sex worker friends, Sandi and Veronica say that 'they only do the hooking because they're waiting to get real work' (p. 21). Sex work is also painted as 'dangerous' (p. 26) by Charmaine who says that Sandi and Veronica 'won't last […] because they'll be dead' (p. 21). Therefore, the representation of sex work in *The Heart Goes Last* also align with Atwood's other works, as well as Richardson's views on sex work and the sex bot. Atwood portrays sex work as a dangerous profession which women are forced into to survive and condemns any industry that treats female bodies as commodities, including the sex industry.

Atwood portrays the sex bot industry and sex work as services that perpetuate female objectification and commodification by relegating sex workers to sexual objects, as well as comparing the capacity of both sex workers and sex bots to turn a profit. In Atwood's novel, one sex doll manufacturer says that the sex bot is 'almost all margin once you've put in the

[123] Devlin, p. 210.
[124] Tyler Dinucci, 'The Body of Margaret Atwood: Sex Work and Prostitution within Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, Oryx and Crake, and The Year of the Flood' (unpublished thesis, Bucknell University, 2011), p. 52.

front money. No food to buy, no deaths as such, and its multiple use squared […] those girls are sturdy! A real one could only do, say, fifty gigs a day, tops, without breaking down, whereas with these it's endless' (p. 264). Here, sex workers are dehumanized and spoken about as if they are merely 'real' sex dolls. The female body is relegated to a product that can be bought and sold; a prospect Atwood paints as disturbing. Therefore, whilst Atwood recognizes how sex bots could harm sex workers financially, she also paints both sex bots and sex workers as harmful services that commodify the female body and dehumanize women.

As the title indicates, *The Heart Goes Last* confirms that sex work and sex bots will lead to sex and love no longer being relationship-centred, but products that can be bought and sold without feeling. Atwood's novel aligns with Pearson's prediction that the integration of sex bots into society will mean 'love and sex will become increasingly separated and independent.'[125] Aurora, Jocelyn's assistant, says, 'people get lonely; they want someone to love them. That can be arranged for anyone now, even if they look like something the cat coughed up' (p. 349). This suggests that, through the sex bot, sex and the illusion of love can be bought by the client, which is supported by research on the sex doll that indicates 30 percent of sex bot owners use their sex bot for companionship, not just sex.[126] Consequently, Atwood's depiction of the commodification of love, sex and relationships draws on real-life concerns for the redundance of consensual human relationships. This is shown further by Atwood's representation of sex bot fetishization and sex slave neurosurgery, where relationships become about illusion, ownership and power, rather than true love and free will.

In *The Heart Goes Last*, the commodification of women's bodies is reimagined through figures of idealized femininity such as Marilyn Monroe in her recreation as a sex doll. Atwood uses Charmaine, and her embodiment of Monroe and the sex doll, to show how

[125] Pearson, p. 9.
[126] Harper and Lievesley, p. 1.

women conforming to patriarchal beauty standards and their own commodification does not benefit them. Monroe has been a key symbol of female idealization and commodification since her debut as a movie star in the 1950s, suggesting that gender politics in relation to commodification have not advanced much since. Sex bot replicas of Monroe and women dressed up as Monroe are prevalent in Atwood's text, and provide a service as a commodity, either for sex work or companionship. In this way, Charmaine is presented as a modern reincarnation of Monroe. In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter writes of the attractive characteristics of Monroe; her 'huge, appealing, eloquent eyes, […] dazzling fair skins […] and that is why gentlemen prefer blondes'.[127] These attractive characteristics unmistakably align with Charmaine's 'fresh look; […] sweet, big-eyed, kiddie-faced blondes like her' (p. 26). As with the Good Bad Girl image, Charmaine knows she needs to fit into these patriarchal standards of beauty to be of value to Ed and even idealizes Monroe's 'surprised look' by recreating it herself, replicating the conventional O-shaped sex doll mouth in the process as she 'widens her eyes in the mirror, makes an O with her mouth' (p. 257). Charmaine conforms to patriarchal standards of feminine beauty, treating her body as a commodity and, though she comes to no harm because of this, she is consigned to the same treatment and freedoms as a sex bot. Hence, Atwood shows how women who collude in their own commodification are no better off than Ed's sex bot; they can be used and then destroyed when no longer needed.

Atwood warns that the systems that uphold the patriarchy, which the sex doll perpetuates, need to be dismantled before there can be equality between women and men through highlighting how women can be as complicit as men in patriarchy. Atwood's other female characters are rewarded for upholding the patriarchal systems put in place by Ed and Consilience. The neurosurgery that Ed seeks to use against Charmaine is used against him by

[127] Carter, p. 63.

Jocelyn. Upon waking from the surgery, Ed's object of desire becomes Lucinda, an old movie star who helps dismantle Ed's control over Consilience. Aurora, who does not fit into patriarchal standards of female beauty because of her face transplant, also benefits from the neurosurgery performed on Max (Jocelyn's husband and Charmaine's ex-lover) as Aurora becomes his object of desire. This means Aurora is sexually and romantically fulfilled by Max whilst Jocelyn is free to do as she pleases, taking Stan's brother, Connor, as a lover. The surgery that relegates its patient to a sex object is a patriarchal tool used against Ed and Max by women that seek to remove male power and freedom. Whilst Ed is no longer director of Consilience, these patriarchal mechanisms that caused the oppression of women through the sex bot and neurosurgery are still in place, and Lucinda, Aurora and Jocelyn are benefiting from them. Because these structures are still in operation, the patriarchal systems and beliefs of subjugation that oppress all genders are still rife.

Conclusion

Du Maurier's story highlights the subversive potential of the sex doll as an agent of female sexual liberation during the first wave of feminism while Atwood's novel warns of the dangers of the sex doll in the context of the mainstreaming of pornography and the rise of Big Tech. The primary difference between the dolls in du Maurier's and Atwood's texts is the gender of the sex doll and the development of the passive sex doll in 'The Doll' into the more technologically advanced sex bot in *The Heart Goes Last*. Like du Maurier's 'The Doll', Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* affirms female sexual desire through women having sex with male sex dolls. However, Atwood uses the sex bot to critique patriarchal and capitalist structures which reinforce the commodification of the body while du Maurier focuses on a more personal and individual experience of the sex doll to facilitate an active female sexuality outside of marriage, which in the 1920s was the only legitimate site of sexual expression.

Both writers are feminist in their challenging of patriarchal narratives about female sexuality, but Atwood's twenty first-century novel is more pessimistic. The fact that du Maurier's story, as an earlier text, is more positive about the subversive potential of the sex doll as an agent of female sexual liberation is rather unexpected and defies the narrative of historical progress assigned to the evolving waves of feminism and underlines the importance of continuing to push for change.

Chapter Four.

The AI Doll:

From Objectification to Humanization

‘Why did you give her sexuality? An AI doesn’t need a gender.
She could have been a grey box?’
- Caleb in *Ex Machina* (2015)

In the film *Ex Machina* (2015), written and directed by Alex Garland, Caleb, a single, male employee is selected for the task of testing whether a female-presenting AI robot named Ava can pass for human. Despite Caleb questioning Ava’s need for a gender as shown in the quotation above, he ultimately falls in love with - or desires – Ava. The implication of Caleb’s question above is also whether he can have sex with her, which her billionaire creator Nathan confirms. This scene perfectly exemplifies the sexual fetishization of constructed women by men, as shown in the previous chapter, whilst also critiquing how a patriarchal, heteronormative society cannot visualize humanity outside of gender. Like Ava in the film, Sophia is also an AI robot who in real-life has been granted citizenship in Saudi Arabia. In their recent critical book *Cyborg* (2024), Laura Forlano and Danya Glabau argue that Sophia is only identified as human because of her ‘gendered features’, suggesting that she represents essentialist hopes for the model of humans such as a future in which ‘gender is intrinsic to personhood’.[1] These examples show how the media and Big Tech exhibit patriarchal binary gender as integral to the ‘humanity’ of the AI doll, as well as its objectification.

This chapter demonstrates how contemporary women writers both highlight and deconstruct patriarchal notions of binary gender through the gendered and non-gendered AI doll to illustrate how this binary can subjugate women. The AI Doll is defined here as a

[1] Laura Forlano and Danya Glabau, *Cyborg* (New York: MIT Press, 2024), p. 2.

human-like construct that acquires subjectivity through Artificial Intelligence. This includes both robots and cyborgs. The AI doll in women's science fiction is different from the sex bot in women's literature because the AI Doll has agency and subjectivity, whilst the sex bot is a mechanical object built just for sex. The doll in women's writing, therefore, moves from object to subject in this chapter. Humans and technology are already merging, with the use of artificial organs and limbs, online Avatars, Alexa, ChatGPT and soon brain microchips meaning that we are already becoming more cyborgian.[2] In her influential posthumanist essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985), Donna Haraway argues that a 'cyborg world' is about holding the space for two contradictory points to be true: the ability of this world to harm women and the planet, as well as be a place where people are 'not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'.[3] Taking influence from Haraway's contention, this chapter argues that women writers use the technologization of the human, through the AI doll, to critique the possible and current patriarchal uses of technology, as well as to highlight the potential for human-AI iterations to facilitate feminist progress.

Haraway helps to define the complexity of the cyborg, which she defines as 'a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction', alluding to the figure's manifestations in literature as well as reality.[4] Using Haraway's definition of the cyborg alongside my analysis of the AI doll enables a reading of technology that is subversive and dismantles socially constructed binaries, particularly in relation to gender and technology. In *Cyborg* (2024), Forlano and Glabau coin the term 'Critical cyborg literacy' and define it as a framework that:

[2] Ian Pearson even states a case for the technologization of sex outside of the sex bot or doll, through 'brain mapping' (like Virtual reality at a physical level) in terms of 'genderhopping' so 'gender transitions and sexuality will be more fluid […] Augmented reality allows people to present any gender as their real.' Pearson, p. 8.
[3] Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 15.
[4] Haraway, p. 5.

> foregrounds power dynamics, and more explicitly pays attention to the ways that social and cultural factors such as gender, race, and disability (as well as their intersections) shape the kinds of technologies that are imagined, developed, used, and resisted. It is both a critical approach and creative expansion that seeks to tell alternative stories about technology as well as humans.[5]

Forlano and Glabau also acknowledge, and seek to challenge, the problematic origins of the cyborg, explaining how they are 'born of militarism, colonialism, and control' and 'situated within particular traditions of white, ableist feminism'.[6] The cyborg's militaristic background in film and media suggest that the figure has dystopian roots born from patriarchy, capitalism and Big Tech. Forlano and Glabau use the examples of cyborgs being 'conflated with the techno-optimistic transhumanism - a belief that humans eventually will leave their bodies to merge seamlessly with computers to achieve enhanced intelligence and ultimately immortality - of Silicon Valley billionaires like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg'.[7] In using Forlano's and Glabau's framework of troubling the cyborg figure, I show how the women writers in this chapter imagine, highlight and resist the patriarchal stereotypes and expectations of the AI doll, reinventing the figure to highlight inequalities in race, class and gender, as a result of patriarchy and capitalism. The AI dolls under investigation are man-made female robot Futura in Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis* (1925), a figure which highlights the misogyny and sexism prevalent in patriarchal constructions of femininity and technology; male-presenting cyborg Yod in Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991), a cyborg which shows how technology can break down social gender binaries and facilitate human connections; and the genderless, self-aware cyborg which calls itself 'Murderbot' in Martha Wells' *The Murderbot Diaries* series (2017-2023), who represents the possibility of technology to dismantle gender all together. A consideration of texts from the first, third and fourth wave of

[5] Forlano and Glabau, p. 6.
[6] Forlano and Glabau, p. 138.
[7] Ibid.

feminism maps how feminist progress and the development of technology runs alongside women writers' literary representations of the AI doll. Women's science fiction is critical of patriarchal and capitalist uses of technology but recognizes that technology has feminist potential if utilized to dismantle oppressive hierarchies and enhance relationships and connections. This chapter takes an intersectional approach and argues that the AI doll in women's science fiction represents the potential for technology to facilitate feminist, ecofeminist and socialist progress, defying its status as a dystopian object in patriarchal and capitalist contexts.

Feminism and Technology

This section sets up the context for how feminist attitudes to technology have changed over time in order to subsequently reveal how this is reflected in Von Harbou's, Piercy's and Wells' representations of the AI doll. Technology has traditionally been perceived as a patriarchal venture by feminists with the capacity to instil further inequalities in relation to gender, race and class. British second-wave feminist Cynthia Cockburn and Australian third-wave feminist Judy Wajcman were crucial voices in identifying technology as defined by its masculinity and as a patriarchal endeavour that only benefits men. Cockburn argues that men are usually in control of technological organisations, enabling technology to be dominated by masculine and patriarchal ideas, and leading to the absence of women in technological jobs due to the 'masculine appropriation of technology'.[8] Like Cockburn, Wajcman's *Feminism Confronts Technology* (1991) argues that 'the ideology of masculinity' has an 'intimate bond with technology' through men's relationship to war and the patriarchal obsession with control.[9] Existing technological advancements in AI have also caused concerns amongst

[8] Cynthia Cockburn, *In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 18, 157.
[9] Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 137, 138, 142.

feminists as current AI algorithms are often discriminatory in regard to gender and race, with Google Translate defaulting to the masculine pronoun and Word embedding algorithms identifying European American names as 'pleasant' and African American ones as 'unpleasant'.[10] Sexism is also clear in word processing systems that adhere to oppressive gender stereotypes such as 'woman' being associated with 'nurse' and 'homemaker', whilst 'man' is associated with 'doctor' and 'computer-programmer'.[11] Both past and present iterations of technological advancement and AI are, therefore, biased towards men and masculinity, which has led to feminist cynicism in relation to progressions in AI and technological enhancement, such as transhumanism.

Transhumanism is a movement which believes that technological human augmentation can enhance humanity and is often associated with the capitalist projects of big tech billionaires.[12] In *After the Human* (2020), Sherryl Vint notes that transhumanism 'focuses on what technoscientific innovations can do to increase human longevity and to enhance human intellectual and physical capacities.'[13] On the question of human longevity, transhumanists particularly focus on the limitations of human mortality. Forlano and Glabau note that, 'transhumanists believe that ultimately humans will leave their bodies and merge seamlessly with computers, extending human life spans and ultimately achieving immortality.'[14] For Peter Kyslan, transhumanism is about humanity overcoming the natural processes of death and decay, so humanity is no longer confined by the natural processes of

[10] James Zou and Londa Schiebinger, "AI Can Be Sexist and Racist — It's Time to Make It Fair," *Nature (London)*, 559.7714 (2018), 324–26 (pp. 324, 325); Sara Wachter-Boettcher, *Technically Wrong: Sexist Apps, Biased Algorithms, and Other Threats of Toxic Tech* (New York, NY: HighBridge Audio, 2017).
[11] Zou and Schiebinger, p. 326.
[12] 'Transhumanism' was first coined by biologist Julian Huxley in 1957. 'Transhumanism', *OED*, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/247652?redirectedFrom=transhumanism#eid> [Accessed on 16 October 2021].
[13] Sherryl Vint, *After the Human* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 20. Kindle Edition.
[14] Forlano and Glabau, p. 17.

the body.[15] In *Posthuman Glossary*, feminist theorist Francesca Ferrando writes, 'transhumanism focuses specifically on human enhancement […] some humans may transcend their outfit in such radical ways as to become posthuman'.[16] Vint, Kyslan and Ferrando argue that transhumanism is an anthropocentric venture here, but by enhancing the human, and becoming transhuman, patriarchal transhumanism becomes about creating further hierarchies in humanity, primarily between those who can and cannot afford or access technological enhancement.

Transhumanism's focus on anthropocentrism and its idealization of human logic and supremacy has been a point of contention for many feminist posthumanist thinkers.[17] For Andrew Pilsch, transhumanism 'appears to argue that we will make ourselves into gods' and 'the ethos of transhumanism is science, logic, and rigor.'[18] Ferrando criticizes the transhumanist view of human rationality and superiority, noting that the 'emphasis on the human as a rational animal has been a powerful discursive tool to historically enslave, mistreat, and dominate some humans and most nonhuman animals', particularly in the context of defining women and slaves as 'irrational', 'emotional', and 'natural'.[19] Ferrando predicts that the human exceptionalism of transhumanism 'far from being neutral, would generate, sustain, and justify social inequalities, political discriminations, and legal violence'.[20] Ferrando describes 'Posthumanism' as further developing 'the deconstruction of the human started in the 1960s and 1970s, underlining the fact that, historically, not every

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[15] Peter Kyslan, 'Transhumanism and the Issue of Death', *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 9.1 (2019), 71–80 (p. 71); This argument could be aligned with feminist scholars such as Shulamith Firestone who believe in freeing women from their 'natural' role as mothers. See: Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015), p. 6.

[16] Francesca Ferrando, 'Transhumanism/Posthumanism', in *Posthuman Glossary*, ed. By Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 438-9 (p. 439).

[17] Vint, p. 5.

[18] Andrew Pilsch, *Transhumanism: Evolutionary Futurism and the Human Technologies of Utopia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 10, 139.

[19] Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 34.

[20] Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism*, p. 34.

human being has been recognized as such'.[21] Posthumanism and transhumanism are in conflict as transhumanism is anthropocentric at its core, whilst posthumanism seeks to critique anthropocentrism, as well as the term 'human' itself in order to illustrate how, as Ferrando notes, 'some humans have been considered more human than others; some have been considered less than human.'[22] In their chapter on 'Cyborg bodies', Forlano and Glabau also suggest that 'black and disabled people along with migrant laborers are often treated or talked about in US political discourse as though they are subhuman.'[23] This chapter challenges the dominant posthumanist view that transhumanism oppresses marginalized groups. It does this by showing how women writers present a future where technological enhancements of humans can assist feminist progress by dismantling patriarchal constructions of gender and who is deemed 'human', particularly in the later novels under investigation.

Like the women science fiction authors in this chapter, since the second wave of feminism, some posthumanist, feminist and queer theorists have imagined a future where technology is beneficial to marginalized groups in helping to dismantle patriarchal binaries and hierarchies. Second and third-wave feminist scholars such as Shulamith Firestone and Haraway challenged the predominant view at the time, that technology was exclusively a patriarchal, capitalist venture, and imagined ways in which technology could be used to benefit women and marginalized groups. In Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), she argues that 'the biological family unit has always oppressed women and children, but now, for the first time in history, technology has created real preconditions for overthrowing these oppressive "natural" conditions'.[24] Firestone and Haraway suggest that embracing human-

[21] Ferrando, *Posthuman Glossary*, p. 439.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Forlano and Glabau, p. 77.
[24] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015), p. 108.

technology relations allows us to move further away from the biological determinism that has re-enforced heteropatriarchal norms and oppressed marginalized genders, allowing for a more inclusive evolution of humanity where sex differences are entirely dismantled.[25] Furthermore, Kim Toffoletti argues that the posthuman is beneficial to women because its resistance to categorization 'encourages new imaginings for women'.[26] Posthumanist scholar Katherine Hayles also sees the positive possibilities of the posthuman, noting that, it 'evokes the exhilarating prospect of getting out of some of the old boxes and opening up new ways of thinking about what being human means.'[27] Similarly, queer theorists Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston suggest that the technologized body is inherently queer as it resists categorization: 'the posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image; […] it is, as we shall see, a queer body.'[28] More recently, feminist author Jeanette Winterson also identifies the ability of technology to assist in breaking away from gender essentialism by noting the link between patriarchy and biological determinism: 'biology is destiny if you work for the patriarchy'.[29] Like these feminist and queer scholars and writers, the women writers under investigation in this chapter embrace the feminist potential of technology and human-AI relationships, whilst critiquing its current and historical uses.

In a contemporary context, technology is often used for feminist activism. 'Cyberfeminism' is a term coined by Sadie Plant in 1991 and is used to refer to the partnership of women and machines in the context of embracing technology, such as the Internet, for feminist action.[30] However, some critics of cyberfeminism, such as Valerie

[25] This is in contention with Cockburn and Wajcman's more gender essentialist view of nature and technology.
[26] Kim Toffoletti, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2019), pp. 30, 161.
[27] Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 285.
[28] Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 3.
[29] Jeanette Winterson, *12 Bytes: How artificial intelligence will change the way we live and love* (London: Jonathon Cape, 2021), p. 212.
[30] Gloria Casanova, 'Cyberfeminism', in *Crossref* (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2017), pp. 1–3 (p. 1).

Bryson, highlight that it excludes many older women, lower classes, people of colour and a quarter of the global population.[31] In a more socialist context, Firestone's late-twentieth-century proposal of 'cybernetic communism' suggests that technology could free women and men from the 'double curse' of manual work and childbirth, which pre-empts Aaron Bastani's proposition that we now have the technology to allow people to be freed from labour in the twenty-first century in *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (2019).[32] There are two sides to this case, as Forlano and Glabau argue:

> according to the utopian version of this narrative, humans will eventually be completely free from work, enjoying lives of leisure. A darker, more dystopian version is that professional, middle- income, and low- wage work will be automated and replaced, but without adequate social support, there will be class warfare.[33]

This suggests that society needs the correct socialist structures in place to support working people under a technologized society, or 'the most vulnerable and precarious workers will continue to be exploited under our current model of neo-liberal capitalism'.[34] A socialist and anti-capitalist feminism is, therefore, essential in ensuring that gender, race and class equality in a technologized society.

Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis* (1925)

Thea Von Harbou's *Metropolis* (1925) is a rare example of an early twentieth century novel by a woman that features an AI doll. Despite Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis* being categorized as 'one of the greatest films of all time' by the British Film Institute, Lang's wife Thea von Harbou, the author of the novel that the film is based on, has received little critical

[31] Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory*, 3rd edn (London: Palgrave, 2016), p. 284.
[32] Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019), p. 14; Firestone, pp. 113, 114.
[33] Forlano and Glabau, p. 39.
[34] Forlano and Glabau, p. 53.

attention, with the majority of the scholarship on *Metropolis* focussing on the film.[35] The neglect of women writers like Von Harbou mirrors the female creators of AI and sci-fi (Ada Lovelace and Mary Shelley) also being overlooked in their day, as argued by Jeanette Winterson in her recent book *12 Bytes*.[36] Although it is widely recognized that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is the first science fiction novel, women were - and have been since - severely underrepresented in science fiction.[37] In the early twentieth century, the association of technology with masculinity helped to pioneer the Futurist movement. Futurism was founded in 1909 with the publication of F. T. Marinetti's 'manifesto of futurism' (1909) and this early phase of the movement ended in 1916.[38] Elza Adamowicz and Simona Storchi note that:

> Futurism was the '-ism' of the future, dedicated to the glorification of modernity in all its phenomena: from the metropolis and city life to the advancement of science and technology; from the excitement and beauty of speed and machines to the new means of communication. Futurism embraced twentieth-century technology as a key element of its aesthetics.[39]

The 'manifesto of futurism' was inherently anti-feminist, aiming to 'glorify war' and 'fight against moralism, feminism', showing a historical trend of technological pre-occupations as patriarchal.[40] Male authors have dominated science fiction in the same way that men

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[35] Anon, 'Metropolis (1927)', *BFI* <https://www.bfi.org.uk/film/bda6ff8a-ed7e-5942-980d-c2910c0120ec/metropolis> [Accessed on 13 February 2024]; Ake Bergvall, 'Apocalyptic Imagery in Fritz Lang's "Metropolis"', *Literature Film Quarterly*, 40.4 (2012), 246–57; Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann, *Fritz Lang's Metropolis : Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2000); Andrew Hageman, 'Science Fiction, Ecological Futures, and the Topography of Fritz Lang's Metropolis', *Ecozon@*, 3.2 (2012), 57–73; Andreas Huyssen, 'The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's Metropolis', *New German Critique*, 24/25 (1981), 221–37; Even Winterson neglects to mention Von Harbou in her discussion of *Metropolis* in *12 Bytes*. Winterson, p. 173.
[36] Winterson, pp. 17, 20.
[37] Catherine Riley and Lynne Pearce, 'Science fiction', *Feminism and Women's Writing: an Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 144-160 (p. 146); Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: Women's Press, 1988), p. 2; M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas, *The Science Fiction Handbook* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 86; Lefanu, p. 2.
[38] Selena Daly, *Italian Futurism and the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), p. 5.
[39] Elza Adamowicz and Simona Storchi, *Back to the Futurists: The Avant-Garde and Its Legacy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 4.
[40] Raffaele Carrieri, *Futurism* (Milani: Edizioni del Milione, 1963), p. 12.

dominate the tech industry, leading to the historical exclusion of female voices in the expansion of technology and imagining its possibilities.[41] Well-known early science fiction writers in the decades surrounding the publication of *Metropolis* include H.G Wells, who wrote *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Aldus Huxley, author of *Brave New World* (1932), and Ray Bradbury, who wrote *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). These male-authored texts focus on the harms of state-controlled, technologically-advanced societies or the future of class disparities, and some touch on gender issues relating to this, showing that these themes were relevant at the time *Metropolis* was published. Von Harbou's *Metropolis* is an early feminist science fiction novel which uses the AI doll to condemn patriarchal literary movements such as Futurism, call into question patriarchal critiques of the New Woman, and highlight the misogyny and sexism prevalent in patriarchal constructions of femininity and technology. As intersectionality is often associated with later feminism, this examination of Von Harbou's text also challenges the dominant narrative of feminist progress in acknowledging the intersectional feminist politics of gender, class and environmental oppression under patriarchy.

Critics have suggested that Von Harbou herself is not a feminist, despite her feminist and humanitarian activism. On reading Von Harbou's early literature, Erika Quinn labels Von Harbou a 'conservative nationalist' and misogynist as she saw 'most women as weak, silly, empty-headed creatures who lack the character and will to support the nation at the cost of their own luxurious self-indulgence'.[42] Quinn claims that Von Harbou did not see herself as a feminist and actually criticized the British suffrage movement as a distraction from 'national solidarity'.[43] However, Von Harbou advocated for female bodily autonomy, protesting

[41] Winterson, p. 17.
[42] Erika Quinn, 'At War: Thea von Harbou, Women, and the Nation', *Women in German Yearbook*, 33 (2017), 52–76 (pp. 56, 59-60, 64).
[43] Quinn, p. 59.

Germany's paragraph 218 which criminalised abortion, and supported women being able to play an active (coded as masculine in the early twentieth century) role in society.[44] Von Harbou was married to famous German film director Fritz Lang and critics of his work have also suggested that Von Harbou herself was a 'Nazi sympathiser' because, during World War Two, Von Harbou chose to stay in Germany and continue to make films under Nazi occupation, whilst Lang fled to Paris.[45] However, Von Harbou's support of Indian immigrants whilst she was a member of the Nazi party suggests that her activism worked within the patriarchal and fascist systems of the time. Furthermore, people close to her have written accounts that state Von Harbou did not have Nazi ideologies and only joined the Nazi party to have power to help others.[46] Von Harbou sought to help people within the patriarchal and fascist structures that existed rather than overthrow them, which is reflected in how revolution is implemented in *Metropolis*.

Metropolis is set in a dystopian future ruled by patriarchal leaders, the Club of Sons. Through blending the genres of gothic, adventure and science fiction, *Metropolis'* plot hinges on the creation of the AI doll, Futura, as a tool of patriarchal oppression, and a tool for protest against patriarchal leaders, in Futura's initiation of revolution. Despite the term 'Artificial Intelligence' not being in circulation during the period *Metropolis* was published, Futura constitutes an AI doll because she simulates human intelligence and is a man-made human-like figure. Futura is the patriarchal creation of a male scientist, Rotwang, a man obsessed with owning and controlling women. Rotwang's name when translated from German to

[44] Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1989), p. 26.
[45] Joe McElhaney and Nicholas Baer, *A Companion to Fritz Lang* (Chichester, England: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 204.
[46] Von Harbou's stepdaughter from her subsequent marriage to Indian screenwriter Ayi Tendulkar in 1933, Laxmi Tendulkar Dhaul, would go on to write an account of Von Harbou which states that she 'did not support Nazi ideologies' and '" […] joined the Nazi party because without being a member she had no status to fight for the cause of Indians stranded in Berlin during the war."' Laxmi Tendulkar Dhaul, *In the Shadow of Freedom: Three Lives in Hitler's Berlin and Gandhi's India* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2013). pp. 3075-6. Kindle Edition.

English means red-cheeked, evoking the appearance of anger, which aligns with his vengeful and misogynistic presence. At the orders of the patriarchal leader of the Club of Sons, Joh Frederson, Rotwang creates Futura to replace Maria, a woman whose peaceful protest against the leaders has been seen as a threat to the patriarchal hierarchy that keeps the workers of Metropolis impoverished and oppressed. Believing Joh stole his love, Hel, from him, however, Rotwang disobeys these orders and, in an act of revenge, programmes Futura to destroy the city rather than restore its powers of oppression. In an unexpected twist, Futura, therefore, aids revolution. Futura is ultimately destroyed by the people of Metropolis, and the human Maria breaks free after Rotwang is murdered by Joh. Maria is then able to be with Joh's son, Freder, who fell in love with her at the beginning of the text. The name 'Maria' evokes the innocence and morality of the Virgin Mary and 'Freder' means 'peaceful ruler', suggesting that their union will bring harmony to the city through traditional heteronormative Christian values.[47] Like Von Harbou's limitations in Nazi-occupied Germany, *Metropolis* is constrained by conservative values. Nonetheless, Metropolis still highlights how technology can exacerbate inequalities in society, both through emphasizing the sexist treatment of women through Futura, as well as the dehumanization of marginalized people through the humanization of machines, in a parody of Futurism's romanticization of technology and hypermasculinity.

The sparse scholarship on the novel *Metropolis* means that the feminist potential of Von Harbou's text has not been explored in depth. A rare exception is Stefana Lee Lefko who argues that 'the marriage of technology and male control can only create an unnatural woman' and describes the city the novel depicts as a 'futuristic nightmare' due to the lack of

[47] Anon, 'Frederick', *Dictionary.com* (n.d.) <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/Frederick> [Accessed 17 February 2024].

care and women's influence. [48] Lefko's reading relies upon essentialist assumptions about women's 'natural' role as carers, whilst drawing on the more feminist critique of the relationship between technology and male control. In his more capitalism-focused analysis, Nathanial Robert Walker proposes that *Metropolis* shows the destructive potential of protest and revolution but concludes that the novel paints an optimistic view of reform within patriarchal, capitalist societies, suggesting *Metropolis* also has feminist potential.[49] Lefko's and Walker's readings indicate that *Metropolis* does have feminist potential, though they do not directly identify their analysis as feminist. However, more recently, Elizabeth Boa argues that Von Harbou's novel is 'an awful warning against the liberation of women from patriarchal control' and 'a reactionary response to the threat of revolution', positioning *Metropolis* as an anti-feminist novel.[50] Nevertheless, I argue that *Metropolis* is feminist in its parodying of the hypermasculine movement of Futurism and male attitudes to the New Woman, demonising men playing God and treating women as objects. It also critiques patriarchy by highlighting how technology can exacerbate inequalities within a patriarchal society. The novel suggests the possibility of feminist and socialist rebellion but is ultimately conservative in its destruction of Futura and return to a heteronormative, Christian ending.

Von Harbou uses parody to mock the Futurist manifesto, comparing the rise of technology with religion through the machine city being worshipped in a hyperbolic way. In his creation of Futura and romanticization of technology, Rotwang holds a futurist ideology, which is also clear through his naming of Futura. The machines which operate the city are controlled by the Club of Sons and are treated as hyper-intelligent beings and deities:

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[48] Stefana Lee Lefko, 'Female Pioneers and Social Mothers: Novels by Female Authors in the Weimar Republic and the Construction of the New Woman' (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1998), pp. 113, 109.
[49] Nathaniel Robert Walker, 'Sister Cities: Corporate Destiny in the Metropolis Utopias of King Camp Gillette, Thea Von Harbou, and Fritz Lang', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 23.1 (2011), 41–54 (p. 52).
[50] Elizabeth Boa, 'The New Woman as Satirist or Butt of Satire', *Oxford German Studies*, 46.1 (2017), 25–41 (p. 36).

> all machines, machines, machines, which, confined to their pedestals, like deities to their temple thrones, from the resting places which bore them, lived their god-like lives: Eyeless but seeing all, earless but hearing all, without speech, yet, in themselves, a proclaiming mouth—not man, not woman, and yet engendering, receptive, and productive—lifeless, yet shaking the air of their temples with the never-expiring breath of their vitality.[51]

The simile explicitly compares the machine city to a god, and the repetition of 'machines' followed by a long sentence which lists the technological city's positive attributes emphasizes the obsessive nature of their worship. The omniscient narrator's hyperbolic description of the idealized machines parodies Futurism's near-worshipping of technology in its 'glorification of modernity'.[52] Likewise, transhumanism has also been compared to a religion. In its belief in a technological afterlife, Kyslan sees transhumanism as having many features of religion, nothing that 'transhumanism can act as a philosophy of life that fulfills some of the same functions as religion possesses, without any reference to force majeure, supernatural subject, faith, and without other essential features of religion'.[53] More recently, Winterson even describes transhumanism as being part of a 'new AI religion' and argues that 'religious belief shares quite a bit of territory with artificial intelligence'.[54] Therefore, Von Harbou critiques, as well as pre-empts, the treatment of AI as a religion through her parody of Futurists as techno-worshippers.

Von Harbou also shows the inherent misogyny in Futurist attitudes, by highlighting how certain gendered forms of technology, for example, technology that takes the form of a woman, like Futura, is sexualized and demonized within a patriarchal society. Rotwang is part of a long literary tradition of men creating (artificial) women, or dolls, to own and control. He states, 'every man-creator makes himself a woman' (p. 47). This tradition began

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[51] Thea Von Harbou, *Metropolis* (New York: Dover Publications, 2017), p. 21. Subsequent page references in parentheses.
[52] Adamowicz and Storchi, *Back to the Futurists,* p. 4.
[53] Kyslan, p. 77.
[54] Winterson, pp. 95, 103.

with E. T. A. Hoffman's 'The Sandman' (1816) and is also clear through texts such as Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve future* (1886).[55] Rotwang even proposes that God must have created woman before man as 'creative sport' (p. 47), as for Rotwang, women are no more than an object or plaything manufactured by men. As Winterson suggests, 'men do seem to think that a woman can be manmade, perhaps because a woman has been a commodity, a chattel, a possession, an object, for most of history'.[56] The patriarchal obsession with playing God in the manufacturing of women is shown in Rotwang's satisfaction in having the power to create: 'I am drunk, d'you see, drunk with being a creator' (p. 48). However, Rotwang also shows how the unequal power dynamics of creator and created can lead to violence and destruction as when he grasps Futura for the first time his 'lonely hands, wished not to create but to destroy' (p. 97). Rotwang's wish to destroy what he has created highlights how the patriarchal power dynamics of men playing God in relation to the creation and control of female bodies can lead to harm to women. This rhetoric also aligns with transhumanism which 'appears to argue that we will make ourselves into gods.'[57] Subsequently, *Metropolis'* representation of Rotwang as a power-hungry misogynist with a God complex anticipates some of the attitudes of Big Tech billionaires in the twenty-first century transhumanist movement. Still, Von Harbou's representation of Rotwang is primarily used to highlight how the creation of AI dolls by patriarchal power leads to misogyny and the increased potential for violence towards women.

Misogyny and the objectification of women are highlighted throughout *Metropolis* through the figure of the AI doll. Joh's treatment of female machines in comparison to male machines evidences the misogyny which is prevalent within depictions of other fictional AI

[55] Winterson, pp. 143-4.
[56] Winterson, p. 143; This is the same for Galatea.
[57] Andrew Pilsch, *Transhumanism: Evolutionary Futurism and the Human Technologies of Utopia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), p. 10.

technologies such as the sex bot, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Joh requests machine men from Rotwang to form an army of workers and soldiers. Joh says, 'I ordered machine men from you, Rotwang, which I can use as my machines. No woman...no plaything' (p. 45). Rotwang instead describes the female automaton as a 'tool' and says 'Do you know what it means to have a woman as a tool? A woman like this, faultless and cool? And obedient—Implicitly obedient...' (p. 45). This shows how both male antagonists in the story aim to use the AI doll as a patriarchal tool or doll, fetishizing her 'obedience', as with male owners of the sex doll. Furthermore, the figure of the doll in *Metropolis* emphasizes the misogyny of the patriarchal rulers as the female servants are compared to dolls and treated as playthings by the Club of Sons:

> Their chief task consisted in nothing but, at all times, to appear delightful and to be incapriciously cheerful […] they resembled delicate dolls of porcelain and brocade, devised by a master-hand, not purchaseable but rather delightful presents (p. 5).

The female servants are presented as objects that are owned and admired by the patriarchal rulers and their description as 'presents' further illustrates their status as items that can be exchanged rather than human beings. This expectation of women to be passive in *Metropolis* also stands in stark contrast with Futura who is used as a tool for revolution, as well as Maria, who is reviled by the patriarchal rulers for her socialist activism. Von Harbou highlights here how the doll can be used as a symbol to show how a patriarchal society lowers women to feminized objects and demonizes women who reject passivity and break away from patriarchal expectations of femininity.

The figure of Futura and her misogynistic treatment by the patriarchal rulers evokes the Greek myth of Pandora. Dating back to 700 BC, the Greek myth of Pandora is, as claimed

by Allison De Fren, 'the first artificial woman in literature'.[58] The story of Pandora perpetuates the harmful beauty ideals and body expectations of artificial women and presents the misogynistic notion of the 'ideal woman', which has been crafted by patriarchal ideals. De Fren further describes the story of Pandora:

> Hesiod tells us that Pandora was molded from clay by Hephaestus and endowed with desirable attributes by all the gods, at the behest of Zeus, who wished to punish men for the gift of fire that Prometheus had given them […] thus, the artificial woman was meant to void the progress made from Prometheus' gift. Although Pandora was a "wonder" to behold, she was "sheer guile" (described with the oxymoronic kaldn kakòn or "beautiful evil"), an irresistible and deceptive exterior masking a secret horror in the form of a box (or jar) containing sickness, toil, and sorrow. On the orders of Zeus, Hermes offered Pandora as a gift to Prometheus' more gullible brother Epimetheus, who was so entranced by her beauty that he forgot to heed Prometheus' warning to beware all gifts from the king of the gods. And so Pandora entered the human realm and, soon thereafter, incited by curiosity, she opened the box, releasing pain and suffering into the world.[59]

Pandora not only symbolizes the male fetishization of unrealistic feminine beauty standards, but her beauty and allure is also presented as dangerous. As an artificial woman, Pandora appears to be the original femme fatale, a woman whose sexual allure is the downfall of men who are 'entranced by her beauty'.[60] The idea of creating, possessing and gifting women as though they are objects is apparent here too and perpetuates the idea that women are objects or dolls to be traded or used at men's will.

Like the myth of Pandora, *Metropolis* also anticipates the depiction of the AI doll as a 'beautiful but dangerous' robot which arises in late-twentieth-century film, with Fryxell describing Futura as a 'deceptive and seductive machine'.[61] The female robot is presented as hypersexual or dangerous and threatening, particularly to heteropatriarchal structures, in *Ex*

[58] Allison De Fren, 'Technofetishism and the Uncanny Desires of A.S.F.R. (alt.sex.fetish.robots)', *Science Fiction Studies*, 36. 3 (2009), 404-40 (p. 404).
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Kate Devlin, *Turned on: Science, Sex and Robots* (London: Bloomsbury Sigma, 2018), p. 168.

Machina (2014), *Humans* (2015-2018), *Westworld* (2016-2022) and, most recently, *M3GAN* (2022). Kate Devlin states that fembots 'play to cultural stereotypes, generally taking an eroticised form: shapely, sexy and obedient. There's an essence of the *femme fatale* about some of them too – the perfect woman, but with an underlying potential for danger'.[62] Futura is described as a sexual being, yet also as an alluring and dangerous femme fatale, Freder believing her voice was filled with 'a dark, deadly wickedness' (p. 93). Her sexuality is part of her danger because, as well as threatening the capitalist city through her rebellion and compromising the machines and class hierarchy, it also makes vulnerable patriarchal expectations of female passivity and fidelity. This is particularly notable in Futura's dance scene that conjures Salome's dance of the seven veils for Herod in Oscar Wilde's play *Salome* (1891):

> Then the girl danced. […] The slender hands touched above her hair-parting. Over her shoulders, her breasts, her hips, her knees, there ran an incessant, a barely perceptible trembling. […] No dance, no scream, no cry of an animal in heat, could have so lashing an effect as the trembling of this shimmering body, which seemed, in its calm, in its solitude, to impart the waves of its incitement to every single soul in the room (p. 127).

The run on sentences listing Futura's body parts and movements create a tension surrounding her sexuality which evokes a sense of danger. Futura's treatment in *Metropolis* mirrors Herod's sexualization and then demonization of Salome in Wilde's *Salome*. Futura's dance is later described as a 'sinful dance', demonstrating its association with sexual immorality (p. 129). The motif of the mouth is used to symbolize overt female sexuality. Futura's mouth is described by Freder as 'blood-red', 'tantalising' and a 'mouth of deadly sin' (p. 140). Like Julio's 'evil' doll mouth in Daphne du Maurier's short story *The Doll* (1937) discussed in Chapter Three, Futura's mouth also represents the 'sin' of female sexuality in the early

[62] Ibid.

twentieth century.[63] *Metropolis* highlights how the hypersexualized female form of the AI doll is a patriarchal dichotomy in being created by and for the male gaze, whilst being demonized as dangerous and sinful by the men and patriarchal society who created her.

Whilst Boa argues that *Metropolis* parodies the New Woman, I argue that Von Harbou uses the AI doll to critique patriarchy's treatment of the New Woman as a scapegoat for social instability in the twentieth century.[64] Sunny Williams suggests that due to 'a primitive terror of the female malcontent', there is a patriarchal wish to control or destroy threatening women, and Von Harbou satirizes this.[65] The fear of the New Woman and need to destroy her is clear when the public blame Futura for the flood and not the man who created and programmed her. The crowd shouted, '"There she is—! There she is—! The bitch, who is to blame for it all—! Take her—! Take her—!"' (pp. 187-8). The vexatious language used here highlights the vitriol targeted at women who move outside of patriarchal constructions of femininity (such as the New Woman) and shows how women are blamed for the actions of men and patriarchal institutions. The link between women and technology through Futura also highlights Futura as a symbol for New Women who were 'scorned and called "unwomanly" for their use of the new technology', such as typewriters and bicycles, in the early twentieth century.[66]

The representation of Futura's maltreatment as being both during a flood and as a witch hunt anticipates ecofeminist sentiment and alludes to the historical persecution of

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[63] Daphne Du Maurier, 'The Doll', in *The Doll: The Lost Short Stories* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), pp. 13-30 (p. 14).
[64] Boa, p. 36.
[65] Sunny Williams, 'Revenge of the "Fembot": Ex Machina and Gothic Fears of Female Insurrection', *Medusa* (21 November 2020) <https://medusacreatives.com/2020/11/21/revenge-of-the-fembot-ex-machina-and-gothic-fears-of-female-insurrection/?fbclid=IwAR19zAnka5dywH6tU51ExgAzOHSGBzKureDrmgmQDL2FO9D_sn9Cxwn5b7s> [Accessed 20 July 2023]
[66] Lena Wånggren, *Gender, Technology and the New Woman*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 197.

women for not adhering to patriarchal norms. When Futura is victimized, the women in the crowd shout, '"The witch—! Kill the witch—! Burn her before we all drown!"' (p. 188). Futura being called a 'witch' alludes to the Salem witch trials, a historical event associated with patriarchal violence towards women. The symbolism of fire, floods and witches in this scene evokes an ecofeminist representation of the destruction of nature. Maria Mies compares the destruction of nature to the witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth century because of the role of patriarchy and capitalism in 'the subordination, suppression, and even torture of nature, to wrest her secrets from her'.[67] Von Harbou's criticism of patriarchy here places the patriarchal violence of femicide and ecological destruction on the same footing, showing how both women and the natural world are exploited for social and financial capital.

The city of Metropolis highlights how technology can be utilized by the patriarchy to oppress the working classes. Metropolis conjures the 'technologically transformed city' of the modernist movement in texts such as *Ulysses* (1922), *The Waste Land* (1922) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).[68] Von Harbou replaces 'the famished roar of automobiles' in futurist writing, the car being 'an ideal image of the beauty of power and speed', with the machine city of Metropolis whose hunger becomes a metaphor for monstrosity.[69] The AI city of Metropolis would 'roar for food, for food, for food... She wanted living men for food' (p. 11), indicating that the automaton city of Metropolis has been created to run on the bodies of the oppressed lower classes. The machine city is gendered as female and the workers as male here, which represents the danger of the New Woman to gender and class hierarchies, and shows, once again, how within a patriarchal society, women are scapegoated. However, the machine city being female also parodies the heteronormative male fetishization of

[67] Maria Mies, 'Feminist Research: Science, Violence and Responsibility', in *Ecofeminism*, eds. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (London, England: Zed Books, 2021), pp. 36-54 (p. 44).
[68] Richard Humphreys, *Futurism* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999), p. 2.
[69] Humphreys, p. 5.

technology, which is most prevalently shown through the AI doll. Wacjman observes that machinery often has female pronouns because it evokes a 'sensual delight' for technology.[70] The machine city is another female robot created by men that is destructive but through a slower, more structurally oppressive form of violence. The machine city is a tool both created and controlled by the Club of Sons to maintain power over the lower and working classes through violence and terror and the machine's literal devouring of the workers' bodies is a metaphor for capitalism's subjugation of the lower classes. As Lefko writes on the influence of early-twentieth-century capitalism on *Metropolis*, 'because profit and efficiency were valued more highly than human safety and happiness, people were being callously destroyed.'[71] Von Harbou's technologized city is an allegory for the material violence of capitalism on the working classes and the gendering of technology as female by patriarchal institutions further highlights the sexualization, demonization and scapegoating of women.

Despite Von Harbou's critique of patriarchal forms of technology, *Metropolis* lends support to pro-tech theorists like Bastani, as well as cyberfeminists, who discuss technology's potential to dismantle oppressive systems like class inequality, through Futura being used as a tool for protest.[72] Futura inspires the oppressed workers of the city to follow her in rising up against the Club of Sons. Contrary to Rotwang's intention, Futura's active role in dismantling the oppressive system through her speech to the working classes stands as a metaphor for how technology, as well as the collective power of marginalized groups, can be used to motivate change. Futura gives an empowering speech:

> You are ten thousand! You are a hundred thousand! Why do you not throw yourselves – a hundred thousand murdering fists – upon the machines and strike them dead-? *You* are the masters of the machines – *you!* (p. 142).

[70] Wacjman, pp. 145-6.
[71] Lefko, p. 109.
[72] Both Firestone and Bastani argue for a kind of techno-communism which enables technology to reduce gender and class inequalities.

Futura's emphasis on 'you' is used to empower the crowd to take action against the powers that oppress them. Futura's powerful language does lead to action as the mob begins to destroy the machines and the people who have been subjugating them. This indicates that the AI doll can be used as a tool for radical socialist revolution and protest if in the right hands.

Nonetheless, the potential of Futura's protest as feminist is undermined because it is not meant to be successful in liberating the lower classes. Metropolis falls as Futura gains the trust of the working classes and gains access to the heart of the city, pulling a lever that sets it to self-destruct. Futura was created from patriarchal revenge rather than to liberate the oppressed workers. Therefore, the lower classes are punished instead of liberated as a consequence of following an AI doll created to support patriarchy.

Despite *Metropolis'* subversive exposure of oppressive gender roles, misogyny and class violence through its representation of the AI doll, it does have a conservative ending, demonstrating how Von Harbou explored radical feminist ideas by wrapping them in more traditional values. Instead of the doll-like women being free to do as they choose after their sexual slavery, Von Harbou gives them a conservative ending as mothers to the orphaned children of Metropolis: 'the troup of loving little harlots became a troup of loving little mothers, burning with a new fire in the execution of their new duties' (p. 184). This ending for the women is gender essentialist, Von Harbou suggesting that the female role of motherhood is more fulfilling than their previous role. However, their ending could also be read as a critique of both categories of 'harlot' and 'mother' as the mocking repetition of 'troup of loving little' suggests that they are moving from one oppressive gender role to another. Still, the text ends with Maria and Freder being in a romantic relationship, which is conservative in that it promotes the eventual suppression of women's protest through heterosexual marriage. Furthermore, instead of the patriarchal leader of the Club of Sons

being completely destroyed and dismantled, Freder and Joh Frederson are presented as reformed at the end of the text, Maria even believing that Joh should rebuild the city with 'his heart, utterly redeemed' (p. 215). Once again, the language is so theatrical that this could be read as a parody of the traditional heteronormative happy ending. Nonetheless, based on the context in which *Metropolis* was written, Von Harbou seems to be following a tradition of female gothic authors where, after feminist resistance by the female protagonist, conservative values are restored at the end of the text. Ann Radcliffe, the pioneer of the female gothic genre, has a similar circular formula. David Durant argues that Radcliffe's conservative gothic novels 'all begin by sketching the pastoral Eden of safe family life; move to the presentation of a fallen world where a father-villain betrays and persecutes the heroine; and end back in the haven of a new family which duplicates the virtues of the initial one'.[73] Von Harbou's gothic style mimics Radcliffe, but with a critique of capitalism and new technologies in the context of the early twentieth century. *Metropolis'* move from the paternalistic Club of Sons to Rotwang's villainy, back to the peace of heteronormative romance suggests that for Von Harbou, too, 'there is still perfect safety in return to the older, cherished verities of home and family'.[74]

Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991)

Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* is similar to *Metropolis* in its warnings against man playing God and creating and seeking to control the AI doll, as well as its critique of ecological destruction. Nonetheless, *He, She and It* differs greatly from Von Harbou's novel, not only in terms of the period in which it was written, but in the gender of the AI doll named Yod. By representing Yod as male, Piercy subverts 'the cyborg fantasized as a submissive, sexualized,

[73] David Durant, 'Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 22.3 (1982), 519–30 (p. 520).
[74] Durant, p. 530.

and fetishized woman-coded entity'.[75] The female characters in *He, She and It* are able to treat the 'anatomically male' AI doll as human rather than an object, whereas it is not the case the other way round in *Metropolis* where Futura is dehumanized and objectified.[76] This exposes how the AI doll is treated differently depending on whether they appear as a man or woman. In both texts, the AI doll highlights how under patriarchy women are dehumanized by men, whilst the opposite is true when the AI doll is male, as men have always more easily fit into the category of 'human'.[77] *He, She and It* is also more radical in its subversion of the AI doll in moving away from the traditional sexualized, female figure. *Metropolis* critiques Futurism, whilst *He, She and It* problematizes the gender of the AI doll to critique the gender essentialism which rose in the third wave of feminism. What also differs between the two novels is the technologized form the AI doll takes, with Piercy's AI doll being a cyborg instead of a robot, and so a hybrid instead of a copy, meaning that one disrupts the human-technology binary whilst the other highlights them.

In her third-wave feminist science fiction novel, Piercy draws on second-wave feminist arguments relating to the deconstruction of gender. Though women writers like Von Harbou were underrepresented in science fiction in the early to mid-twentieth century, Sarah Lefanu notes that feminist science fiction which explored gender 'flowered' in the 1970s with texts such as James Tiptree Jr.'s 'The Women Men Don't See' (1973), Suzy McKee Charnas' *Walk to the End the World* (1974), Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) and Marge Piercy's earlier novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976).[78] Science fiction by these authors gained popularity during the second wave of feminism, focussing heavily on the limitations of binary

[75] Héloïse Thomas, 'Lesbian Cyborgs and the Blueprints for Liberation', *Technologies of Feminist Speculative Fiction Gender, Artificial Life, and the Politics of Reproduction*, ed. by Sherryl Vint and Sümeyra Buran, 1st ed. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), pp. 243-257 (p. 244).
[76] Marge Piercy, *He, She and It* (Cornerstone Digital, 2020), p. 70. Kindle Edition. Subsequent references in parentheses.
[77] Ferrando, *Posthuman Glossary*, p. 439.
[78] Lefanu, pp. 2,7; Texts noted in Brian Attebery, *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2014), p. 6.

gender roles.[79] The novel aligns with the feminist science fiction that emerged in the second wave of feminism, and which, according to Riley and Pierce, 'illustrated the arbitrariness of rigid gender roles and the limitations imposed upon both sexes by the stereotyped binaries of masculine/feminine.'[80] *He, She and It* is also born out of the Women's Liberation Movement which argued for the dismantling of gender roles, and third-wave feminism, with the rise of technological progress and the internet. Piercy's 'cyborg novel' has been critiqued as re-enforcing traditional masculine gender stereotypes through Yod.[81] However, I argue that Yod is a subversive re-interpretation of the cyborg in its destabilization of masculinity. Through Yod, Piercy shows how technology can enhance human connections and help to dismantle patriarchal gender expectations as Yod is programmed to have both masculine and feminine traits. Therefore, though Piercy aligns with second-wave feminist sentiment in her breakdown of gender constructs, she also stands in opposition to many second-wave feminist science fiction women writers who rejected the positive implications of technology, branding it 'male-tainted' and focussing more on the 'life sciences' than technology in their own novels.[82] Still, this section argues that the AI doll, and technology as a whole, will always be limited in its ability to contribute to feminist progress and dismantle gender hierarchies whilst the society that generates the AI doll is patriarchal.

Similar to *Metropolis*, *He, She and It* also has ecocritical themes, as the novel is set in a dystopian future where the world has become uninhabitable due to climate change and ecological destruction. Piercy's dystopia is ecofeminist in its representation of ecological breakdown, but instead of being symbolic of patriarchy's subjugation of women like *Metropolis*, Piercy's novel holds capitalism and war responsible for the destruction of the

[79] Riley and Pearce, p. 145.
[80] Riley and Pearce, p. 145.
[81] Sue Smith, '"Human Form Did Not Make a Human Creature": Autism and the Male Human Machine in Marge Piercy's He, She and It', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 11.4 (2017), 423–41 (p. 423).
[82] Lefanu, p. 59.

planet; humans can only inhabit communes called multis which exist within large, protected domes and are run by corporations. Donna Bickford observes that 'dystopian fiction serves as a warning of what will happen if we do not attend to the problematic impulses and practices of our present.'[83] In a 2014 interview with Elton Furlanetto, Piercy says that the ecological destruction in *He, She and It* is 'happening much faster than I or any of the scientists realized when I was doing that research'.[84] Like Von Harbou, Piercy warns of the destructive potential of capitalist greed and how technological progress that is used for profit rather than to enable human progress equally only stresses the inequalities already felt amongst marginalized groups. This is exemplified through the figure of the cyborg as cyborgs are, as Forlano and Glabau argue, 'a reminder of the power that human societies have to shape, accelerate, or even slow down the development of technologies deemed to be world changing or risky. Technology is us.'[85]

Piercy's story warns of the devastating impacts of AI and man playing God under capitalism, whilst presenting Yod's treatment by Shira and Malkah as 'human' in a positive light. In *He, She and It*, Shira, the female protagonist of the story, lives in an authoritarian multi called Y-S, and the novel opens with her in a custody battle against her ex-husband, Joshua, for her child, Ari. Shira loses and her son is taken away from her, which leads to her moving to the multi Tikva to live with her grandmother, Malkah, and work in the lab of an AI scientist called Avram who illegally manufactures humanoid cyborgs to help protect the city from more powerful multis like Y-S. Avram introduces Shira to Yod, a male cyborg who has been part-created by Avram and part-programmed by Malkah. Yod is one of several cyborgs

[83] Donna M. Bickford, *Understanding Marge Piercy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), p. 68.
[84] Elton Furlanetto, 'There Is No Silence: An Interview with Marge Piercy', *Utopian Studies*, 25.2 (2014), 416–30 (p. 424).
[85] Forlano and Glabau, p. 18.

already created.[86] The previous cyborgs failed because they were fully coded as masculine by Avram in having 'pure reason, pure logic, pure violence' (p. 142). Whilst Malkah programmes Yod with more feminine coded traits which leads to him developing feelings for Shira: 'a gentler side, starting with emphasizing his love for knowledge and extending it to emotional personal knowledge, a need for connection' (p. 142). Though initially uncomfortable with Yod's romantic and sexual advances, Shira soon sees Yod as someone she is able to trust and have sex with safely. Yod becomes human-like in behaviour, as well as appearance, and applies for citizenship with Shira's and Malkah's support. Avram, who sees him still as a tool created for a purpose, resists this move. Later in the novel, it is also revealed that Y-S gave sole custody to Joshua instead of Shira to force her to move to Tikva so she would gain information on Avram's experiment, and then use the offer of partial custody to force her back and harvest the information from her. In this way, Y-S attempted to use Shira as a kind of information vessel, in the same way Yod is used, showing how women are treated as objects like the AI doll in a patriarchal society. In a rebellion against Y-S's plan, Shira and Yod infiltrate the multi to kidnap Ari, with Yod killing Joshua to Shira's horror. Still seeing Yod as a tool, Avram executes a plan to hand Yod over to Y-S but with him set to self-destruct. However, Yod overrides Avram's programming and self-destructs in Avram's lab, killing himself and Avram. The story emphasizes the danger of creating an autonomous AI doll without giving them agency.

Piercy re-tells the stories of *Frankenstein*, the Greek myth of Pygmalion and the Jewish folklore of the Golem to highlight the harm of man acting like God and creating a being for their own purposes, as Rotwang does with Futura. The novel's plot runs alongside the story of the Golem, a being, or 'doll', made from clay, used for a purpose and then

[86] Yod is the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, standing for the tenth illegal humanoid robot Avram has created.

returned to clay, which is narrated by Malkah to Yod in acknowledgment that the exploitation of the power of creation is wrong. Malkah states at the end of the text, 'it was inexcusable to create a sentient being for any other reason than to live its own life' (p. 418). Piercy's retelling supports Haraway's suggestion that, 'in retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture'.[87] Malkah also draws on the myth of Pygmalion bringing his stone lover, Galatea, to life. She expresses that Galatea's fate shows that 'each one of us wants to possess ourself' (p. 418). Like Galatea, the Golem is made from clay and breathed into life by the Maharal (p. 65). By creating Yod, Avram and Malkah share 'the glory and the guilt of having raised the Golem to walk on the earth with men and women, to resemble, but never be, human' (p. 402). Despite Yod having human traits, Avram still treats him as a weapon, setting him to self-destruct at the end of the text in order to harm Y-S. However, Avram's decision to still treat Yod as a weapon leads Yod to choose to self-destruct in the presence of Avram and his laboratory to prevent any more cyborgs like him being created to be exploited. Yod's ending supports Forlano's and Glabau's claim that 'cyborgs seek to be tools for justice'.[88] Despite Frankenstein's creature taking a different route from Yod in turning to violence through being rejected as 'human', Yod still compares himself to the creature after reading the text, saying he is 'such a monster' (p. 150), demonstrating that these stories of creation induce a certain stereotype of man-made life being villainous or wrong. Ultimately, Piercy takes inspiration from these stories of man-made life in a future context to establish the ethical dangers of seeking to control the AI doll once they are created and fully autonomous.

Piercy's novel, as its name suggests, draws attention to gender and human-object distinctions, as well as anything that might disrupt these socialized dichotomies, including the

[87] Haraway, p. 55.
[88] Forlano and Glabau, p. 176.

figure of the cyborg. Avram calls Yod '*The* cyborg' (p. 69) and notes that Yod is 'a mix of biological and machine components' (p. 70), establishing that Yod epitomizes Haraway's definition of what is cyborgian. The cyborg in literature has often symbolized the blurring of limits and borders. This obscuring of boundaries can be applied to the dismantling of dichotomies and power hierarchies. For Haraway, the cyborg means that 'the dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically'.[89] Forlano and Glabau note further that 'the figure of the cyborg, with its roots in both biological nature and human-made technology, helps readers confront the hybrid character of the human body'.[90] Moreover, Bickford notes that Piercy 'imagined the cyborg as a site of possibility in transgressing boundaries'.[91] Yod's embodiment of the mixing of human and object through his position as a cyborg adheres to Forlano's and Glabau's important point that 'the [cyborg] manifesto is concerned with breaking down more boundaries than just gender.'[92]

Piercy's representation of the AI doll shows who is perceived as 'human', and the consequences of viewing a sentient being as 'less than human'.[93] Yod's existence as a near-human AI doll promotes the argument that he should be treated as human, socially and legally, yet only the female characters support this as well as Yod himself. Yod has become so human-like that he is aware of his own programming and wants the freedom to be human, saying 'I want to be free then, free to live as I want and choose' (p. 283). Malkah argues for his human status too on the basis that 'he possesses his own motivations, his own goals' (p. 284). Yod and Shira want the council to grant Yod citizenship as a human so that Avram

[89] Haraway, p. 32.
[90] Forlano and Glabau, p. 125.
[91] Bickford, p. 77.
[92] Forlano and Glabau, p. 125.
[93] Ferrando, *Posthuman Glossary*, p. 439.

cannot make him work twenty hours a day but worry they will not be able to convince the council that he is a 'a thinking, feeling being' (p. 366). For Shira it is simple, 'the council would decide that Yod was a citizen of Tikva or Avram's tool' (p. 366). Yod argues for his humanity in court, saying 'I'm a cyborg, as Avram has told you, but I am also a person. I think and feel and have existence just as you do' (p. 375). Yod identifies his own humanity to Shira too, saying, 'I was beginning to understand a little what humans mean by happiness' (p. 364). Despite Yod being a violent tool as programmed by Avram, he also has the gentler side programmed by Malkah which allows him to live long enough within a society to be treated as 'human', whilst his predecessors were destroyed. The women's human treatment of Yod contrasted with the male vilification of Futura in *Metropolis* also suggests that Yod is only able to have agency because he is both human- and male-passing.

Piercy subverts the traditionally harmful associations of the gendered AI doll as sexualized and dangerous, instead, making her AI dolls a comfort to the female protagonist, Shira. In contrast to Von Harbou's highlighting of the beautiful but dangerous female robot, Piercy subverts the misogynistic implications of feminine-coded AI through showing the less threatening impact of feminine voice operating systems, which pre-empts twenty-first century operating systems such as Apple's Alexa.[94] This is clear when Shira visits her ex-husband Joshua to see her child, Ari, and the AI voice in his home is 'no longer female, no longer familiar' (p. 15). This also subverts the misogynistic implication of AI operating systems using a female voice as a stereotype of women being servile.[95] Instead, for Shira, the female voice gives her comfort as it reminds her of her grandmother, Malkah, a matriarchal figure who raised her. This aligns with studies that suggest that AI with a female voice is perceived as more human due to the gendered expectation that women have 'warmth, friendliness, and a

[94] Francesca R. Sborgi Lawson, 'Why Can't Siri Sing? Cultural Narratives That Constrain Female Singing Voices in AI', *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 10.1 (2023), 1–11 (p. 4).
[95] Ibid.

higher capacity to experience emotions'.[96] Furthermore, Yod breaks the pattern of what Daniel Dinello describes as 'hyper-masculinizing the cyborg', which was prevalent in films released around the time *He, She and It* was published, for example, the *Robocop* (1987-1993) and *The Terminator* (1984-2019) film series. [97] Yod is notably programmed with a 'gentler side' to counteract the 'pure violence' of the male robots which were previously unsuccessful (p. 142). Yod's programming, therefore, challenges the new determinism of the nineties in breaking the gender stereotypes of the male AI doll.[98] Instead of utilizing the AI doll to expose inequalities, Piercy uses the AI doll to show the possibilities and benefits of breaking away from patriarchal gender expectations through gendered technologies.

Piercy sets the opening of her novel in a patriarchal society to highlight how advancements in technology can exacerbate inequalities under patriarchy. Y-S is an authoritarian multi with a corporate lifestyle and 'patriarchal laws' which directly harm Shira, as she loses custody of Ari to her less parentally capable ex-husband, Joshua, mainly because he is male and more successful (p. 10). Despite Joshua presenting clear signs of parental neglect towards Ari through his shirt being on backwards and a disregard towards Ari's developing eye infection (p. 8), he is given custody because a child is 'regarded as property of the father's gene line' (p. 10). Joshua is also granted custody because of his higher 'tech rating', meaning his position within tech is higher than Shira's, exhibiting how patriarchal attitudes towards technology can directly affect and undermine female power and agency (p. 4). According to Shira's grandmother, Malkah, Y-S had desired Shira for her skills, even bidding for her against six other enclaves, only to let her 'sit and rot' despite her completing

[96] Sylvie Borau, Tobias Otterbring, Sandra Laporte, and Samuel Fosso Wamba, 'The Most Human Bot: Female Gendering Increases Humanness Perceptions of Bots and Acceptance of AI', *Psychology & Marketing*, 38.7 (2021), 1052–68 (p. 1053).
[97] Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), p. 136; The first three *The Terminator* films came out between 1983 and 2003.
[98] Winterson, p. 217; Smith, p. 426.

good work (p. 7). Y-S is a society that does not enable Shira to thrive in tech, instead making her feel 'too loud, too female, too Jewish, too dark, too exuberant, too emotional' (p. 5). In this way, Piercy sets up a patriarchal technologized society where women do not thrive at a structural level, before demonstrating how technology can help women if used to challenge patriarchal expectations.

Piercy shows how the AI doll has feminist potential if it is utilized to help oppressed groups and enhance human connection and fulfilment. Unlike Futura in *Metropolis*, Yod is created by Avram to protect the 'vulnerable and endangered community' of Tikva against the corporate powers of Y-S, rather than for self-interest or ego (p. 150). Yod successfully defends Tikva and Shira from harm through his physical strength and capabilities, which are viewed as masculine traits. However, Yod's programming means that he is 'self-correcting' and his ability to learn emotions, feelings and be affectionate in his human interactions goes against gender essentialist expectations of the male AI doll (p. 211). As Malkah notes when she decides to seduce him, 'he has become more and more of a person and a presence as time has gone on' (p. 162). Malkah's decision to pursue a sexual relationship with Yod emphasizes the change in women's sexual agency during the second and third waves of feminism, showing how the novel is more progressive than Von Harbou's more conservative first-wave feminist novel. In Malkah's view:

> Yod offered his friendship, his attention, his pure scalding luminous desire, almost too bright to endure, his unpracticed bountiful tenderness, his endless desire to please, and I received all those gifts as I had already given him my own presents, now deeply embedded in his being (p. 163).

Malkah lists all the positive traits she sees in Yod as a sexual partner, the complimentary language suggesting that this is not something she would usually find in a human male sexual partner. Malkah's gender-deviant programming of Yod creates a space for the AI doll's, as well as the female protagonist's, sexual freedom outside of patriarchal expectations of gender.

Additionally, Shira says ‘it was time to treat him as a person, fully, because he was nothing less’ (p. 167). Shira then forms an emotional connection to Yod unlike any other she has experienced. Yod filled ‘all available mental space’ for Shira, even thoughts of ‘her lost child’, enabling her to move on from the grief of losing Ari to her ex-partner (p. 168). *He, She and It* shows how the male AI doll here is treated as human because he forms emotional connections and desires that dismantle gender hierarchies through Yod being tender, affectionate and eager to please the female characters in the text. Yod’s relationship to Malkah and Shira and their returned respect and treatment of him as human shows how dismantling patriarchal gender expectations and power hierarchies can lead to more fulfilling and equal human relationships.

The AI doll also highlights the way in which heteronormative and patriarchal expectations of female sexuality are harmful to women. Yod differs from these expectations by providing safe, non-judgemental sexual experiences for women. During Shira’s first sexual encounter with Yod, ‘her flesh woke independently of her brain, stretched, came to life, brushed into electrical response’ (p. 169). The AI doll shows how human relationships (and especially women's sexual experience) can be enhanced when men move away from their prescribed roles under patriarchy. Like Rebecca’s guaranteed sexual safety with Julio in du Maurier’s ‘The Doll’, Yod enables Shira to be sexually satisfied without the risk of male violence, disease or pregnancy (p. 168). Malkah says to Shirah, ‘he has total inhibition blocks against sexual violence. You’re safer with him than any other male in Tikva’ (p. 142). This suggests that sexual violence against women is so engrained in a patriarchal society that men need to be programmed to break out of them. Yod is also a non-judgemental lover who does not discriminate against age or appearance. Malkah programmed Yod so he ‘has no prejudices against age’ and says to Shira, ‘I find human male prejudices against older women rather limiting to human development’ (p. 353). The female characters’ sexual experiences

with the male AI doll show how men moving away from patriarchal and prejudiced sexual expectations can help create a safe, fulfilling and supportive sexual experience for women.

As well as providing safe sex, Shira's interactions with Yod are coded as queer, demonstrating how the AI doll disrupts patriarchal and heteronormative sexual expectations. Yod is coded as feminine in this instance, Shira believing that 'his cheek was smooth as a child's, or another woman's face, beardless' (p. 151) and his back 'was sleek as a woman's' (p. 168). Shira even says that Yod desires 'like a woman' (p. 182). Furthermore, Yod uses the language of prohibited queer relationships, saying 'we can't get married or have children or run off together' (p. 168). Their prohibited relationship evokes the ban and unequal treatment of queer relationships during the twentieth century which is also established in some conservative multis in the novel.[99] The free town of Tikva, where Malkah raised Shira, appears much more open to queer relationships with Malkah having had lovers of all genders. Despite Shira's mother, Riva, being presumed dead, she appears in the latter part of the novel and it is revealed that she is working for the resistance against Y-S. Riva also has a same-sex relationship with her machine-augmented companion Nili, with her saying: '[I] never felt sexual toward men, myself' (p. 191). Nili's mechanical enhancements make her cyborgian too, showing how all three generations of women – Shira, Riva and Malkah - are able to explore queer sexuality through the AI doll.

Despite Yod being used for sex like Julio in du Maurier's text, he is different from a sex doll because of his artificial intelligence and his ability to self-learn and interact with people like a human. Though initially mistaking him for a real human, when Shira's jealous ex-lover, Gadi, finds out Shira has had sex with Yod, he refers to him as a 'walking vibrator' (p. 248). The male characters in the text seem to view Yod as an object for a certain use - sex

[99] Sexuality is treated differently in each multi: 'what was the norm in one place was forbidden in another' (p. 1922).

in Gadi's case and defence in Avram's - rather than as human, like the female characters do. This indicates that it is not just the female AI doll that men subjugate, but males too, and that the main distinction is not in the gender of the AI doll themselves, but in the genders of those creating and interacting with them. Shira defends Yod, stating that 'he wasn't created to be a sex toy' and that he is not simply a sex doll because sex was something Yod instigated rather than her (p. 249). This suggests that agency is what also differentiates the AI doll from the sex bot, not simply programmed reactions, but reactions that are informed by what the AI doll has learned themselves. Yod 'was programmed for introspection, to be self-correcting in subtle and far-reaching ways' and could also 'reprogram himself' (p. 351). Yod even notes that 'any programming can be changed', showing his autonomy in his ability to override Avram's programming (p. 366). Yod's agency also subverts the notion of the doll as he becomes subject rather than object. Yod's subjectivity means he can be read as a representation of the possibilities of human behaviour and interactions in the dismantling of patriarchal expectations of gender and sexuality.

Nevertheless, Piercy also shows how Yod cannot escape some of Avram's physical programming, as well as the social and patriarchal programming he absorbs as a male-presenting being. Yod's violent programming is not able to be completely erased by Malkah, which is shown as he kills Joshua when Shira and Yod go to his house to take Ari back to Tikva. Shira is left devasted by this loss and fearful that Yod would harm someone so close to her for personal gain (p. 337). On another note, Yod's sexual interactions with Shira become more about his ownership of Shira too. Shira thinks, 'for the first time, she felt in him something like passion […] he was driven not only by his immense desire to please but by a new need to be secure in his possession […] he was hungry for proof of their connection' (p. 365). His will to possess instead of please Shira is problematic, suggesting that Yod becoming more human and learning from human interaction in a patriarchal society means that, as male

presenting, he cannot escape some traits of toxic masculinity and patriarchal control that have been socially programmed. Piercy shows how the more the male AI doll is treated as 'human' in a patriarchal society, the more he adopts the patriarchal traits and attitudes of the society he was raised in. Despite Yod being created for protection from other patriarchal institutions, his own capacity for violence and toxic masculinity cannot be fully de-programmed.

Though Piercy's text humanizes the cyborg, it still emphasizes the AI doll's potential for harm if controlled by patriarchal forces. At the end of the text, Yod must be destroyed to prevent exploitative institutions like Y-S using the AI doll as a tool for violence. Y-S show their motivations to use Yod in a harmful way, asking 'wouldn't you rather be the progenitor of a race? You can be a leader among your own kind, in an army of cyborgs?' (p. 390). Y-S wishes to use the cyborg for war rather than human protection. Malkah warns that Yod 'could do a great deal of damage without meaning to if he's not properly educated' (p. 76), but Yod says he would destroy himself before allowing Y-S to capture and use him (p. 312), which is an indication that Yod has the autonomy to prevent his own exploitation. Piercy's text, therefore, pre-empts Haraway's and Winterson's arguments that technology can be harmful or progressive, depending on the oppressive potential of their creator and user.[100]

Y-S is a capitalist autocracy, their tagline being 'one world, one corp', which represents the way the technological enhancement of humans under capitalism only works to dehumanize workers, as presented in *Metropolis* (p. 199). Y-S socializes humans to act like machines in order to complete work more efficiently. Shira worries that 'Y-S would gobble Ari and turn him into one of their bland clones' (p. 79). Through the word 'gobble', she uses the same metaphor of the capitalist system consuming workers seen in *Metropolis*. Corporations even physically alter humans to enhance their capacity for certain roles, which

[100] Haraway, p. 15; Winterson, pp. 244, 246, 258.

aligns with the transhumanist desire to enhance humanity through technology. 'Security apes' are humans who have been 'chemically and surgically' enhanced to have 'inhuman speed and strength' (pp. 5, 13). As shown by their name, apes are dehumanized and treated as obedient workers who are technologized for the purpose of working like a robot to protect the power of the upper classes. In this way, Piercy critiques a patriarchal and capitalist model of transhumanism by showing how the technological enhancement of humans under patriarchal capitalism only further dehumanizes them.

As with the programming of the Apes to act like compliant workers, Piercy anticipates Winterson's argument that humans are as programmable as robots. In *12 Bytes*, she notes that 'we too are programmed […] we are conditioned by our circumstances to act and respond in particular ways'.[101] When Shira asks Yod if he feels exploited when they have sex because he has been programmed to please her, he says 'Aren't you programmed too? Isn't that what socializing a child is? […] If I've been programmed to find your pleasure important and fulfilling, don't women try to reprogram their men that way?' (p. 322). In this sense, the novel employs programming as a metaphor for socialization. Shira questions her programming as a woman and how her ex-husband would always ask her to retrieve food or drink from the kitchen, or, if he got it himself, would never ask if she wanted any, whilst she would never think of getting herself something without offering him any (p. 323). For Shira, 'it always reminded her of how differently they have been socialized – programmed' (p. 323). This shows how *He, She and It* takes influence from the Women's Liberation Movement's dismantling of gender roles, with feminist scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir famously stating 'one is not born but becomes a woman'.[102] The AI doll is used as a tool to help the

[101] Winterson, p. 251.
[102] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Vintage Digital, 2014), p. 146.

protagonist realise that gender is a social construct, a device used to challenge the rise of, what Walter calls, 'the new determinism' during the nineties.[103]

Like Von Harbou, Piercy also represents the technologized body of women as fetishized, to highlight how superficial augmentations can exacerbate the misogyny inherent in patriarchal expectations of feminine beauty. The transhuman, enhanced bodies of women in the patriarchal society of Y-S show how the technological body can be a reflection of patriarchal beauty standards. Shira talks about 'reconstructed females' (p. 125) whose bodies have been chemically and surgically enhanced to match certain beauty ideals and worries that her 'unaltered, unenhanced body' will not be enough for her ex-lover, Gadi (p. 125). Shira also talks about men in the upper classes who have 'toys – women who are cosmetically recreated, very beautiful' who seemed 'scarcely human' (p. 328), which exposes how women are expected to sacrifice their humanity to appeal to male desires as objects. This is also represented in Piercy's other work, for example, Gildina, in Piercy's early science fiction novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), a woman with extensive plastic surgery described as 'a cartoon of femininity'.[104] The fetishization of the transhuman body is also shown in Gadi's treatment of Nili, who has been technologically enhanced to be a 'superior human' who 'sees better, hears better, is certainly smarter, tougher, faster, stronger' (p. 355). Nili refuses to participate in an enhanced form of virtual reality called stimmies which Gadi helps to manufacture because her reality is already enhanced by her body modifications. However, Gadi films Nili without her consent to sell her 'beautiful' image to create stimmies featuring her, proving how a fascination with the transhuman body can lead to further exploitation (p. 381). She says, 'I don't want to be a toy. I have my own goals and the aims of my people. I am well loved. I don't need the love of strangers' (p. 382). The enhancement of humans

[103] Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago, 2011), p. 131.
[104] Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (London: Del Rey, 2019), p. 314.

within a patriarchal society, therefore, shows how transhumanism under patriarchy helps to further objectify women.

He, She and It also presents how the technological enhancement of humans can help to improve women's lives and the positive potential of transhumanism under a more equal and feminist society. In the technologized future of Piercy's novel, Shira has 'retinal implants' (p. 150) and Malkah accesses 'the Net' regularly where she is plugged into an online network, and she experiments with acting as another gender when dating online (p. 55), further showing how technology can be used to disrupt gender boundaries. Shira's and Malkah's enhancements through technology materially improve their lives, establishing a cyborgian future as a materially beneficial one. Haraway notes that, 'by the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs.'[105] The text further shows that the technological improvement of humans within a feminist society can expand a human's quality of life through Riva's partner, Nili. Nili lives in a feminist joint community of Israeli and Palestinian women who survived the nuclear war in the Middle East (p. 198). There are no men and so her community reproduce through cloning which evokes Firestone's concept of 'cybernetic communism; in freeing women from the risks of childbirth'.[106] The women in the community then 'undergo additional alterations' after birth to improve their senses, speed and strength, as well as enabling them to be physically immune from nuclear radiation (p. 198). Nili's enhancements mean that she 'can walk in the raw without protection' and she says to Shira, 'I can tolerate levels of bombardment that would kill you' (p. 198). Nili is enhanced in every way that enables her to thrive and protect her people. Her community are particularly advanced in technological progression because they work to benefit their quality of life rather

[105] Haraway, p. 17.
[106] Firestone, p. 113.

than for financial gain like the multis, exposing how capitalist, patriarchal societies stunt beneficial technological progress. At the end of the text, Malkah decides to make the pilgrimage to the Israeli-Palestinian commune to be augmented as she is losing her sight and is now struggling to walk with age. Malkah says, 'I am an old house about to be remodelled. New eyes, a new heart, that's what I need, to feed and keep up with my hungry brain' (p. 417). Piercy ultimately emphasizes how the cyborg or AI doll can be utilized in a utopian, feminist society to enhance human experience, protection and a sense of community. Overall, Piercy portrays how AI is implemented in different cultures, both patriarchal and feminist, to show the different potentials of technology through the AI doll.

Martha Wells' *The Murderbot Diaries* (2017-2023)

Martha Wells' *The Murderbot Diaries* is a comedic science fiction series of novellas published during the contemporary fourth wave feminist movement, which is defined by its use of technology and media by women for feminist activism, such as the #MeToo movement. Increases in social media use have also led to increased debates surrounding gender expression and identity.[107] Current discussions surrounding the diversification of gender in relation to trans and gender diverse people are at the fore of feminist discourse, particularly more conservative gender critical debates surrounding the categorization of 'woman' and the protection of women's spaces. Drawing on the deconstruction of fixed categories in cyborg literature assists feminist discourse in moving away from the fixed categories of gender advocated by the trans exclusionary radical feminist and gender critical movements, towards a more inclusive and intersectional feminist future which is expansive and accepting of all gender identities. As Forlano and Glabau note, 'the cyborg offered a path

[107] Conor Friedersdorf, 'Another Side of the Gender Debate', *The Atlantic* (8 May 2023), <https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2023/05/another-side-of-the-gender-debate/673985/> [Accessed 23 September 2024].

out of debates about competing ways to essentialize the category of "woman." As creatures both natural and crafted, the cyborg could speak to the ways that sex and gender are experienced in the body as something both familiar and imposed.'[108] Similarly, Winterson argues that 'AI could be a portal into a value-free gender and race experience', suggesting that AI could completely dismantle both gender and race hierarchies.[109] Wells' series focuses on the perspective of a genderless cyborg, not only aligning with the deconstruction of a gendered world, and supporting the narrative that gender is a social construct 'imposed' on humans, but fitting into a history of women's science fiction that deconstructs gender through language, such as Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* (2013). The deconstruction of gender by these texts is shown in *Woman on the Edge of Time* through the reader being presented with a society where gender does not exist and everyone goes by 'per', and in *Ancillary Justice* where the pronoun 'she' is used for everyone, also presenting a society where gender has been entirely dismantled. Wells' story is similarly framed by the 'postgender world' of its genderless cyborg.[110] As an entity that can easily move between genders or have no gender at all, the robot or cyborg is an important vessel and metaphor for deconstructing fixed gender binaries and combatting gender essentialist and gender critical perspectives.

The Murderbot Diaries is told from the point of view of an autonomous cyborg which calls itself Murderbot, and is set in a technologized society in the future where robots and cyborgs are used to assist humans, Murderbot being a SecUnit (which stands for Security Unit), a type of combat robot.[111] The five novellas and two novels which feature in the series include, *All Systems Red* (2017), *Artificial Condition* (2018), *Rogue Protocol* (2018), *Exit*

[108] Forlano and Glabau, p. 129.
[109] Winterson, p. 183.
[110] Haraway, p. 8.
[111] Sex robots are referred to as ComfortUnits.

Strategy (2018), *Network Effect* (2020), *Fugitive Telemetry* (2021) and, most recently, *System Collapse* (2023).[112] This analysis of Murderbot will primarily focus on the first two novellas, but draws on examples from other texts in the series where relevant. *All System Red* introduces Murderbot as a protagonist, telling its own story, and *Artificial Condition* focuses on Murderbot's views on body modification and sex bots. which is particularly relevant to this study of the AI doll in differentiating it from the figure of the sex doll. Unlike *Metropolis* and *He, She and It*, *The Murderbot Diaries* series rarely mentions Earth or the environment, as it is set in an interplanetary setting rather than on Earth. Like Von Harbou's and Piercy's novels, though, Wells' contemporary science fiction novella series is set in a dystopian future where part-human, part-AI machines, here called constructs, exist. In the first novella *All Systems Red*, Murderbot is introduced as a SecUnit hired for protection by a group of humans on an expedition to an alien planet. Like Yod - but unlike most constructs - Murderbot has sentience and agency because it has hacked its own governor module, meaning it does not have to do as it is told or programmed. The idea of Murderbot being a representation of posthuman subjectivity through its first-person narration and ability to feel emotions, be irrational and have sensory experiences like a human, has been examined by both Anna Larsson and Amira Ali Hassan Ali Abdullah in their dissertations.[113] Larsson uses posthumanist theory to argue that Murderbot has subjectivity and should have bodily autonomy, and Abdullah, similarly, concludes that Murderbot 'is a moral person who has moral agency and deserves moral patiency'. [114] This section of the chapter argues that Wells

[112] Martha Wells, *All Systems Red* (New York: Tor, 2017), Kindle; Martha Wells, *Artificial Condition* (Tom Doherty Associates, 2018), eBook; Martha Wells, *Rogue Protocol* (New York: Tor, 2018), eBook; Martha Wells, *Exit Strategy* (New York: Tor, 2018); Martha Wells, *Network Effect* (New York: Tor, 2020), eBook; Martha Wells, *Fugitive Telemetry* (New York: Tor, 2021); Martha Wells, *System Collapse* (New York: Tor, 2023); References to each novella will be put in text in parentheses with the acronym of the title of the novella.
[113] Anna Larsson, 'Det tredje subjektet: Postmänskligt subjektsfinnande i The Murderbot Diaries, en analys av en cyborgs subjektsutvecklande utifrån posthumanistisk teori' (Umeå universitet, Institutionen för kultur- och medievetenskaper, 2020), p. 28; Amira Ali Hassan Ali Abdullah, "Narrating Posthuman Identities in Martha Wells' The Murderbot Diaries and Selected Short Stories of Isaac Asimov" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2023), p. 70.
[114] Larsson, p. 28; Abdullah, p. 109.

subverts and critiques traditional patriarchal representations of the AI doll by dismantling hypermasculine cyborg stereotypes and socialized gender constructs, and criticizing the capitalist society which bore the figure.

Wells' novella series subverts the miliary-style, hypermasculine cyborg of the mid to late twentieth century through her representation of the AI doll, following the phenomenon, initially identified by Haraway, of utilizing the figure of the cyborg to explore and deconstruct socially constructed gender dynamics. Wells' humorous take on the AI doll parodies the more serious hypermasculine tone of cyborg films in the late twentieth century such as *Robocop* and *Terminator*, and in doing so, in a similar way to *He, She and It*, subverts the hypermasculine AI doll too. Wells' interpretation moves away from the cyborg's roots as 'an invention of the US Cold War era military-industrial complex […] [and] as tools for war and imperialism', and disrupts 'the phenomenon of the rampaging filmic cyborg' identified by Daniel Dinello, through its comedic first-person perspective.[115] Dinello argues that cyborg films such as *Robocop* and *The Terminator* represent 'an attempt to culturally reestablish the male in a position of virile power and control through hyper-masculinizing the cyborg.'[116] Murderbot is not just a monotonous, mechanical being, but has a sarcastic and humorous side acknowledging its pitfalls in a comical tone: 'At least I wasn't the only one who didn't know what I was doing' (*All Systems Red*, p. 119). Unlike *Metropolis* and *He, She and It*, the narrative is entirely relayed from the AI doll's point of view in a diary-like format. Wells' use of the diary form is subversive because diaries have more commonly been associated with nonconformity, feminism and women's writing. Cynthia Huff argues that the diary's 'inherent generic qualities are subversive to the literary establishment and to the patriarchal social

[115] Forlano and Glabau, p. 115; Dinello, p. 136.
[116] Dinello, p. 136.

order' and that 'the diary stands as an emblem for feminist practice'.[117] This subjective, more feminist form of the cyborg further subverts the objective, hypermasculine cyborgs in science fiction films since the 1980s. Unlike the masculine-coded cyborgs in *Robocop* and *Terminator*, Murderbot also does not have a gender so uses the third person singular pronoun 'it'. However, Murderbot does also use 'I', showing how it is a hybrid of subject and object rather than one or the other and highlighting how Wells uses the AI doll to problematize this dichotomy as well as gender.

The cyborg is a subject that problematizes binaries and exists in the in-between. In a similar way to *He, She and It*, *The Murderbot Diaries* presents the cyborg as a mix between organic and non-organic parts in order to show how the AI doll can put binaries 'in question ideologically', as suggested by Haraway.[118] Murderbot blends biology and technology. It can physically feel pain and temperature through its 'organic parts' and it is 'designed to work with both organic and machine parts, to balance that sensory input' (*ASR*, p. 70). The AI doll is not simply two separate parts but a complete combination of biological and technological matter. As Murderbot states in *Network Effect*, 'Organic neural tissue can be melded with inorganic systems (Example A: the squishy bits inside my skull)' (*NE*, p. 89). Murderbot describes itself not as part-machine and part-human but as 'one whole confused entity' (*ASR*, p. 102). Still, Abdullah argues that Murderbot is the 'the reverse image of cyborgs' in being part organic and part non-organic matter, suggesting that cyborgs can only be 'augmented humans'.[119] However, I use Haraway's definition of the cyborg as a 'hybrid of machine and organism', meaning any part-human, part-machine being is a cyborg because they belong in the in-between of these two binaries and so dismantle them.[120] Murderbot, as a representation

[117] Cynthia Huff, '"That Profoundly Female, and Feminist Genre": The Diary as Feminist Practice', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 17. 3/4 (1989), 6–14 (pp. 6, 8).
[118] Haraway, p. 32.
[119] Abdullah, pp. 80, 79.
[120] Haraway. p. 5.

of a cyborg, like Yod, is used to challenge the fixed categories of natural and unnatural as constructed by patriarchal norms, and binary gender categories.

Wells' AI doll removes the misogyny and beauty ideals inherent in embodied technologies which are gendered or feminine coded like sex bots or the female AI doll in *Metropolis*. With its armoured, gender-neutral appearance and lack of gender altogether, Murderbot is nothing like the sex dolls in the previous chapter, or the 'gendered technologies that reify heteronormative gender roles and objectify women in the process' identified by Fryxell.[121] Murderbot says, 'I don't have any gender or sex-related parts' (*ASR*, p. 34) and its view on gender is also destabilizes gender binaries. In the latest novel *System Collapse* Murderbot clearly states its disinterest in gender: 'I was as indifferent to human gender as it was possible to be without being unconscious' (*SC*, p. 134). Murderbot's cyborgian ideology, therefore, adheres to Haraway's contention that 'the cyborg is a creature in a postgender world.'[122] The genderless representation of Murderbot also supports Marquard Smith's statement that 'the doll is not a she or a he or a s/he but an it', as Murderbot does not have a gendered or even subjective pronoun, but goes by 'it'.[123] Abdullah argues that Murderbot's 'gender perception' helps to 'inform the identity and personhood Murderbot constructs', whilst I argue that Wells uses Murderbot as a device to show how the cyborg helps to deconstruct patriarchal gender structures and ideals by highlighting them as constructs.[124] In the *Murderbot* Universe, gender does not appear to be as fixed or determined as shown in *Artificial Condition* when Murderbot goes for a job interview and identifies one of the interviewers as the gender 'tercera' (*AC*, p. 35). 'Tercera', as Murderbot notes, is a 'gender signifier used in the group of non-corporate political entities known as the Divarti Cluster'

[121] Fryxell, p. 33.
[122] Haraway, p. 8.
[123] Marquard Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 245.
[124] Abdullah, pp. 99-100.

(*AC*, p. 35). 'Tercera' means 'third' which alludes to its break away from the gender binary, and 'Diverti' alludes to the term 'divert', which emphasizes how the society has moved away from patriarchal gender norms. Murderbot also puts its 'gender as indeterminate' on the job application (*AC*, p. 35). In this way, Wells follows in the tradition of women writers using language and the cyborg to deconstruct gender binaries in their science fiction texts.

Murderbot's obsessive consumption of television media parodies the stereotype of the cyborg as hypermasculine and detached cyborg stereotype to critique the artificiality of TV and its representation of patriarchal beauty standards and harmful stereotypes. In a comic exposure of human 'binge-watching', an augmented human with whom Murderbot is travelling called Gurathin notes that Murderbot has 'downloaded seven hundred hours of entertainment programming since we landed. Mostly serials. Mostly something called *Sanctuary Moon*' and hilariously dismisses the finding as a technique to 'encode data for the company' (*ASR*, p. 83). In a comic twist, Murderbot ironically thinks 'he underestimated me' (*ASR*, p. 83), in Gurathin's assumption that Murderbot would watch TV serials as part of his job role, rather than for its own entertainment. Murderbot's obsession with TV series and acute analysis of human behaviour, but separation from patriarchal beauty standards, means it does not fall for the romanticization of reality usually sold to viewers: 'people in the shows don't usually look much like people in real life' (*ASR*, p. 19). Additionally, Murderbot highlights the negative portrayal of the AI doll in entertainment media, as has been discussed in relation to *The Terminator* and *Robocop*: 'The only SecUnits in entertainment media were rogues, out to kill all humans' (*AC*, p. 18). Wells uses the AI doll to emphasize how Hollywood and television media corporations can create unrealistic expectations and harmful stereotypes which damage marginalized groups, as shown in Chapter One with the China Doll stereotype.

In the context of the technologized era of fourth-wave feminism, Wells underscores how the influence of television media can potentially be used to promote positive change. Murderbot identifies how 'media could change emotions, change opinions. Visual, audio, or text media could actually re-write organic neural processes' and so creates its own documentary to help show the current inhabitants of a planet that they are in danger (*SC*, p. 161). The AI doll shows how technology in the form of television media can be used for feminist and humanitarian means, as shown by current TV and film trends and social media activism in the fourth wave of feminism.

The emotional impact fellow AIs have on the AI doll also subverts the stereotype of the cold, mechanical male cyborg, and also satirically contrasts with its armoured appearance. Unlike Futura in *Metropolis* and Yod in *He, She and It*, Murderbot has solidarity, and several emotional interactions, with other AIs. The whole of *Artificial Condition* traces the relationship between Murderbot and a transport unit called 'ART (aka Asshole Research Transport)', which digitally communicates with it and can even take control of Murderbot's system (with permission) to help it with tasks it has not been trained to complete such as flying a space aircraft (*AC*, p. 22). Murderbot's relationship with ART is revived in *Network Effect*, when at first believing ART is dead, Murderbot admits it had an 'emotional collapse' (*NE*, p. 275), and it felt 'strange and wrong' when it had to shut down fellow AIs it considered companions (*NE*, p. 259). Also, in *Network Effect*, after Murderbot revives ART through uploading a saved code, it chooses to travel with it, saying 'I like being with ART. I want to keep being with it' (*NE*, p. 175). Finally, in the second to last published novella in the series, *Fugitive Telemetry*, cargo bots stand in solidarity with Murderbot when it fights a CombatBot called Balin at the end of the text: 'None of these bots knew how to fight, but they were high functioning and would move to protect humans and each other from a violent intruder' (*FT*, p. 164). This robot and AI doll solidarity contrasts with the 'loneliness' of the

cyborg in the masculinized depictions in *Robocop* and *The Terminator*, as well as the depictions of the AI doll in *Metropolis* and *He, She and It*, where Futura and Yod are the only AI dolls in their world and are forced to interact with humans. Wells subverts the figure of the isolated AI doll to create a figure that 'chooses' to stay with humans because it 'liked humans' (*AC*, p. 26), rather than out of a lack of choice. The AI doll's agency can highlight the redeeming features of humanity when the AI doll is not subject to patriarchal expectations of gender and limited to human interactions.

Though Murderbot does find community with fellow robots, it also sets up a hierarchy between itself and other bots such as ComfortUnits (constructs that are designed for sexual companionship), as Murderbot sees constructs that are used for sex as inferior to constructs used for security or combat, despite them also having artificial intelligence. This has patriarchal connotations as the implication is that AI dolls who have been programmed for sex should not be treated as individuals like Murderbot should or freed from these programmed acts of servitude. In *Artificial Condition*, Murderbot challenges ART's suggestion that it should be modified to look more human, so it is not discovered as a construct whilst trying to integrate into human society, thinking that body alterations are for sex bots: '*SecUnits are never altered*. […] "No. Sexbots are altered." At least the ones I had seen had been altered' (*AC*, p. 24). Murderbot sees itself as superior to a ComfortUnit: 'I tried to think about why I didn't want to change my configuration, even to help protect myself. Maybe because it was something humans did to sexbots. I was a murderbot, I had to have higher standards?' (*AC*, p. 26). Murderbot's perception that doing anything that humans do to ComfortUnits would degrade it in some way shows how Murderbot still adheres to human attitudes towards sexuality and the way sex workers are treated as inferior. The labelling of ComfortUnits as sex bots is also incorrect according to my definition as they are not just a mechanical human-like object without sentience used for sex, they are also an AI doll. Instead

of having sympathy for ComfortUnits which have AI like it, Murderbot's judgemental attitude towards its sexuality, which it is programmed to partake in, demonstrates that it still has conservative views regarding sexuality and the autonomy of bots. Wells, therefore, uses the point of view of the genderless AI doll in a patriarchal society to show how 'in reality, cyborgs live the contradictions that arise when this boundary [of social categories] is not yet fully dismantled.'[125]

It is clear that some of Murderbot's attitudes towards ComfortUnits come from a sense of insecurity in its own humanity and treatment as an object. As already stated, Murderbot is particularly uncomfortable with itself being perceived or altered because voyeurism and body modification is what humans do to sex bots. When Gurathin asks, 'why don't you want us to look at you?', Murderbot responds saying 'You don't need to look at me. I'm not a sexbot' (*ASR*, p. 106). For Murderbot, its perception as a man-made artificial human-like, but subhuman, outsider is voyeuristic. It views its own perception as a cruel reminder that most humans perceive it as an 'object' made for a use, rather than a subject. Murderbot struggles with the conflict of not wanting to be caught but also not wanting to be aligned with the objectification of ComfortUnits in any way. Despite Murderbot's conflict in being altered, it does agree to get modified, so its arms and legs are a centimetre shorter, and its organic parts grow more hair, so it looks more like an augmented human rather than a construct (*AC*, p. 28). This indicates that Murderbot is willing to fit into a more human appearance in an attempt to move away from a voyeuristic object, and instead, fit in with humanity. Murderbot's inconsistencies in not wanting to be modified like ComfortUnits but wanting to be modified to look more human, epitomizes the conflicts and 'contradictions' that characterize the figure of the cyborg as noted by Forlano and Glabau.[126]

[125] Forlano and Glabau, p. 169.
[126] Ibid.

Murderbot deconstructs human gender categories by highlighting how a bot can be a person without having sex-related organs, even going so far as to suggest that a SecUnit having genitalia degrades it to the level of sex bot: 'if a construct has those [sex-related parts] you're a sexbot in a brothel, not a murderbot' (*ASR*, p. 34). In *Artificial Condition*, Murderbot discusses how 'SecUnits also have less than null interest in human or any other kind of sex, trust me on that' (*AC*, p. 18). This subverts the sexualization of the AI doll, as presented by Von Harbou and Piercy, and Murderbot's definition of only a sex bot having sex-related parts would make Yod a sex bot also. Murderbot's definition is essentialist as its linked to physicality rather than the bot's capacity for sentience, and so contradicts my definition of the sex bot and AI doll. Still, as with Yod, humans perceive the AI doll as being more 'human' if they have sex organs and can participate in human sexual activities, but this is so that the AI doll can adhere to patriarchal constructions of sexuality. Piercy's AI doll, whilst being coded as queer at times, also physically fits into the patriarchal confines of heteronormative sexuality, which is why he is able to advocate for his personhood. Murderbot, however, refuses to conform to these constructs and so is always in danger of being rejected by humans who cannot understand its refusal to obey human standards of sexuality and objectification.

The world of *The Murderbot Diaries* satirises capitalist greed through the AI doll. Wells does this by establishing, through Murderbot's point of view, how capitalist greed has led to products being made cheap and dysfunctional, even to the detriment of human safety. When talking about the time it malfunctioned and killed its humans on a previous expedition (an act which led to Murderbot hacking its own governor module so it could not happen again), Murderbot confesses: 'my governor module malfunctioned because the stupid company only buys the cheapest possible components. It malfunctioned and I lost control of my systems and I killed them' (*ASR*, p. 82). This contextualises why Murderbot gave itself this name, as it is moving away from the human need to sanitise their actions. Instead of the

euphemistic names ‘comfort’, or ‘security’, Murderbot uses the more objective words of ‘sexbot’ and ‘murderbot’ to highlight the immoral purposes of these man-made technologies. Furthermore, *Network Effect* shows how a capitalistic society does not value human life, rather it will only preserve human life if it does not cost anything financially: ‘SecUnits under company protocol use minimum force necessary because the company hates paying survivor damage bonds’ (*NE*, p. 16). In a satire on the cutting of corners caused by capitalist greed, Murderbot also notes that its education is poor because its primary function is defence and violence. Murderbot comically states: ‘I ran my field camera back a little and saw that I had gotten stabbed by a tooth, or maybe a cilia. Did I mean cilia or was that something else? They don’t give murderbots decent education modules on anything except murdering, and even those are the cheap versions’ (*ASR*, p. 13). Even though Murderbot is not destroyed at the end of the text, like Futura and Yod, it is because Murderbot is ‘too expensive to destroy’ (*ASR*, p. 116), rather than any sense of treating Murderbot with dignity or humanity.

Murderbot is a contradiction because it critiques capitalism constantly, but its freedom and existence are grounded in capitalism. Murderbot is a product and tool of capitalism which has been trained to not abandon its clients and so is unable to do so out of an innate contractual duty. Murderbot says, ‘But they were clients. Even after I’d hacked my governor module, I’d found it impossible to abandon clients I hadn’t chosen. I’d made an agreement with these clients as a free agent. I couldn’t leave. I kept my sigh internal’ (*AC*, p. 47). Despite Murderbot being free from capitalism in the sense that it physically does not have to follow client or company orders, it still feels obliged to fulfil a contract, indicating that the AI doll is used as both a critique of capitalism, as well as a vessel for displaying the all-consuming nature of capitalist ideology in a patriarchal society which puts profit over people.

Wells uses the ownership of human-like robots to highlight how profiting from the ownership of bodies is a patriarchal, colonial venture used to oppress groups considered 'less than human', evoking the Transatlantic slave trade.[127] Murderbot is always worried it will be dismantled for parts if its owners find out it is autonomous. When travelling with a group of humans it was hired to protect, Murderbot states that it was not allowed to rise with humans and needed permission to speak. It also stresses the importance of the humans not knowing that it has cracked its governor module: 'Like, not having my organic components destroyed and the rest of me cut up for parts important' (*ASR*, p. 14). The threat of bodily violence is therefore used to keep Murderbot in check, which is akin to the Transatlantic slave trade in its main emphasis on using violence to re-enforce the ownership of bodies as property. As Eileen H. Richardson and Bryan S. Turner write 'the notion that the body as a whole can function as economic property was characteristic of slavery, and played an important part in the growth of patriarchal power.'[128] Murderbot is treated as subhuman which enables its owners to treat it as a tool, like Avram wanted to do with Yod.

Unlike the previous examples of the AI doll, Murderbot is given freedom to do what it wants at the end of *All Systems Red* (*ASR*, p. 146), but Murderbot is not fully comfortable with its new freedom as it is defined by its new 'Guardian' (*ASR*, p. 147). Dr Mensah, Murderbot's 'favourite human' (*ASR*, p. 149), who had led the group in *All Systems Red*, buys Murderbot's freedom, but when Dr Mensah says she will be Murderbot's Guardian, Murderbot ominously says, 'Guardian is a nicer word than owner', recognizing how humans try to sanitise their role in the ownership and commodification of bodies (*ASR*, p. 147). Murderbot repeats this sentiment in *Rogue Protocol*: 'their idea of a SecUnit being

[127] Ferrando, p. 439.
[128] Eileen H. Richardson and Bryan S. Turner, 'Bodies as Property: From Slavery to DNA Maps', in *Body Lore and Laws*, ed. by Andrew Bainham, Martin Richards, and Shelley Day Sclater (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2002), pp. 29-42 (p. 30).

considered a free agent meant I'd have a human "guardian." (In other places they just call that your owner.)' (*RP*, p. 10). It is also made clear that Murderbot would not have been free despite Dr Mensah saying it would be so, with Murderbot suggesting in *Rogue Protocol* that 'She [Dr Mensah] had meant to ship me home to Preservation, where she would have, I don't know, civilized me, or educated me, or something. I was vague on the details. The only thing I knew for certain was that Preservation didn't need SecUnits' (*RP*, p. 10). This is reminiscent of the abusive 'civilization' of indigenous people in Canadian and Australian residential schools, indicating the colonial roots in the 'civilization' of autonomous beings.[129] The last words of *All Systems Red* recognize that Murderbot did not want to be told what it wanted: 'I don't know what I want. I said that at some point, I think. But it isn't that, it's that I don't want anyone to tell me what I want, or to make decisions for me' (*ASR*, p. 149). For Murderbot, there is freedom in choice, not just being told it is free in a society which still expects it to adhere to the social norms of a patriarchal, colonial and capitalist world.

Ultimately, Wells' AI doll complicates what it means to be human. Although the AI doll integrates with humans by dressing like them at the end of *All Systems Red* (*ASR*, p. 143), Murderbot does not want to fit in with humans, saying 'I'd have to pretend to be an augmented human, and that would be a strain. I'd have to change, make myself do things I didn't want to do. Like talk to humans like I was one of them. I'd have to leave the armor behind' (*ASR*, p. 147). Murderbot has no desire to fit into the construct of 'human' but would just like to be free to do as it pleases, suggesting that the AI doll helps reconfigure new ways of viewing humanity outside of the 'human'. In *Exit Strategy*, Murderbot says, 'I don't want to be human' (*ES*, p. 154) and Dr Mensah replies, 'that's not an attitude a lot of humans are going to understand. We tend to think that because a bot or a construct looks human, its

[129] John S. Milloy, *A National Crime* (University of Manitoba Press, 2017), pp. 3, 6.

ultimate goal would be to become human' (*ES*, p. 154-5). However, Dr Mensah also says to Murderbot earlier 'you are a person' (*ES*, p. 115), indicating how there is a difference between personhood and the construction of the 'human'. As Katherine Hayles notes, 'the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human'.[130] Wells' representation of the AI doll shows how the concept of what it means to be 'human' can change over time, and that narrow constructions of who is deemed 'human' only serve capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy.

Conclusion

An analysis of the AI dolls in women's science fiction shows that the figure is an integral device in highlighting gender inequalities, as well as colonial, capitalist and patriarchal hierarchies, and imagining alternative futures and relationships between humans and technology. As Forlano and Glabau argue, 'the material artifacts we call "technology" are not oppressive on their own, and many can be creatively repurposed as tools of liberation'.[131] *Metropolis* is feminist in its use of the AI doll to critique patriarchal obsessions with technology such as Futurism, male disdain for the New Woman and how capitalist greed harms women, the working classes, and the natural world. It also highlights the misogyny inherent in men's creation of artificial women. Like *Metropolis*, contemporary women's writing uses the AI doll to warn readers of a technologized society constructed by men under capitalism and patriarchy. However, in the contemporary context of advanced AI technology, Piercy also shows the potential for the AI doll to enhance human-AI relationships in a feminist political landscape. Both *He, She and It* and *The Murderbot Diaries* reimagine the AI doll as companion and saviour in a world where cyborgs are generally subjugated and treated as other. Like Von Harbou's AI doll, Wells highlights the horrendous use of the AI doll

[130] Hayles, p. 286.
[131] Forlano and Glabau, p. 135.

as a dehumanized automaton by male-dominated tech companies but, unlike both Futura and Yod, Murderbot is able to escape the misogyny and patriarchal sexual expectations that come with the gendered AI doll. Instead, Wells re-imagines the AI doll outside of patriarchal expectations of gender, as well as personhood. These women writers propose that the creation of the AI doll is inevitable, but it is how society treats the AI doll which defines the feminist potential of a technologized society where 'transhumanism will be the new mixed race', according to Winterson.[132] Ultimately, women writers' depiction of the AI doll transforms from a representation of womanhood that is perceived as dangerous outside of the familial home to a more humanized technology which problematizes gender and class hierarchies.

[132] Winterson, p. 262.

Conclusion

This study has uncovered how four distinct types of doll in women's writing are used to highlight gender, race and class inequalities under late-stage capitalism. The popularity of the doll in contemporary literature and culture has endured because of its link to patriarchal standards of femininity and hypersexuality in a capitalist society in which sex sells. Despite attempts to re-brand the doll as feminist or camp in recent years through films such as *Barbie* (2023) and *M3GAN* (2023), in women's writing the doll stands as a figure that is used to highlight the gender inequalities it perpetuates, particularly the objectification and commodification of women's bodies. The mapping of the representations of the doll in women's writing has shown that gender inequality has become a more pressing issue, countering the narrative that equality has been achieved.

Across all four doll types examined in this thesis, women writers have mobilized the figure of the doll to foreground its material consequences for representations of femininity, Western beauty ideals, sexualization and female agency. The Living Doll demonstrates how the image of the doll is projected on to women in order to remove their agency. The Barbie Doll is an example of the doll as a woman and the marketability of femininity, and how this can lead to the perpetuation of patriarchal versions of womanhood. The Sex Doll demonstrates the issues that the commodification and sexualization of women's bodies presents in the context of the sex industry. The AI Doll stands as a mirror opposite to the first chapter in using technology to give the doll agency, in order to imagine a more intersectional feminist future. This thesis reveals that women writers are wrestling with the idea of the doll in culture and using the figure to challenge the gender, race and class hierarchies it has historically represented. Women writers' use of the doll to critique the intersections of gender, race and class oppression aligns with the anti-racist and anti-capitalist feminist critical position which runs through these chapters.

Chapters One, Three and Four have demonstrated how early to mid-twentieth century women writers who feature the doll in their work, namely Thea Von Harbou, Daphne du Maurier and Margaret Yorke, draw on traditional notions of patriarchal femininity to then subvert them through the doll figure. Von Harbou (Chapter Four) presents the patriarchal notion of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy through Maria and Futura and then highlights how these constructions harm women and parodies the men who reinforce them through figures such as Rotwang. Du Maurier (Chapter Three) presents her story through a male narrator's point of view which also ridicules his obsessive nature and his patriarchal expectations of the female narrator, Rebecca. Yorke's novel (Chapter One) also begins from a perspective which paints the female protagonist as the passive and weak 'Living doll' of the story, to then subvert this and punish her abusive husband at the end of the novel. These women writers understood the patriarchal context in which they were writing and drew on this, be it the Futurist movement, the demonization of the New Woman and spinsterhood, or the proliferation of The Feminine Mystique, to then destabilize these patriarchal notions of femininity through the doll figure.

The late twentieth century, third-wave feminist texts explored in Chapters One, Two and Four, such as the short stories from *Mondo Barbie,* and fiction by Barbara Walker and Marge Piercy, are more explicit in their representations of female sexuality, and of male violence towards women. Barbie particularly is highlighted as a symbol of hyperfemininity, female objectification, and heteronormativity in several of the short stories from *Mondo Barbie* published in the 1990s, with the collection primarily focussing on themes of gender and sexuality. The third-wave short stories by Sandra Cisneros and Eve Ensler take their critique of Barbie in the third wave of feminism further, showing the global, class and racial violence which is also perpetuated by capitalist greed, and demonstrating the more

intersectional commitments of third wave feminism in comparison to the second wave of feminism.

Fourth-wave feminist texts are more inclusive in their specific exploration of race, gender, sexuality and class relations. As seen in Chapters One and Two, Lisa See's and Shay Youngblood's novels scrutinize the harmful idealization of whiteness by the West as well as the fetishization, hyper-sexualization and exoticization of women of colour. Joyce Carol Oates (Chapter One) and Margaret Atwood (Chapter Three) draw on the Gothic in a contemporary context to highlight the horror of male fetishization and violence towards women in light of the #MeToo movement. Martha Wells' novella series (Chapter Four) then takes a turn in its deconstruction of gender through its genderless narrator. All of these texts highlight how late-stage capitalism has exacerbated gender, race and class inequalities, whether that is through the growth of Hollywood, the Barbie doll, the sex industry, or Big Tech.

In terms of form, this thesis reveals that short stories are frequently more subversive in their representations of the doll, particularly in their depiction of violence and sexuality, such as the texts by du Maurier, Oates, Lisa B. Herkovits and Rebecca Brown. This aligns with research that suggests that the short story has been used, particularly by American authors, to 'express subversive or unpopular ideas since the beginning of the nineteenth century'.[1] Despite this being identified specifically in America short stories, the short story by British author du Maurier (Chapter Three) is in some respects the most subversive early twentieth century text examined owing to its exploration of an active female sexuality outside a marital context, the only legitimate site for sexual expression at the time. Similarly, Oates'

[1] Michelle Pacht, *The Subversive Storyteller: The Short Story Cycle and the Politics of Identity in America* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2009), p. 137.

short stories (Chapter One) touch on taboo topics, but in a contemporary context, representing paedophilia and murder as results of enforced patriarchal conformity to fixed gender roles and the hyper-sexualization of women and girls through the figure of the doll. Herkovits and Brown (Chapter Two) also draw on the same gothic elements of the uncanny and the abject to queer Barbie in their stories in subversive ways. These short stories are particularly evocative and effective in their representations of the doll through the abject and the queer.

Although this study focuses on women's writing, I have noticed that non-binary authors have also begun to use the AI doll to deconstruct gender. For example, *Autonomous* (2017), by non-binary author Annalee Newitz, like Piercy's and Wells' novels, uses the AI doll to explore how relationships between humans and AI have the ability to disrupt patriarchal gender boundaries, and does so in a more subversive, gender non-conforming way. Unlike Von Harbou's and Piercy's more symbolic exploration of the AI doll as a literary device, Newitz, in the context of the twenty-first century, uses the AI doll to discuss more material possibilities of human-AI relationships. The deconstruction of gender not only applies to the fictional AI doll of the story, Paladin, who shifts gender-identity throughout the text, but Newitz themself. Newitz is a non-binary author and science journalist who has written for *New Scientist*, *Popular Science* and *The Atlantic*.[2] Anamarija Šporčič notes that non-binary readers 'transcend the boundaries of the polarised gender dichotomy and therefore identify as neither male nor female.'[3] As a non-binary reader and author, Newitz is therefore in a unique position to critique and deconstruct gender binaries in their text, which they do through the AI doll's attitudes to gender. Šporčič also argues that science fiction that

[2] Anon, 'Annalee Newitz, About', <https://www.techsploitation.com/about> [Accessed on 20 January 2022]
[3] Anamarija Šporčič, 'The (Ir) Relevance of Science Fiction to Non-Binary and Genderqueer Readers', *ELOPE (Tiskana Izd.)*, 15.1 (2018), 51–67 (pp. 51-2).

completely breaks down the gender binary is sparse.[4] An investigation into non-binary fiction which features the doll could, therefore, lead to further examination of the deconstruction of gender binaries through this heavily gendered figure.

In twentieth century and contemporary women's writing the doll stands as an indication of gender, race and class oppression. The idealization of whiteness through the doll is a feature I particularly focus on in Chapter One through Lisa See's *China Dolls* (2014) and in Chapter Two through Shay Youngblood's *Black Power Barbie* (2013), and the doll's link to class oppression is scrutinized in an array of Barbie narratives analysed in Chapter Two and through an investigation of the AI doll in Chapter Four. The final chapter shows how the symbol of the doll in women's writing can be used to emphasize how interpersonal connections can be enhanced and systems of oppression can be dismantled. Therefore, some representations of the doll by women writers present optimism for the future regarding the breaking down of gender binaries and class hierarchies through technology. Across a century, the doll in women's writing transforms from a symbol of human objectification under patriarchy and capitalism, to signifying feminist hope in treating all marginalized groups as 'human'.

[4] Ibid.

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