

The Power of the Sponge

Imagine a world full of animated, talking, aquatic creatures. These cartoon characters have their own way of life; they have jobs, neighborly quarrels, friends, and family. One of these creatures lives in a pineapple under the sea. Perhaps the world's most famous sponge, he is SpongeBob Squarepants. Spongebob lives in the city of Bikini Bottom, and works at the Krusty Krab. The Krusty Krab is famous for its Krabby Patties, and their recipe is extremely secret. For every secret there is someone who covets it, and for the Krabby Patty, this person is Plankton. Plankton always tries to steal the recipe, but to no avail. In "The SpongeBob Squarepants Movie" however, plankton is finally successful in stealing the formula, as well as in framing the owner of the Krusty Krab, Mr. Krabs, for stealing the crown of King Neptune. Determined to make things right, SpongeBob embarks on a journey with his starfish best friend, Patrick, to get the crown and the formula back. The SpongeBob Squarepants movie is a children's film based off of the popular television series. Most children's television aims to teach lessons of morality or humanity, while being funny and entertaining. But when looked at from a viewpoint of theory and ideology, children's texts can tell us much more than what we see on the surface. From the standpoint of subjectivity, the character SpongeBob is a subject to nearly everyone he encounters. Through his heroic journey he must learn how to exert his agency. SpongeBob in "The SpongeBob Squarepants Movie" fights to change the subjectivity of being a child

SpongeBob views himself as a "man". He thinks he is mature and capable of handling responsibilities. This is why he wants to be promoted to manager of the new Krusty Krab 2. But to his dismay, at the grand opening ceremony, Squidward (another employee) is named manager.

SpongeBob was so involved in thoughts of winning, he did not realize he is not the new manager and goes to accept the promotion. Mr. Krabs explains to SpongeBob the reason why Squidward got the promotion when he says, "let's face it, he's more mature than you" (12:11). SpongeBob replies with a shocked and confused, "I'm not...mature?" (12:16). SpongeBob feels as though he does his job well, and deserves more responsibility. Others see him as a kid who goofs up too often. Mr. Krabs continues his explanation to SpongeBob, "you're just a kid, to be a manager you have to be a man. Otherwise they'd call it kidager" (12:43). Clearly Mr. Krabs sees SpongeBob as a child. King Neptune shares the same view. When SpongeBob says he is capable of getting the crown back the king responds with, "but you're just a kid" (24:08). SpongeBob replies, "I'm not a kid, I can do it" (24:11). The only character who sees SpongeBob as mature is Patrick. Patrick says, "you're not a kid! That's like saying I'm a kid" (17:22). Patrick is obviously a kid, as seen when he asks for the toy to go along with his meal in the following scene. What is important is that SpongeBob has someone that believes in his capabilities from the beginning, even if that someone is a child.

When Mr. Krabs is framed for theft of the King's crown, SpongeBob gets his big chance to prove he is not a kid. He is given just a few days to get the crown from "the forbidden shell city" before Mr. Krabs is toast. SpongeBob and Patrick depart to Shell City in a "boatmobile" shaped like a Krabby Patty. On their way they stop for fuel and are teased about their "car" by some other fish. In their defense, SpongeBob says to Patrick, "we are not kids, we are men" (29:15). The other fish make a bet that Patrick and SpongeBob will not make it across the county line for more than a few seconds. When they do make it, they shout "In your face!" (31:00) SpongeBob is able to prove someone wrong and demonstrate agency here. They expected him to fail, but he succeeded. In another instance, SpongeBob must get his car key back from inside a tough

looking club. While inside the club, SpongeBob and Patrick blow bubbles in the bathroom. This is a childish activity which they regret doing once the patrons of the club want to beat up whoever blew the bubbles. All the fish in the club are put through a “baby” test in which the theme song for Goofy Goober’s (a Chuck-E-Cheese like restaurant) is played. Here SpongeBob exhibits agency by resisting to sing the song. The leader of the club expects him to sing because he is a child, but SpongeBob fights his subjectivity. The biggest demonstration of agency, however, is when SpongeBob actually succeeds in his mission to get the crown and save Mr. Krabs. At that moment he will have accomplished what everyone said he could not do.

There are times in which SpongeBob doubts his power as a child. He is told by almost everyone that he cannot complete the mission because he is a kid. One instance of this is when SpongeBob and Patrick must cross a trench full of monsters. People would expect a child to be scared of such a task and unable to complete it. SpongeBob says to Patrick, “...We’ll never survive in that trench. You said it yourself, this is man’s country. And let’s face it Pat, we’re just...kids.” [What?! We’re not kids!] “Open your eyes Patrick! We blow bubbles, we eat ice cream, we worship a dancing peanut for corn’s sake. We don’t belong out here” (45:10).

SpongeBob does many things that are defined by ideology as childish, as he listed when talking to Patrick. In this moment SpongeBob realizes this. He sees being a child as being incapable of accomplishing mature tasks which is also a product of ideology. For both of these reasons, SpongeBob feels as though he can not going on with the mission. In this moment he has no agency, he is completely a subject. Later on in the movie, SpongeBob and Patrick are trapped by a human who wants to dry them out and turn them into souvenirs. At this point, SpongeBob is completely subject to the subjectivity of a child who cannot take on mature tasks. He says to Patrick, “Well, it looks like what everybody said about us is true...we’re just kids. A couple of

kids in way over their heads. We were doomed from the start... We let everybody down. We failed.” Here SpongeBob demonstrates no agency and is once again totally constrained by his subjectivity. SpongeBob will only be able to change his subjectivity when he realizes his capabilities as a child.

At one point on their quest SpongeBob and Patrick are visited by Mindy, King Neptune’s daughter. She tries to help them on their journey by inspiring them. She is one person who believes that SpongeBob can succeed, even as a child. She says, “Hey, it doesn’t matter if you’re kids. And what’s so wrong with being a kid anyway? Kids rule! You don’t need to be a man to do this, you just gotta believe in yourself.” (47:08). Mindy is explaining to SpongeBob that it is okay to be a kid. She is giving him another way to look at being a child. This in a way acts as a new subjectivity; kids are capable. To complete their mission there is no need to be men, they just have to believe in their capabilities. Having Mindy see that kids are capable is a step in the right direction for SpongeBob who is trying to redefine the subjectivity of children.

Unfortunately, even after Mindy’s compelling speech, SpongeBob still feels that being a man is better than being a child. So in order to continue, Mindy uses seaweed as fake mustaches and tricks SpongeBob and Patrick into thinking they are men. The mustache acts as a material representation of the ideology of a man. This type of ideological object is what Althusser was speaking of when he tells of a quote from Pascal, “Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe”(180). This means that if you follow the practices of an ideology, and use the objects of an ideology, you will accept and become a part of it. In SpongeBob’s case this translates into, “wear the mustache and you will be a man.” Now they are able to walk through the trench and dodge hideous monsters. While walking they are singing a song about how being a man makes them capable. Part of the song goes like this, “Now that we’re men, we’ll go to

Shell City, get the crown, save the town, and Mr. Krabs. Now that we're men, We have facial hair... We're tough enough to save the day. We never had a chance when we were kids." (50:50). Now that SpongeBob feels he is a man, he feels he can do anything, as was expressed in his song. This is where SpongeBob is losing in his struggle to change the ideology of a child. He does not believe in himself enough to be confident on his own so he relies on a mustache made of seaweed to give him power. With his new feeling of "manliness" SpongeBob can keep moving towards Shell City and the crown.

Now back on their way, SpongeBob and Patrick run into Dennis, the assassin. SpongeBob confronts Dennis in a way that he thinks a man should. He says to Dennis, "Listen, junior, you caught me and my friend here in a good mood today, so I'm gonna let you off with a warning. Step aside, and you won't have to feel the awesome wrath of our mustaches." SpongeBob is feeling so empowered by his mustache that he talks back to the assassin as if he is more powerful. The mustache is giving SpongeBob the agency to be as much of a man as he can. Dennis, however, sees through the ruse. He responds by ripping SpongeBob and Patrick's mustaches off. SpongeBob whimpers, "They were fake?" and Dennis snaps back "Of course they were fake! This is what a real mustache looks like" (He grows a mustache). With the object of manliness removed, SpongeBob and Patrick are reduced back to children as they cower in fear. SpongeBob once again has become what ideology expects a child to be – powerless.

After some more heroism, we find Patrick and SpongeBob back at the Krusty Krab where he confronts Plankton, the villain, in order to save Mr. Krabs. In the end, SpongeBob was able to get the crown by making it to Shell City and stealing it back from a human scuba diver. He accomplished his mission while still being a child; he effectively changed his subjectivity. SpongeBob confronts Plankton on his return, "I guess you're right, Plankton. I am just a

kid...And you know, I've been through a lot in the past six days, five minutes, and seven-and-a-half seconds. And if I've learned anything during that time, It's that you are who you are"

(1:12:00). Here is SpongeBob's defining moment, he ultimately accepts that he is a kid, and he is not going to try to prove to anyone that he is anything else. What he wants now is for people to respect him as he is. SpongeBob continues his speech now directing it at everyone in the restaurant. He says, "[nothing] can make me anything more than what I really am inside: A kid...But that's okay...Because I did what everyone said a kid couldn't do. I made it to Shell City, and I beat the Cyclops, and I rode the Hasselhoff, and I brought the crown back...So, yeah, I'm a kid..." (1:14:00). SpongeBob has told all of the people who doubted him that he did everything they said he could not do. This is truly SpongeBob's moment to show how their subjectivity of him was wrong. The ideology that a kid is incapable is false. SpongeBob has won his fight to redefine his subjectivity. This is proved when SpongeBob finally defeats plankton and begins to talk to the people in the Krusty Krab individually. King Neptune speaks to Mr. Krabs about SpongeBob. He says, "You are very lucky to have in your employ such a brave, faithful, and heroic young lad" (1:17:04). Now King Neptune sees SpongeBob through a new subjectivity, one that defines a kid as capable. Next Mr. Krabs himself speaks to SpongeBob, "SpongeBob me boy, I'm sorry I ever doubted ye. That's a mistake I won't make again" (1:17:28). Mr. Krabs has come full circle, as well as King Neptune. They both truly believe in SpongeBob's power as a child.

SpongeBob is able to redefine his subjectivity, and in doing so he conveys the message of kid empowerment. SpongeBob is an incredibly popular children's character as well as an immensely successful brand. On the Wal-Mart store website, a search of "spongebob squarepants" returns a list of 147 products (walmart.com). So not only can children watch

SpongeBob on television, they can also wear him on their clothes, have numerous toys of his likeness, and even have a ceiling fan with images of their favorite sponge smiling back at them. The success of this movie, (in the United States alone it grossed upwards of 85 million dollars) and the success of SpongeBob as a brand is a testament to its power over children (The Numbers). One of the problems with intense marketing to children is whether or not the character, and the show, give children the right message. But I believe that "The SpongeBob Squarepants Movie" overall has a good message. There is a difference between SpongeBob's message of "children can be powerful" compared to a sassy pre-teen talking back to an adult as seen on shows such as *Hannah Montana* or *True Jackson VP*. Since the popularization of television ads and the success of character toys, there have been cries from people to stop or limit such marketing to children. From the article *Toy for Saps*, "They tried to ban these commercials to give parents, not toy companies, control over the desires of their offspring"(Cross). Unfortunately it does not seem as though children's media will put on the brakes any time soon. As long as companies behind shows like SpongeBob are making money, we will continue to see store shelves stocked with strange characters of consumerism. Yes, the SpongeBob Squarepants Movie has a good message. SpongeBob is a great and funny character, but it is simply not necessary to continually fill the minds of children with such a desire to buy products. No lesson is learned from having an iPod that looks like the eye of SpongeBob. Children's media needs to take a long hard look at itself and realize that maybe, there is more to life than filling one's pockets with cash from selling mindless junk to children. The mind of a child is a terrible thing to waste, and if the true message of a kid-empowered movie like this one could be heard without all the products surrounding it, that would be an impressive step towards giving children back their childhoods.

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SUPA

Subjectivity FINAL DRAFT (missing final page)

Good Will Hunting at first gives the impression that we can defy society's norms; there is something within us that can look upon society objectively or without influence, and that is our "true" self. However, as the characters and the plot develop, we quickly learn that this isn't the case at all. The environment in which we are raised is in fact made out to be one of the most significant factors in what we turn out to be, and that even our unconscious desires and motivations are a result of the world around us. *Good Will Hunting* at first seems to support the idea of the "untouched" self, but quickly refutes it for a self that is more subjective.

The film follows the story of Will Hunting, a janitor employed at MIT with an exceptional gift for math. His genius is discovered when a math professor at the university, Gerald Lambeau, leaves a series of problems on a chalk board outside his classroom; Will is caught answering the problems correctly, sparking Lambeau's interest. When Will is arrested for assault, Lambeau makes a deal with the judge that in lieu of going to jail, Will could work with Lambeau on some problems and go and see a therapist. Will agrees, and their work begins. They go through five therapists before Lambeau begs Sean Maguire, an old classmate of his from college with some baggage over the untimely death of his wife, to work with Will. Their initial meeting is rocky (as are many subsequent ones), but Sean likes the challenge Will presents, and agrees to work with him. Meanwhile, Will's personal life takes a pleasant turn when he meets Skylar, a British student at Harvard, and the two begin to see each other. Soon after starting work with Lambeau, Will begins getting job offers for his incredible abilities in math. Will dismisses all of them, taking none of it seriously; he begins to show his self-destructive tendencies. When Lambeau confronts him on the issue, Will makes a mockery of the work that Lambeau is doing, telling him how easy it is and eventually burning some equations he had recently done. Skylar asks him to join her in California, where she is going to medical school, and Will panics, breaking off the relationship and purposely hurting Skylar's feelings. When Sean speaks to him about his future, Will makes a joke about it, and Sean kicks him out.

In their final session, Sean exposes that both he and Will were the victims of child abuse. In an emotional scene, Sean tells Will the abuse wasn't his fault, that he didn't deserve it, and Will finally realizes how he always holds himself back. The movie ends with Will going to California to see Skylar, his future uncertain, but finally more at peace with himself.

The self is most clearly addressed through the main protagonist, Will. In the beginning of the movie, there seems to be a belief in the "untouched" self; that there is a person within us that isn't influenced by the world around us (Subjectivity). Will is a genius; he solves a math problem in one evening that Lambeau felt would take most of the students at least one semester to figure out. For some reason though, Will is working as a janitor, a job not really making use of his mind. It seems that Will has chosen this career for himself, as well as a job in construction as a laborer. He has purposely chosen jobs that don't push him in areas in which he might excel; he doesn't seem to want to use his mind. In fact, he shows a lot of disdain for those who take pride in their intelligence. In one scene, he confronts a Harvard student in a bar, citing the exact books that the student was attempting to pass off as his own knowledge, and humiliating the student in front of several of his classmates. Will shows a similar contempt for Lambeau, who throughout the movie shows pride in his accomplishments as an academic; towards the end of the movie, Will calls Lambeau's work easy and childish. He then proceeds to burn the equations he has been working on, and scoffs as Lambeau puts the flames out and tries to salvage the work. In a way, by bullying those that are intelligent, Will seems to be punishing that which he doesn't like in himself, pushing against his environment and refusing to give in to society's expectations of his intelligence.

Will also demonstrates a sort of "untouched" self in the company he keeps. He mostly hangs out with friends that don't push him in any way; they were his childhood companions, have grown up in South Boston with him, and even hold similar positions. They don't expect more from him than he gives them, and don't make him work in any way. It seems that Will purposely chooses to be with these people; when Skylar enters his life, he lets her get closer to him because although she is smart, she doesn't act superior about it, and is very down to earth. However, when she attempts to push Will but asking him to move to California with her, he panics, pushing her away and ending the relationship, being sure to hurt

her in the process. Will seems to once again act in favor of something within himself that isn't easily moved by his environment or what people expect of him, and he appears to be in control of it.

What is interesting to note is that Will seems to purposely put himself in positions that make him appear less intelligent than he actually is. He works as a janitor, a job that traditionally society looks down upon as being "low class," or for people who aren't well educated. We instinctively judge Will for his position; how dare he not make use of his brilliant mind for math, and subject himself instead to social ridicule, and essential poverty. One of the essential ideologies we must understand in the movie is that Will should want to make use of his mind, and improve his life. But we must then assume that Will's job and income level is undesirable; we must feel that Will being poor is something that must be escaped, as it does him more harm than good. By being a blue collar worker, Will is a part of a ever diminishing social class due to deindustrialization, and purposely denies himself "cultural capital," the "access to certain ways of speaking, certain cultural codes of behavior, taste, and discrimination," (Differences). Will actually seems to purposely deny himself of "cultural capital," as he looks down on it. This again seems to support the idea that Will is speaking from an uninfluenced, inner self that looks at society and chooses to rise above it. Will's career is the only thing that he really has "control" over in his life, as he had no say in his gender or race, and so we blame him for his lack of success and for his not making full use of his abilities (Differences). Again, it seems that Will makes the choice to be in this social class, scoffing at society and its expectations and appealing to himself.

It would be interesting to think that Will is defying social views on purpose; that the movie is actually trying to say that striving for higher social positions is unnecessary or undesirable as it comes with its own negative connotations. It would be interesting to say that *Good Will Hunting* tries to throw social norms back in our faces, and defies them. But this really isn't a good description of the film at all. This view of the "untouched" self, of Will consciously putting himself in these positions, doesn't fully explain Will's choices. Perhaps one could choose a lower position in society for lack of caring, or for not wanting to acknowledge certain environmental factors in his life. But then why doesn't he push himself in areas he enjoys, and why does he purposely rid himself of Skylar even though he cares for her? It is

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ETS 142
Unit Two
Due:

Choose one of the following texts: “The Story of an Hour,” “The Revolt of ‘Mother,’” “The Yellow Wallpaper,” or “The Awakening” and write an essay of about 1,500 words in which you examine and analyze how the author uses language to represent issues of authority, subjectivity, and gender. Use what you have learned about these issues in *Beginning Theory*, *The Theory Toolbox*, and *A Room of One’s Own* as the intellectual foundation for your analysis.

ETS 142: Unit II Essay

April 16, 2006

The Awakening

“In making meaning, the reader is steering a course, but many potential courses are already mapped when he or she comes upon the text to be read. The reader negotiates meaning by working with, between, and among already existing cultural signs” (Nealson and Searls Giroux 41). This quote from *The Theory Toolbox* reflects upon the roles in making meaning of the reader and the author of a text. Although the reader has a generous amount of freedom to interpret meaning from a text, certain limitations exist because it is the writer who is vested with the authority to construct the “potential courses” the reader may follow, and to weave cultural signs into the text to guide him or her. Kate Chopin utilizes this authority, complemented by her use of language, to represent issues in *The Awakening*, specifically issues of authority, subjectivity, and gender. These issues are illustrated through the relations between men and women in the Creole society of Louisiana, as well as through gender roles and social codes. Using the voice of Edna, a woman, mother, wife, and daughter (to name a few), as well as the society’s relations and interactions, Chopin creates a conflict between self and subjectivity. Edna seeks to resolve this conflict in a quest for freedom, but ultimately finds herself trapped and commits suicide. An analysis of the social codes in the novel

reveals the extent of the repression she experienced, and by examining the author's use of language we can gain a better understanding of the issues that surround Edna.

"The Awakening" is the title of Edna's story that preludes Chopin's skillful use of language to embody meaning. A transition of some sort usually constitutes an awakening, such as a shift from dream to reality, or unconsciousness to consciousness. The word is applicable to a great number of situations, many of which are comparable to Edna's experience in the novel; the inclusion of such a far-reaching term in the title reflects the broadness and widespread impacts of Edna's change in attitude. The reader is introduced to Edna on Grand Isle, where she is vacationing with other Creole families. Chopin begins discreetly subverting the social codes in practice by utilizing the literary element of setting: the site of the vacation is owned by *Madame Lebrun*—a significant role for a female in a society where men are the principal breadwinners and the public face of the family. First impressions of Edna reveal that she is restless with the rigid gender roles and subjectivity found in the Creole society she married into. Chopin uses Edna's relations with other characters on the island to introduce these issues, using literary tools including binaries and paired alternatives. A male/female and subsequently a husband/wife binary are created when Edna's husband, Mr. Pontellier, scolds her for her disregard of the children. He outlines a major issue and calls into question the workings of the institution of marriage when he asks "If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" (Chopin 6). Is marriage not an equal partnership involving shared responsibility? Do the children not belong to both Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier? In this manner a social code of the Creole society is outlined: women care for the children. In

this situation Chopin uses language to make the social conditions seem natural using ordinary description, thus easing their acceptance.

Chopin further expands the reader's knowledge of the Creole social codes as she introduces the other women on Grand Isle, specifically Madame Ratignolle. A paired alternative is created when Chopin describes a 'mother-woman': "They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (8). Language creates distinctions in this description—Edna is explicitly stated to be not a "mother-woman," while Madame Ratignolle is depicted as a model woman, wife, and mother. She is fully compliant with the social codes that surround her, but her apparent perfection is not something Edna desires; rather than aspiring to act as Madame Ratignolle does, Edna goes on to further undermine social codes regarding motherhood and marriage. In *Beginning Theory*, Barry writes that "...gender roles must be malleable and changeable, not inevitable and unchangeable givens" (131). The rigidity of these codes confines Edna and she feels trapped in her role of motherhood, but it is not until later in the novel when she learns to swim that she awakens to the possibility of freeing herself from all roles. Chopin's introduction and creation of the main character sets the novel up well for the further exploration of the social codes and issues surrounding authority, subjectivity, and gender that cloud Edna's life.

The aforementioned "effacing" of the individual, specifically the mother, becomes of principal concern in *The Awakening* as Edna struggles to resolve the conflict between self and subjectivity. The 'self' is described as "the essence of our unique individuality: the intrinsic, singular qualities that define us as who we are" while "the

subject is defined by its place among various social positions.” It “is an outwardly generated concept, an effect, an understanding of personhood based on the social laws or codes to which we are made to answer” (Nealson and Searls Giroux 36-37). Edna awakens to her ‘self’ at Grand Isle and feels that her new friend, Robert LeBrun, was an instrumental part in this major realization of her life. He becomes the object of Edna’s affection, contrary to his usual role as the island’s harmless flirt. Robert teaches her how to swim, an ability that, along with water, becomes a recurring symbol throughout the remainder of the story. Edna’s connection with the ocean, which often is representative of the unconscious, is an example of Chopin’s use of symbolism to represent issues of subjectivity. Her ability to swim, to access the waters of her unconscious, can be interpreted as her ability to access a part of her that she has repressed into her unconscious—her true *self*. Freedom from repression gives her agency—the power to act—and act she does. In *The Theory Toolbox*, a distinction between the self and the subject is made:

In the end, we tend to understand the “self” as always in the driver’s seat, whereas the “subject” is more of a passenger, who may have a say in the destinations and routes but is not wholly or simply in control of them. The self is causing things to happen, whereas the subject is necessarily responding to things that happen.

(Nealson and Searls Giroux 38)

Application of these terms would then describe Edna’s position when she returned home from the Grand Isle vacation as “in the driver’s seat,” suggesting that her entire life prior had been spent as a “passenger.” She uses her newfound agency to continue to subvert social codes and gender roles, beginning with her discontinuation of the usual Tuesday

visits she hosted in her home. She sends her children to stay on the family farm, disregards the requests of her husband, has a short affair with Alcee Arobin (who has a less than positive reputation), and moves to a home of her own. Edna explains her changing state of mind quite clearly: "I would give up my money. I would give my life for my children, but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it anymore clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (Chopin 57). The use of Edna's voice to convey the shift in power of the self versus subject conflict is an important method that Chopin takes advantage of. Throughout the novel Edna herself clearly expresses her awakening, and what she does not speak out loud is described by the narrator. The reader hears Edna's emerging independence when she herself proclaims it to Robert, stating that she is no longer a possession of her husband, and that she had "gotten into the habit of expressing" herself (114-116). But it is the narration that most explicitly confirms Edna's small victories in her internal self versus subject conflict: "Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual" (101). Through Edna's struggle, Chopin conveys the issue of subjectivity to the reader.

The inclusion of a fully independent female character, Mademoiselle Reisz, allows Chopin to further explore issues of gender and subjectivity. Mademoiselle Reisz is a social outcast of the Creole society. She is an artist—a pianist—and this separates her from the usual gender roles of females in her day. Society's reception of her was similar to that of female writers in history; as Virginia Woolf describes in *A Room of One's Own*, "The world did not say to her as it said to them, Write if you choose; it makes no difference to me" (54). The society is not accepting of Mademoiselle's Reisz's profession

or marital status because of her independence, but Edna seeks recognition and validation of her talent from her. Chopin uses the relationship between these two characters to further develop the binary between self and subject: Mademoiselle Reisz is her own self, and Edna is struggling to rid herself of subjectivity. Edna's difficulty with the transition contrasts with Mademoiselle's seemingly easy lifestyle; ultimately Edna cannot achieve freedom from subjectivity and gender roles as Mademoiselle Reisz has.

Other character relations that Chopin includes in *The Awakening* also help to develop the main issues of the story. Chopin's authority in relation to language use is represented by her choice of speaker and subsequently those who are not speaking. The narrator closely follows Edna and so the reader is exposed mostly to her thoughts and actions—but the male characters are not heard from as frequently. On the few occasions that their voices are heard, the reader is given further insight into the confinements, attitudes, and ideology of the Creole society. Mr. Pontellier's speech reflects both issues, scolding his wife for neglecting Tuesday visits, urging her to care for the children, and expressing concern to a doctor regarding Edna's attitude after her awakening. Chopin utilizes marital relations to make explicit the Creole society's social codes with Mr. Pontellier's words to Edna: "...he begged her to consider first, foremost, and above all else, what people would say," and "we've got to observe society's conventions and appearances if we ever expect to get on" (55, 100). In addition to Mr. Pontellier, Doctor Mandalet conveys his opinions on the complications of dealing with women and Edna's father, the Colonel, calls for patriarchal action when he urges Mr. Pontellier to put his "foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife" (77). The male viewpoint exposes the reader to a greater depth of the subjectivity and confining social codes.

The first time Edna swam freely, Chopin described her experience: "As she swam, she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself" (30). At the time her self was beginning to emerge, far from shore where society and its social codes were swimming in the water and swarming the beach. Edna tested the limits of her self and at the end of the novel finds no freedom from subjectivity. Her awakening revealed to her a life just out of her reach; she could not handle the transition to it as Mademoiselle Reisz had because of her responsibility to her children. Edna saw no way out but to cast off all of society's influences, represented symbolically by her clothes, and free herself by swimming out into her unconscious where repression would not follow her—and thus the story ends with her suicide.

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ETS 142: Narratives of Culture
Spring 2007
Formal Paper #2: Subject/ivity in film

View one of the following films and write a formal, analytical essay in which you discuss the concept of subject/ivity:

- *Adaptation* (2003)
- **American Splendor* (2003)
- *Being John Malkovich* (1999)
- *Hero* (2004)
- *Memento* (2000)
- *Stranger Than Fiction* (2007)
- **The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999)
- *The Truman Show* (1998)

Your “reading” of the film should be informed by our class readings and discussions on the concept of subject/ivity. When explaining your analysis, be sure to incorporate the course’s theoretical language. Let the concept of subject/ivity serve as the focus of your discussion; the film is the vehicle for your discussion. Plan accordingly to allow for multiple viewings of the film.

Generative Questions to Help Shape the Task:

- What customs/cultural norms/codes are at play in the context (time/place) of the film?
- How do cultural norms affect individual subjects within that context?
- How does a subject’s understanding of his/her culture inform the construction of his/her identity?
- Can individuals affect their culture? Does the main character?
- How is the “place” of subjects/individuals determined within particular contexts?
- What aspects of a subject’s identity are pre-determined (e.g. race, class, gender)?
- In what ways can individuals construct (or reconstruct) themselves and influence how others perceive them as subjects?
- How does an individual’s understanding of him/herself as a subject influence his/her actions or agency (the ability to “do”)?
- Can a subject and his/her subjective beliefs change over time/give way to other views?

*These two films are available on DVD from instructor. Please make arrangements with the instructor early; an after school viewing for multiple students may be necessary.

3/31/07

Formal Paper #2: Subjectivity in Film

Don't Change a Hair for Me...Not if You Care for Me

"Forging signatures, telling lies, and impersonating practically anybody" is Tom Ripley's response when Dickie asks him what his talent is. Dickie did not understand at the time that Tom's three talents would ultimately lead to his own death. In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, a story of duplicity, lies, and murder unfolds as the main character Tom Ripley struggles to lose his true identity, one that he is ashamed of, and become someone more desirable and powerful in society. Tom's words of "I'd rather be a fake somebody than a real nobody" represent his dire devotion to embody the life of Dickie Greenleaf, a man living off of his father's money in Italy, playfully sailing on crystal blue waters and spending time tanning on the sandy beaches with a beautiful woman. Tom manipulates his way into Dickie's life through lies and deceit, trying desperately to lead a similar lifestyle to Dickie and ultimately loses his own identity. However, it is through the limitations of the culture of Dickie's lifestyle that Tom is subjected to those around him. Tom can only meet success through imitating a specific type of person and associating himself with certain members of society. By choosing to imitate Dickie's lifestyle, Tom must embody wealth and power and expose himself to others with similar status and fortune. As a result, Tom's interaction with Marge, Dickie, Freddie, and Peter subject them to his control as Tom's actions weave them all into a tangled web of tragedy and disaster.

The Talented Mr. Ripley is an excellent example of subjectivity of individuals within certain contexts. As Tom tries to take control of his life by impersonating the desirable lifestyle of the rich, he is restricted by the limitations set by wealth and power.

In order to fit in with the cultural norms, Tom needed to lose his own identity and embody the characteristics of those with money and status. Power structure is evident in Tom's relationship with Dickie as Tom is immediately uncomfortable and intimidated around Dickie. Because he was not born into money and had never lived a lavish life before, Tom was both anxious and desperate to fit in. For example, when he learned Dickie liked jazz, Tom taught himself the style of music so that he and Dickie would have a deeper connection. It is obvious that Tom didn't naturally like jazz as he didn't know if Dizzy Gillespie was a man or a woman. But, because of his understanding of the rich culture, he begins to construct his new identity by changing his mannerisms and his characteristics to become successful in Dickie's world.

There is a binary of rich and poor within *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as money and power is attributed to happiness and success. Within the context of the film, this cultural norm affects the characters because the rich lifestyle is desired by those who don't have it. Though everyone is aspiring to achieve status and build their fortunes, only those who were born and raised with it fully understand the sacrifices that come with money. At one point in the film, Meredith stated, "The truth is, if you've had money your entire life, even if you despise it, which we do, you are only truly comfortable around other people who have it and despise it." Because Tom wasn't truly comfortable around those with money, no matter how hard he tried, he never succeeded in the rich world.

Sensing his discomfort, Marge felt bad for Tom and his inability to fit in with Dickie's lifestyle, knowing he would not be capable of handling status and power. She sympathized with Tom when he excluded from the ski trip and pitied him when he was often the third wheel when Dickie was with Freddie. In this sense, Tom is subjected to Marge for being of lower class; she assumes he is not able to succeed because he has

never been around money before. Her sympathy eventually turned to suspicion, though, as her instincts told her that Tom was involved in Dickie's disappearance. This change in Marge can be directly related to the assumptions she makes considering Tom's class. Because he obviously desires to lead a life of luxury, Marge uses this against him to blame him for the tragedy.

Because Tom desired to lead a lifestyle similar to Dickie's, he was subjected to that kind of lifestyle. Tom became limited by society in what he should wear, how he should act and speak, and how he should entertain himself. Society has shaped the mold of what it means to be successful. As a result, Tom had to reconstruct himself by changing his appearance and personality so that he could fit in within the cultural norm. For example, as a wealthy man, Dickie had sport coats made for him by Italian tailors, entertained himself through sailing adventures and attending jazz clubs, and even furthered his power and status as a hot shot by sleeping around with many women. Nothing could stop Dickie because he had everything and everyone had a desire to be just like him. Because of this, Tom was subjected to the rich lifestyle and had to change a lot about himself so he could survive in this kind of world.

Coming from no money and having nothing to show for himself, Tom stood out as a "nobody" in a sea of successful people who had everything anyone could ever want. What contributed to Tom's downfall was his inability to adapt to his surroundings. Though it was comfortable for him to live a life of such luxury, he had no experience being around people who had grown up with such customs and extravagant lifestyles. Tom didn't really understand what having money meant. Meredith, for example, knew that others took advantage of her fortunes, and for that reason, she was more than likely used by many men for her money. She felt she could confide in Dickie (though it was

really Tom) and that he would understand her because he would have had to experience the sacrifice that comes along with being powerful and wealthy. As a result, she genuinely loved him because she could connect with him on another level.

Marge, Dickie, Freddie and Peter were all subjected to Tom throughout the story, as his actions controlled their lives. In this sense, the power structure changed as Tom became the author within the text. Tom now had the pen and was writing the story, while Marge, Dickie, Freddie and Peter were all his characters and subjected to the plot that he confined them to. Because of their ignorance to his manipulation and deceit, none of them fully understood the impact Tom was making on their futures. They were all blindsighted by this man who seemed friendly, witty, caring, and lovable, but would really end up ruining their lives. Tom fooled them all into believing that he was someone they want to have around and that they could look to for support and encouragement in their friendships with him. According to Nealon and Giroux's philosophy that the self is the driver in a situation and the subject is the passenger, Tom was the driver and Marge, Dickie, Freddie and Peter were the passengers. Tom, as the driver, had complete control to decide what road he wanted to take his passengers down. Nealon and Giroux state, "The self is causing things to happen, whereas the subject is necessarily responding to things that happen." Marge, Dickie, Freddie and Peter were all subjected to Tom's actions and had no control over the situations that occurred. Because no one could stop Tom and they were too ignorant to fully understand what he was even up to, they could only respond to the course of events and had no power to stop them or counteract them.

Beyond being subjected to Tom's actions, Marge, Dickie, Freddie and Peter were also subjected to the culture that they belonged to. Being of the wealthy cultural norm, they were forced to be somewhat homogenous in style and personality. It was expected

that the wealthy attend Operas and eat at lavish restaurants. Even more so, the film takes place in Italy, showing the opportunities the wealthy young have at traveling and experiencing exotic parts of the world. Only their culture experiences things like that because it all takes money. To become successful within their culture, all four had to embody the necessary characteristics that society demanded of them. In this sense, they lost their identities and all became products of their culture, enveloped in materialistic possessions and a high demand of status and power.

Though all the characters in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* struggled with finding or maintaining their identities, it is through the reoccurring theme of mirrors and reflections that the meaning of identity is truly enhanced within the film. Identity, and having the ability to recognize individuality, is important when considering subjectivity of the self in an environment. You, as an individual, cannot help but be subjected to the world around you; people and places that you encounter will undoubtedly mold who you are. This is true within the film as Tom's personality and appearance is reconstructed so that he can attempt to succeed in the rich cultural norm. Mirrors and reflections, which symbolize identity within the film, enhance Tom Ripley's ability to identify himself or the person he is impersonating. His own reflections demonstrate the deterioration of Tom's true identity as he digs himself deeper and deeper into a hole through secrets, lies, and impersonations.

There are four main instances in the film that, through the use of a mirror or a reflecting surface, show Tom's ability or inability to recognize his own identity. Through the use of cinematic art, the viewer also is subjected to Tom's impersonations because we lose our ability to truly recognize him as an individual. Laura Mulvey, in her work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", develops her own ideas about reflections and mirrors by linking them to Lacan's theory of "The Mirror Stage". According to Lacan, an

infant first develops ego, personality and language when seeing his reflection for the first time in a mirror. Culture, in this sense, is like looking in the mirror as we are all products of our environment. Mulvey continues with this idea by stating, "Recognition is overlaid by misrecognition: the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego, the alienated subject which, reintrojected as an ego ideal, prepares the way for identification with others in the future." Lacan's theory and Mulvey's work can directly be translated to *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as it can easily be argued that Tom's reflections symbolize his changing identities throughout the course of the film.

After Tom kills Dickie, he takes on Dickie's persona by wearing his clothes, putting on his rings, using his passport, spending his money, and introducing himself as Dickie Greenleaf. Tom so easily impersonates Dickie by forging his signature and mastering his mannerisms that people in society begin to recognize him as Dickie. The first important occurrence of the mirror happens when Tom closes the piano after playing it to see his reflection as two images of himself; there is one direct reflection of his face, but another reflection turned upside down and coming out of his direct reflection. This symbolizes Tom's impersonation of Dickie as one reflection and his own identity as the other. Through the cinematic art, the reflections actually grow out of one another to maintain the idea that Tom represents both himself and Dickie. When they separate, Tom's inability to maintain both identities is revealed as the two reflections represent the real Dickie Greenleaf, who Tom will never fully be able to embody, and his own identity, that is never really developed and exposed to the viewer. We constantly ask ourselves, "Who is the real Tom Ripley?" The viewer can attempt to answer this question in the next scene, when things take a turn for the worse for Tom.

On accident, Marge ironically finds Dickie's rings in Tom's possession. While Tom is in the bath, Marge begins to become anxious to speak with Tom about her discovery and Tom immediately begins to panic after hearing Marge has found the rings. He tells her to pour them both a drink while he gets changed into some clothes, and as Tom slams the bathroom door shut, he faces his reflection in the mirror. Tom angrily stares back at himself as he made his first mistake in his impersonation of Dickie by not carefully hiding his possession of the rings. Tom snaps at this point, giving the viewer a little bit more of a clue as to who Tom really is. This reflection of Tom is clear and not blurry at all like the one shown earlier in the piano scene, showing the viewer that Tom, in his true identity, is angry and manipulative as he then goes on to attempt to kill Marge for knowing too much.

As he digs himself deeper into trouble, Tom continues to lose more of his own identity as he continues to impersonate Dickie. When fleeing from the Italian police, Tom loses control of a motorcycle he is riding and falls to scrape his face on the road. He crashes into a street vendor and rises to see his reflection in a cracked mirror. This is the third and most important occurrence of a mirror, in which Tom's identity is now totally unidentifiable. At this point, he has attempted for quite some time to impersonate Dickie and has been, for the most part, very successful. However, now Tom has started to slip up and because of his mistakes, he cannot fully embody Dickie's persona. As a result, Tom cannot see his reflection as Dickie as whole and accurate because it is now cracked and in pieces. On the other hand, Tom cannot identify with his true self either. It is likely he never imagined he would go as far as murder and fatal lies to become somebody, and because of this, he doesn't really know who he is and what he believes in. He has lost all his morals and values to impersonate Dickie, a man who has everything that Tom wants

and needs in life to consider himself happy and successful. Power and money made Tom do crazy things, so much to the extent that he could no longer even control himself.

This complete loss of control is evident in the final scene of the film in which Tom murders Peter. As the boat rocks back and forth, “rough waters” symbolize what Tom has endured to become a fake somebody rather than being the real nobody he truly is. Tom sits on the bed with his head hanging low as the mirror in his cabin room shows his profile reflection rather than his face. This is important because it further symbolizes Tom’s failure to become somebody, and it is the last reflection shown of him. By showing his profile rather than his face, Tom loses even more of his identity. Rather than developing his own identity and working to become who he wanted so desperately to be, Tom became more of a “nobody” through murder, lies, and deceit. It is impossible for him to keep impersonating Dickie because he cannot continue to murder everyone who threatens him or his success; eventually he will be caught. In attempting to gain Dickie’s lifestyle, he murdered people who actually cared about him. Never in his life had Tom probably experienced friendship and care from others. Dickie and Peter both showed compassion towards Tom, and because of his desperate need to become somebody, Tom took that friendship away from himself by murdering both of them.

Nealon and Giroux state that there is no such thing as an unconstrained self, meaning we are all products of our culture. Though Tom attempted to fit in with the rich, he simply did not belong there because that was not the lifestyle he was accustomed to; he could not ignore his exposure to the lower class in which he was born. His changing identity was shaped by his desire to fit in where he clearly did not belong, and as a result, he was unsuccessful at becoming somebody. And that’s just the way the cookie crumbles.

Changing Subjects, Foreign Lands

When one thinks of the state of the world in the early 20th century, (a time when the most accessible way for a woman to become successful was to marry a successful man) it is easy to assume that women had little power over their lives, much less those of others. At the same time, colonialism was still prevalent, and although developed Western countries were no longer sending out representatives with the mission of making non-European peoples “civilized,” the balance of power in those territories still leaned overwhelmingly towards the colonizers and away from the colonized. *The Letter* takes place in Indonesia, which was under British colonization at the time, and the main character is a woman. This might lead the average viewer to assume that the plot of the movie would involve the woman being overwhelmed by some societal mechanism and the colonized people being exploited, meaning that both would possess very little power, but this is not the case. In *The Letter*, people who have been interpellated into weak subject positions by society attempt to gain agency either by manipulating these positions, or by transcending them.

The point must first be established that people are made into subjects by society. In classical philosophy, things defined as subjects (by their relation to objects) were considered fairly stable and as being created in some metaphysical manner (in fact, Heidegger showed that the concept of a “subject” was derived from the Greek word and philosophical concept “substance”). This all changed around the time of Nietzsche, who argued that there is no ultimate metaphysical “backbone” for a subject, and that subjects were constructed entirely by the body itself and the context in which it is in. This line of thought prevailed in most of later

* *Being and Time*, 1927

philosophical thought, especially that of literary philosophers such as Althusser, Foucault, and Derrida, all of whom provided numerous examples and logical reasoning explaining the logic and repercussions of this philosophical concept. One of the things this implies is that subjects are not born, they are actively being made every moment of their existence by the context in which they exist. A corollary to this is that a subject (and its position within society) can be changed at any moment, and is actually perceived as different by every observer, since each of these observers also exist within a different context. *The Letter* demonstrates this concept with several characters by showing how one's power and position in society can change instantly with a change in circumstances, and how one may manipulate how they are perceived in order to gain agency. The clearest example of this is the character Leslie Crosbie, the wife of a British rubber planter.

The first scene in *The Letter* shows Leslie shooting her lover, Jeff Hammond, to death. Normally, no one would be able to get away with this, but since Leslie is the wife of a highly respected businessman, her case is different. By merit of her husband, Leslie has been granted a position of respect and power within her contextual surroundings. This gave her the added benefit of having friends in high places, among them a highly respected British attorney, Howard Joyce, who she knew would assist her in case she was in some legal trouble. In addition to this, Leslie was a white woman in a country of Asians and, due to the British/Asian power hierarchy in the colonized country, this guaranteed that her statements would be considered more valid than those of any poor Asian witnesses if the case were brought before the white colonial court (the biased nature of the court is clear from the fact that the judge and lawyers still wore white powdered wigs in traditional British style, and the judge and jury were all white). This background of privilege may have caused Leslie to

believe that even if she killed a man (especially one who was involved in the gambling industry and married an Asian woman), she would be able to escape any serious consequences. Leslie's understanding of her position within the colonial social context gave her the comforting belief that she would be safe no matter what she did. It is possible that this helped her decide to kill Hammond, since she had little or no fear of the consequences.

Once she performed the deed, though, Leslie realized that her privileged social background might not be enough to save her, so she used her understanding of society's perception of the masculine/feminine binary and appropriated the part of a fragile woman who has been unfairly attacked by a drunken, aggressive, powerful man. At the time, women were widely considered weak and defenseless creatures, a belief that would usually be detrimental to a woman's status. Leslie, however, managed to use this commonly held ideology in her favor. She was naturally aware that due to her supposed fragility, people would be sympathetic towards her. Utilizing her knowledge of this, she played the role of the weak, yet courageous woman for all it was worth, using a subject position that would usually be considered a downfall for her own benefit. Several people commented to Leslie that they were impressed by the calm and courageous way in which she delivered her version of what happened. It is clear that they were probably particularly impressed that a *woman*, and a high-class, delicate one at that, could deliver testimony about such a harsh and serious issue in such a confident and strong manner. What they did not realize, though, is that she contrived the entire story herself and--although it did probably take a tremendous amount of courage and bravery to make it up and deliver it--she was not nearly as helpless and much more cunning and devious than everybody assumed. Leslie uses this "damsel in distress" approach with practically everyone in order to make people sympathetic to her. Her husband is incapable of

believing that she could be lying since he naively believes that she is still just a simple, angelic woman. In the beginning her lawyer has his suspicions, but does not believe that she could be so brutal as to kill a man in cold blood. The judge and jury obviously buy her charade since they acquit her fully within 25 minutes of deliberation. Leslie uses her unique position as an upper class, delicate woman in a colonial society in which the minority possesses most of the power to influence everybody she can in order to gain agency.

Whereas Leslie is capable of manipulating her subject position in order to achieve agency, certain characters in *The Letter* are unable to use their positions to their benefit since they occupy such a low place in society, so they must resort to different means of gaining power. The two prime examples of this are Ong Chi Seng and Mrs. Hammond. Ong, Joyce's lowly Asian secretary, has been interpellated into a low subject position due to the fact that he is Indonesian, and doesn't play a very important role in society. In Joyce's conversations with Ong, he uses a harsh and suspicious tone of voice, seemingly without reason. Soon thereafter, though, his suspicions are confirmed when Ong tells him of a letter which could compromise the entire Crosbie case. The letter, in Leslie's handwriting, was sent out on the same day as Hammonds murder, and implores him to come to Leslie's house while her husband is away. Inconveniently enough, the letter is in the possession of Hammond's widow--an Asian woman who Leslie hates simply because of her relationship with Hammond and her race. Ong offers Joyce the letter in exchange for \$10,000, of which he is promised a \$2,000 profit. While this may not make Ong's character seem very deserving of sympathy, it is important to remember that he has very little opportunity to move up the socioeconomic ladder in a moral manner. The only way he can get power is through money, and the only way he can get money is through blackmail. Society has interpellated Ong into a weak

subject position, so he has to transcend it by working in a manner not condoned by society. His character shows the fragile nature of subjects, since in one moment the tables are flipped and he holds great power over the people who usually ruled over him. Ong is assisted in his rise to power by Mrs. Hammond, another character which would usually have little power, but who manages to transcend the role society has relegated her to. First, she married a British man who showered her with jewelry and other gifts. Her relationship with him would logically either bring her up in society, or pull him down. It seemed to do the latter, and caused Leslie to despise Mrs. Hammond with baseless hatred stemming in part from her race. In her comments on Mrs. Hammond, Leslie notes various characteristics which annoy her, notably her slanting eyes. Try as she might, Mrs. Hammond is unable to escape the subject position she was born into. After her husband's death, though, she discovers the letter and just like Ong she switches power relations. The difference is that Ong primarily switched power with Joyce, while Leslie switched with Mrs. Hammond. When she gave Leslie the letter, she dropped it on the ground, effectively making Leslie crawl to pick it up. At the end of the movie, Hammond's widow has the ultimate revenge by murdering Leslie in the night. The viewer can only wonder whether or not she will be able to get away with murder like Leslie did, or whether her subject position will cause her to be found guilty by the colonial court. By the end of the movie, the transient nature of subjectivity is clear, as evidenced by the huge power and role reversals between several characters.

The Letter displays several instances of characters attempting to gain power using their subject positions as given by society or by trying to transcend them. Most of the major characters go on a roller-coaster ride of shifting power relations in which societal norms go awry due to the unstable nature of subjectivity. One can only wonder if *The Letter* took place

in the modern day, without the obviously racist colonial setting, if things would turn out the same or justice would prevail.

April 12, 2006

Classy Crosbie Composes and Controls

“If you’ve got it, flaunt it.” Uttered by Ulla in *The Producers*, this statement ultimately makes sense: people should use every resource available to them in order to make their lives better. Great writers should use their creative abilities to enter writing contests and win awards. Great athletes should try to “make plays” or beat their personal record at each sporting event in order to get noticed by scouts and eventually turn professional. And yes, if a person is good-looking, they should wear flattering clothing...simply because they can. It should be a person’s goal to show off their best qualities, especially if it makes them feel better about themselves.

Unfortunately, there are many people who do not realize their own unique qualities, as well as those who are too highly aware of their strengths. These “aware” people often find ways to use others and abuse their power in many situations. For example, a star athlete may try to show off and make all of the plays, not allowing other team members their time to shine. Well-liked high school students may use their popularity to tempt others to vote for them in student council elections so that they can beat out the more-deserving candidates; people even try to flirt with police officers to get out of speeding tickets. If people are aware of their own strengths, it makes it much easier for them to abuse the power their strengths create.

This idea of people using personal skills and attributes to the best of their ability is depicted well in the 19 1 film, *The Letter*, which stars famous actress Bette Davis. In the film, Davis’ character, Leslie Crosbie, is a typical 19 0s housewife who lives on a rubber plantation in Singapore with her husband, Bob. Life seems perfectly normal until Leslie shoots and kills unsuspecting victim, Geoffrey Hammond, with Bob’s gun. Leslie must face what she has done,

go to jail, and eventually be tried in a court of law. She also must deal (in more ways than one) with the ever-present Mrs. Hammond, a Singapore native, who is grieving her husband's recent death. In the film, Leslie Crosbie uses her subject position of a 19 0s housewife along with her selfish motivations to manipulate other characters.

Ultimately, Leslie has three selfish goals throughout the movie. First, she wants to maintain her "more than friendly" relationship with Geoffrey Hammond. Leslie has always been attracted to Mr. Hammond and appreciates his company much more than that of her husband. This leads her to have an affair with Mr. Hammond, which is a selfish act because Mr. Hammond does not have the same feelings toward her. Because their feelings are not mutual, Mr. Hammond gets married and does not want to see Leslie anymore. When Leslie sprouts awareness of Mr. Hammond's faithfulness to his wife, she immediately becomes jealous of her and strives to ruin their relationship. This becomes goal number two, especially when Leslie realizes that goal number one is unattainable. Because she cannot stand to see Mr. Hammond happy with another woman, she shoots him, causing his death and his wife's heartbreak, her selfishness ultimately stemming from her jealousy. Goal three is for Leslie to keep her high social status within her society of Caucasian people living in Singapore, especially after she commits murder. Leslie enjoys being defined as a high-class woman and embraces associations with people similar to her. She wants to maintain her high social status so that she can reap the personal benefits, many of which deal with having power over the lower classes, and Leslie seems to want all the power she can get, simply to be in control. These three goals lead Leslie to the awareness of her subject position, which is what she will ultimately need to gain the power she wants. For Leslie, this subject position is that of the 19 0s housewife.

Housewives of the 19 0s were seemingly powerless individuals that cooked, cleaned, always looked perfectly made up with styled hair and fancy dresses, and just kept the house in tip-top shape for their husbands. Any stereotypical feminine quality was highly accepted for housewives of this time. It was also part of the typical housewife role to act very meek and powerless, always being in positions of submissiveness. They were to be very dependent on others, especially their husbands, and were always at their mercy. Leslie acted in all of these ways and more to fill her role of the 19 0s housewife.

After Leslie murders Mr. Hammond, she plays into this subject position. First of all, she goes and cries behind a closed door in her house, refusing to come out or talk to anyone until her husband arrives. This follows the 19 0s housewife definition of acting very powerless as well as having an obvious dependency on the man of the house. When Bob finally does return home, Leslie cries to him, searching for comfort, limply holding a tissue in her hand as she apologizes to the two lawyers present for being “bothersome.” She continues to act feebly, while acknowledging her lawyer “guests” as any 19 0s housewife would do. Leslie purposefully shows weakness, as she claims to feel faint and needs to lie down. This places Leslie in a submissive position where she can only be judged by her powerless womanly pose. As Leslie lay on the couch “recovering,” she asks the lawyers about their wives and family, so as to continue to show her concern for her guests over her concern for herself, the duty of the housewife. As Leslie recounts her murderous tale, she does such things as cry and cover her face, reach for her husband, and embrace the submissive position. All of these things play into her subject role of the 19 0s housewife who is weak and dependent.

Leslie’s awareness of her 19 0s housewife subject position allows her to exhibit agency. She does this by manipulating other characters, namely the two lawyers and her husband, Bob.

Overall, Leslie is able to manipulate other characters because of her well-spoken nature. She always enunciates and tells her story in a smooth, easy-to-follow way that is exactly the same every single time. This makes her story simple to understand and seemingly believable. As Leslie recounts her story, she uses her submissive techniques combined with her powerful speech to manipulate the men into believing that she is innocent. Leslie also subtly fishes for compliments from the lawyers, or assurance that they knew how hard it was to be in her position. The lawyers' compliance with these two ideas keeps them involved with Leslie's explanation and also helps her to gain their overall support of her "innocence." In addition, Leslie branches out from her limited submissive position to get up and act out her story. This acting ends up being very powerful and even more manipulative to the lawyers. They like how she accounts for every little detail and therefore continue to display their skewed support of Leslie's "innocence."

Leslie continues to try to manipulate the lawyers through her feminine actions throughout dinner. She humbly apologizes for her cooking and proceeds to reel in more compliments. Her submissive actions carry on as she plays the "innocent eyes" card and ignorantly asks what is going to happen to her. The lawyers can't help but feel sorry for this woman who "isn't even aware" that she will be charged for murder and have to go to jail. With her subtle questions and blank stares, Leslie makes it seem as though she is truly innocent, when in reality she is simply trying to manipulate these lawyers to believe her. Obviously, Leslie's attempts for manipulation are successful largely as a result of her subject position.

Even in jail Leslie continues to use her agency to manipulate others through the knowledge of her subject position. One specific woman who works in the prison always comments on Leslie's bravery after shooting a man "in self-defense" and then having to go to jail because of it. Therefore, Leslie is given special privileges such as being able to stay in the

visitor's room as long as she likes. The woman who works in the prison makes it sound like Leslie had to kill Mr. Hammond in order to protect her own life. People clearly assume that because Leslie is a 19 0s housewife of a certain social class, she could not have committed a crime. By playing up this subject position, Leslie continues to make herself seem innocent, and tries to prolong this innocence as long as she possibly can. While she is in jail, Mr. Joyce comes to see her and she continues to try to use her 19 0s housewife skills to manipulate him. Before she enters the room that he's in, Leslie fixes her hair and clutches the lace that she makes throughout the entire movie. Both of these things enhance her 19 0s womanliness. As she follows Mr. Joyce, Leslie selects a flower and holds onto it throughout the scene which makes her seem even more innocent.

Mr. Joyce ends up confronting and cornering Leslie with all of her lies, but Leslie's knowledge of her housewife role helps her to get out of this sticky situation. In the midst of attempting to change her story, Leslie knows that she needs to return to her "innocent woman" role to regain her manipulative power. Leslie forces herself to faint. When she wakes up, she is instantly in the submissive pose that ironically holds so much power. Because of Leslie's social status, Mr. Joyce decides that he'll do everything he can to help her win her case, even if he knows the true story, not to mention that Leslie's housewife tears to Mr. Joyce could not have been completely useless.

Perhaps the person that Leslie is most able to manipulate through her agency is her own husband, Bob. Especially after her trial, it is clear how much control Leslie has over her husband, even though it really isn't supposed to appear this way. Bob is lonely and almost useless without Leslie. He does not know what to do when she's not home except to miss her and worry about her life. Clearly, Bob is also convinced by Leslie's rendition of why she shot

Geoffrey Hammond, and Leslie finds other ways to manipulate him as well. When Bob decides that it would be in their best interest to move to a new plantation, at first Leslie's natural housewife reaction is of course to agree with her husband and want to move. She states her general agreement as she lies on the couch. Then Leslie realizes that she spent all of Bob's money in order to win her trial and she must manipulate him so that he doesn't want to move to a new plantation. Leslie puts together some trivial words before the whole truth about the money ends up being revealed to Bob anyway. A person might think that after the truth was revealed there would be no hope for the housewife that ultimately betrayed her husband, but that assumption would be incorrect. Because Leslie has basically stayed true to her subject position up until this point, Bob is still able to forgive her. He ends up crying much more than she does, showing her ultimate power over him.

In the movie's final scene, a formal victory party, Leslie must continue to use her housewife power to remain in control. She wears jewelry, perfume, and a flowing gown to complete the ensemble of her subject position, and allows herself to dance with some of the men at the party, being the gracious woman that she is. When in doubt of herself, she returns to the womanly act of making her lace, which has grown quite large by this time. Bob enters the room and Leslie uses her manipulative words to try to comfort him. After she speaks, he admits that he will always be able to forgive people that he loves. This shows that Leslie's manipulative ways could have ended up completely working out for her in the end. However, Leslie decides to take a different route and actually utter the truth, that she does not love Bob. Stepping out of both her roles: 1900s housewife and manipulative woman, Leslie is led to her downfall. She can no longer survive without these subject roles.

Ultimately however, Leslie has manipulated all of the people at the party with her womanly ways. Most of them never doubt her innocence, and the Leslie gala continues well after she has been stabbed to death. Even her lace remains, which has become a symbol of the tangled lies she sewed, although to the people at the party it simply represents her ultimate femininity.

Leslie Crosbie used her role as the 19 0s housewife to be selfish and manipulative. In trying to achieve personal goals, she causes lawyers, workers, and even her husband to believe falsities. She did this by exploiting the idea of womanly meekness, turning it into false innocence that ended up being extremely persuasive. Without this knowledge of her subject position, Leslie could never have expressed agency, the agency which would lead her to a “not guilty” sentence. She manipulated everyone around her; by the end they are all either believing in her lies or aware of how she used them when they did believe her lies. It just goes to show that people who are too aware of their power will find ways to abuse it.

Ultimately, Leslie became the 19 0s version of the popular student council candidate, the hogging star athlete, and the flirting person whose car was pulled over. She takes advantage of the power that stems from her natural qualities, which eventually leads to her own downfall and the unhappiness of myriad people including Bob, Mrs. Hammond, and Mr. Joyce. Although confidence in one’s qualities is quite important, people should be aware and careful of how much they “flaunt” their attributes.

