bad girls and transgressive women in popular television, fiction, and film

edited by julie a. chappell and mallory young

Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film

Julie A. Chappell • Mallory Young
Editors

Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Julie A. Chappell
Tarleton State University
Stephenville, Texas, USA

Mallory Young
Tarleton State University
Stephenville, Texas, USA

ISBN 978-3-319-47258-4 ISBN 978-3-319-47259-1 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-47259-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017937862

Cover image © iStock / Getty Images Plus
Cover design by Henry Petrides

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgments

Our thanks go first to the authors of the fine essays included here. We are endlessly grateful for their brilliant insights, their hard work, and their patience—and above all, for their unflagging interest in bad girls (wink, wink). We also want to express our gratitude to our Palgrave Macmillan editor, Shaun Vigil, who recognized the potential in this collection and has helped us negotiate the process of seeing it into print. We owe thanks as well to the presenters and audience members of the two panels we chaired at the SCMLA Conference in New Orleans in 2013. It was their enthusiasm that inspired us to put this volume together. We do, in addition, have ample cause to recognize our life partners for accompanying us on this journey, as on so many others. Finally, we acknowledge all of the women who have had the courage to transgress the rules and transform the world. We dedicate this book to them.

Contents

List of Contributors

Samaa Abdurraqib works at the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine as a Reproductive Freedom Organizer. Her writings on Muslim American identity and literature can be found in *MELUS* and the edited collections *Arab Voices in Diaspora*, *Teaching Against Islamophobia*, and *Muslim Voices in School*.

Julie A. Chappell is Professor of English at Tarleton State University. Her writing has focused primarily on women's lives and texts from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. She has published several books, including the monograph *Perilous Passages: The Book of Margery Kempe, 1534–1934*. She is currently working on the fate of the nuns during the Henrician Reformation and finishing her second collection of original poetry.

Sara K. Day is an Assistant Professor of English at Truman State University. She is the author of *Reading Like a Girl: Narrative Intimacy in Contemporary American Young Adult Literature* and the co-editor of *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*. Her current research focuses on reimaginings of nineteenth-century texts and tropes in contemporary literature for young audiences.

Joel Gwynne is Associate Professor of English and Cultural Studies at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is the author of *Erotic Memoirs and Postfeminism: The Politics of Pleasure* and co-editor of three collections of essays focused on sexuality, feminism, and popular culture. Journals in which his work has appeared include *Feminist Theory*, *Feminist Media Studies*, and *Critical Studies in Television*.

Elizabeth Johnston is an Associate Professor in the English and Philosophy Department at Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY. Her scholarly and creative works typically employ a feminist lens. She has also facilitated workshops on writing as healing for women.

Kathleen Kennedy is the Department Head and Professor of History at Missouri State University. Her research focuses on issues of gender, race, trauma, and violence. She is the co-editor of *Athena's Daughters* and has written on Xena, Warrior Princess, Joan Jett, and Babylon 5.

Joanne Knowles is a senior lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University, UK, researching gender and popular narrative and culture. She has published on chick lit, comedy/drama on television, and adaptations from page to screen.

Kaley Kramer is a lecturer in eighteenth-century literature and culture at York St John University in York, UK. A specialist in women's writing and the Gothic, she has published work on Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith, Sophia Lee, and Elizabeth Inchbald, among others.

Dragoș Manea is an assistant lecturer at the University of Bucharest, where he teaches seminars in British and American literature, translation, and academic writing. His main research interests include the adaptation of history, cultural memory, and the relationship between ethics and fiction.

N.A. Pierce is a Ph.D. student in the English Department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro specializing in twentieth-century African Diasporic Literatures. Her work examines the intersections of representations of gender and race in works of speculative fiction and the implications of postcolonial legacies and politics on African diasporic writing.

Mihaela Precup is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Bucharest, Romania. Her main research interests include American graphic narratives, trauma and autobiography studies, and family photography.

William B. Robison is Professor of History at Southeastern Louisiana University, co-author of *The Tudors on Film and Television* (2013), and editor of *History, Fiction, and "The Tudors": Sex, Politics, Power, and Artistic License in the Showtime Television Series* (2016).

Kirsten T. Saxton is Professor of English at Mills College where she directs the M.A. Program in English literature. She writes about crime fiction, gender and violence, eighteenth-century literature and culture, particularly women writers, and pedagogy. She is currently working on early women's crime fiction and a collection on adaptation and pedagogy.

Kate Waites is Professor of English and Gender Studies at Nova Southeastern University's Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences. Her work on representations of women in film has been published in a variety of scholarly journals as well as *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies.*

Mallory Young is Professor of English at Tarleton State University. She has written on a wide variety of subjects including European women's films, popular representations of Marie Antoinette, and teaching the Homeric epics through popular culture. She is co-editor of *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction* and *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies.*

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Bad Girls in Popular Culture

Mallory Young

Bad Girls: The Legacy

Western literature, legend, and culture are replete with representations of the "Bad Girl." Perhaps not surprisingly, the initial introduction of women into western cultural narrative coincides with the introduction of transgressive women: those who challenge, ignore, or cross over the patriarchal limits intended to circumscribe them. From the beginning, for good or ill—depending on the point of view of those presenting as well as those receiving the tales—women have been depicted as insubordinate. Eve, according to the Judeo-Christian Ur-text, is the first woman created—and the first to taste the fruits, both literal and metaphorical, of resistance. The ancient Greek tradition similarly presents the first woman, Pandora, making her appearance in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, as the first woman to disobey the voice of male authority.

The ancient Hebrews' Eve and the ancient Greeks' Pandora were among the first of a long line to enter the annals of literature and legend by displaying their inability—or refusal—to play by the rules. As the list of

M. Young (✉)
Department of English and Languages, Tarleton State University, Stephenville, TX, USA

J.A. Chappell, M. Young (eds.), *Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film*,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-47259-1_1

historical, mythological, and literary bad girls grew, so did the patriarchal collection of condemnations against them. Eve's insubordination becomes the justification for centuries of her daughters' subordination. Works of literature, conduct manuals, sermons, ballads, and plays throughout the medieval and early modern western world confirmed the stereotype, enforcing the good girl/bad girl, Eve/Mary distinction.[1] Women could be passive, voiceless, and powerless—worthy of praise—or vengeful, violent, promiscuous, disruptive—requiring restraint. Patriarchal culture, simultaneously and paradoxically, characterized women in both of these opposing ways.

But even in these periods could be heard an occasional voice of dissent: a Hildegard von Bingen, a Marie de France, a Margery Kempe, an Aphra Behn, or, later, a Mary Wollstonecraft, a George Eliot, a Virginia Woolf, a Zora Neale Hurston. These dissenting voices coalesce in what becomes the Women's Movement of the 1970s when the tradition of the bad girl is transformed in two primary ways: she is read differently and she is written differently. The adjective "bad" becomes ironic. The effects of second-wave feminist efforts—resistant readings of earlier texts, the rediscovery of lost or forgotten works of women's literature, and a new body of feminist discourse, both literary and critical, unite to challenge and change the bad girl's reputation. Chaucer's ribald, serially polygamous Wife of Bath; Milton's less-than-equal Eve; even Euripides' vicious and vengeful Medea are recuperated—or understood as creations of a misogynistic ruling culture. At the same time, the praiseworthy heroines of new literary works are no longer those who silently accept submission.[2] And, as in former periods, popular-culture treatments follow suit. From the raucous but ultimately doomed female revenge fantasy of *Thelma and Louise* to the quiet resistance championed in *The Color Purple*, women who break the rules become the heroines of the story.

Looking back now, that period of feminist assurance might appear both paradigm-breaking and limited in perspective. Already in the 1980s feminism had become *feminisms*. Postfeminism and third-wave feminism appeared on the scene—first in the sexually provocative performances of bad girl Madonna and later in countless other pop-culture, literary, and scholarly treatments—to complicate those initially simple second-wave truths.[3] And the image of the bad girl multiplied as well.

We might ask why, in a society in which women have in fact made enormous gains in education, professional life, and civil rights, those who oppose the status quo remain such prominent figures in popular culture.

If, as feminist scholars have suggested, postfeminism assumes, rightly or wrongly, that equality between the genders has been successfully attained,[4] why does the transgressive woman remain a central figure of postfeminist texts, popular as well as scholarly?[5] Is the bad girl's appearance no longer a matter of actual resistance but rather an entertaining performance of transgression? Indeed, a constant line-up of young women successively enter the limelight by performing bad-girl behavior—though their actions might result in no more than the proverbial fifteen minutes of pop-culture fame.

What can we make of women who resist the status quo in an age of endlessly varied postmodern perspectives? In fact, today's bad girl clearly occupies a conflicted space. We can find evidence across the pop-culture landscape of supposed resistance to gender norms that actually exploits and commercializes the bad-girl image. We can locate bad girls being tamed—or destroyed—by heroic male protagonists at the center of an antifeminist backlash. At the same time, we can discover a renewed feminist drive to address the continued existence of gender inequity. And we can catch glimpses of ambiguous figures who simultaneously support and subvert the often contradictory stereotypes of both women and men.

One of the most recent pop-culture trends in girls behaving badly presents young women copying the behavior of aggressive, promiscuous, and uncensored young men. Films including *Bridesmaids* (2011) and *What's Your Number?* (2011), along with TV shows such as HBO's *Girls* (2012–), suggest that women can and should be free from the culturally enforced expectations of sweet, demure femininity. The huge popularity of these productions cannot be denied.[6] But we might ask if the right to express bodily functions in public—and talk about them in equally coarse terms—truly exhibits a further step towards gender equity.[7] Could these performances of bad-girl behavior even be obscuring actual inequalities by appearing to address pseudo concerns?

Other offerings, such as the wildly popular horror fantasy TV series *Supernatural*, might present a more troubling scenario.[8] The show, which first aired on the Warner Bros Television Network (The WB) in 2005 and at this writing is scheduled to begin its twelfth season (now on The CW), focuses on demon-hunter brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester. In spite of its self-conscious postmodern inside jokes referencing, in particular, the obsessive fandom and fan fiction that surround it, the series' antifeminist elements are hard to miss. The brothers were trained by their father, according to the series' backstory, to gain revenge against supernatural forces after their mother was killed by an evil demon. This theme of

righteous revenge for an attack on the patriarchal family might already raise feminist eyebrows. But the fact that many of the so-called demons who must be dispatched take the form of women and even young girls evidences a more sinister streak. As in the case of ancient and medieval representations of women as literal monsters, a supposedly sacred duty necessitates and justifies male violence against women.[9] Not surprisingly, one of those female demons, appearing in Season 4, is Lilith—according to medieval legend, the bad-girl predecessor of Eve who refused to accept subordination to Adam.

By contrast, other popular-culture texts featuring transgressive women do address issues of major concern to feminist activists and thinkers. Possibly the most radical woman to enter recent mainstream popular culture is Lisbeth Salander, the Girl with the Dragon Tattoo. The Swedish novels, trio of Swedish films, and the American remake all present a heroine who is truly subversive, refusing to follow both traditional gender-role prescriptions and the rule of patriarchal law. And, in a less radical, revisionist vein, postmodern writers continue, in fiction, film, and Broadway musicals, to recuperate maligned female characters of the past in such works as *Wicked*, focused on the *Wizard of Oz*'s Wicked Witch of the West, and *Maleficent*, providing a sympathetic backstory for the evil queen of *Sleeping Beauty*. Finally, the series *Game of Thrones*—in both its literary and televised forms—might be identified as the site of every imaginable type of bad-girl incarnation.

While the existence and prominence of transgressive women has continued uninterrupted, then, attitudes towards them have varied tremendously. It is those attitudes we seek to explore in this collection. Why in a postfeminist world are women still so often depicted as threats to social order? How have those depictions changed over time? What are the contemporary parameters of "badness" in the popular mind? How has the use of violence as a method of resistance affected those women who wield it? How has the diversity of race, ethnicity, and even species reconfigured the bad-girl paradigm? Are those women who engage in transgressive actions merely upsetting social norms or actually challenging or even subverting the status quo? And finally, is bad-girl behavior as represented in popular texts truly transformative and empowering—or simply playing in to a commercialized and ultimately non-threatening reestablishment of women's traditional roles? The authors included here address these questions and more.

Bad Girls: The Collection

This collection resulted from what we, the co-editors, think of as the academic life cycle: the cycle of teaching, researching, presenting, and publishing, which then comes back around to the classroom. The volume's genesis can be found in the classes we've offered on the subject of Bad Girls in Literature and Popular Culture, beginning over ten years ago. From its onset the topic was, and has remained, an unqualified hit with our students. This ongoing interest led us to create a session on Bad Girls in Popular Culture at the 2013 South Central Modern Language Association meeting. The resulting panels were so enthusiastically received by both the panelists and the audience members that the next step was inevitable. In fact, the panelists themselves encouraged us to create a collection of essays on the subject, and several of their essays are included in this volume. We are now looking forward to closing the circle: a return to the classroom, book in hand, for the benefit, we hope, of our future students.

While the collection grew organically from classes we taught and a conference session we organized, this is not to say we have sought to advocate a particular position or put forward our own agenda. By contrast, our aim has been to include a wide diversity of subjects, perspectives, and approaches. The essays included focus on the representation of transgressive girls and women in television, popular fiction, and mainstream film from the mid-twentieth to the early twenty-first century. The assessments of the writers vary as much as the actions, and ultimate fates, of the protagonists. What remains a constant among all of these bad girls, however, is the will to cross the boundaries of behavior deemed, by prevailing authorities, to be acceptable.

The book intends to set up a conversation among the essays, both within and across the five sections: we think of each essay as beginning with an implied "Yes, but…." We ask you, our readers, to join this conversation, to notice the connections, disagreements, tensions, and intertextual exchanges and to add your own. For example, both Kate Waites' essay in the section "Crime and Punishment" and Kirsten T. Saxon's in "Domestic Arts" note their protagonists' role in attacking the representatives of patriarchal corporate culture. Joanne Knowles' essay in the "Domestic Arts" section connects with Joel Gwynne's in the section on "Academic Performance" through their common focus on transgressive humor. And essays in both of those sections focus on the issue of devalued female labor in the traditional roles of housewives and teachers. Many of

the essays point out the subversive potential of popular-culture texts, while others, such as Elizabeth Johnston's and Sara K. Day's, reveal an anti-feminist backlash or subtle efforts to inculcate "good behavior" embedded in seemingly "innocent" entertainment directed at adolescents. And some, such as Samaa Abdurraqib's discussion of the Angry Black Woman, see popular texts simultaneously supporting and undercutting traditional stereotypes. At the same time, these essays place feminist/postfeminist analysis in a larger context, entering into ongoing debates about power, equality, sexuality, and gender.

We have grouped the twelve essays into five sections according to the prominent themes of the popular-culture texts under consideration. Essays in the opening section, "Crime and Punishment," consider the overt subversion—or even inversion—of the status quo through women's complex and ambiguous use of violence. While the three essays differ markedly in both subject and treatment, focusing on different genres—one on television, one on film, and one on fiction—they all discuss the effects of violence, both on the oppressive systems the protagonists attack and on the perpetrators themselves. And all three essays share, along with the texts they discuss, a refusal to romanticize or fetishize violence, specifically violent revenge.

The first essay, by Kaley Kramer, focuses on the most discussed—and among the most influential—TV series of all time, Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Comparing the show's representations of violent women to those of an early nineteenth-century Gothic novel, Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya; or the Moor*, and drawing on the work of theorists including Hannah Arendt and Jean Elshtain, Kramer explores the consequences, responsibilities, and potentials associated with women's violence as a response to systemic oppression. Whedon's series, Kramer concludes, is finally optimistic about female empowerment: "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is about the joy of female power: having it, enjoying it, and *sharing* it."

Kate Waites' essay, focused on David Fincher's film version of *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, considers the disruptive force of protagonist Lisbeth Salander, the consummate twenty-first-century warrior woman. Salander challenges the standard female stereotypes—of sexuality, behavior, appearance, ability—while fiercely opposing the patriarchal corporate system that abuses and attempts to subjugate her. Her one-woman war on oppression—supported by feminist journalist Mikael Blomkvist—reveals, Waites argues, the continuation of men's domination and women's inequality in a supposedly egalitarian postfeminist world.

Kathleen Kennedy's treatment of defiant detective Kathleen Mallory reflects on both the trauma suffered by victims of abuse and the concomitant trauma produced by the use of violent revenge. As Kennedy points out, Carol O'Connell's contemporary crime-fiction series ultimately dismisses the possibility of easy happy endings, rejecting the common narrative of healing. The result is a demand placed on readers not merely to show empathy for women and children victimized by those in power, but to account for that victimization in the face of injustice.

The following section on "Domestic Arts" introduces a change of scene and tone. While the first section focuses on overt subversion, this section addresses covert resistance—resistance arising within the sphere of the domestic. Here our authors explore the often humorous and always ironic influence of untamed behavior on hearth and home, the locus of good girls, good women, and especially good wives and mothers—the circumscribed world presided over by the Angel in the House.[10] The bad girls discussed here invade those sacred domestic spaces, acting out in the kitchen, failing to bring order to the parlor, and murdering in the bedroom. The essays included focus on popular fiction from two vastly different traditions: one considering a mid-twentieth-century crime novel, the other analyzing recent and contemporary chick lit.

Kirsten T. Saxon focuses on Vera Caspary's surprisingly subversive 1940s pulp novel *Bedelia*. The novel's eponymous central figure, described on the book's cover as "the wickedest woman who ever loved," appears to be the ideal loving wife and perfect homemaker, the paragon of domestic femininity. She proves, shockingly, to be a serial murderer of husbands, even more interested, Saxon contends, in her performance of domesticity—the fictional "narrative" she creates—than in the financial gains that result. The novel undercuts the conventional narrative of family life, masculine prerogative, and domestic bliss that lies at the foundation of American capitalist society.

Joanne Knowles takes on the genre of chick lit, often considered the regressive domain of a postfeminist performance of domesticity.[11] Knowles points out, however, that the chick-lit protagonists of novels such as *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, and *The Undomestic Goddess* prove themselves unwilling to comply with one area of conventional feminine behavior: the domestic labor of housework. In resisting and ultimately refusing the expectations placed on them to assume the burden of housekeeping, these heroines reveal the continuing gender inequality of contemporary middle-class life. Most significantly, the novels, rather than punishing such "misbehavior," clearly support their heroines' choice to be "bad" mothers, daughters, and wives.

The third section, "Academic Performance," focuses on what is arguably the site of the strongest normative control over female behavior: public school. Here, however, the site of control becomes potentially the site of subversion as well. As Joel Gwynne suggests, the prevailing image of the female teacher normalizes altruism, compassion, and lack of self-interest as the central tenets of feminine behavior. But in the 2011 film *Bad Teacher*, Cameron Diaz, portraying the ultimate reprobate, rejects all of those markers of good-girl performance while demonstrating the transgressive potential of feminist humor. Diaz's character, Elizabeth Halsey, the titular bad teacher, is self-centered and uncensored. And yet the film does not require her to apologize for her bad-girl antics. In line with Hollywood formula, she gives up her goals of breast-enhancement surgery and marriage to a wealthy man, choosing instead her soul mate, the school gym coach. But she remains, in the film and in the halls of learning, happily unrepentant and unreformed.

While the bad teacher might thrive, the teen queen bees of numerous recent novels, movies, and TV series directed at female adolescents are not so fortunate, typically ending up dead. Sara K. Day notes that on the surface, these works, including such pop-culture phenomena as *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Lying Game*, might appear to support the empowerment of those marginalized girls who suffer as the mean girls' easy targets. Instead, Day argues, most of these offerings actually provide a dire warning to adolescent girls tempted to step outside nice-girl lines. In this case, what masquerades as a lesson in empowerment is in fact re-inscribing traditional boundaries. Still, a few recent works, she finds, do locate the problem of girl-on-girl aggression not in the girls themselves but in the social systems that inculcate and perpetuate it.

The two essays in "Revisionist Perspectives" explore twentieth and twenty-first-century representations of bad girls of the past, one historical and one mythological. Historian William B. Robison, taking a markedly different approach from the cultural analyses included in the volume, provides a detailed, comprehensive survey focused on the popular-culture reinventions of a much-maligned historical figure. The sixteenth-century ruler Catherine de' Medici, dubbed by early historians "the Black Queen," is finally receiving a more balanced and judicious treatment from scholars. But contemporary popular-culture texts continue to portray her in the guise of the wicked fairy-tale villain. Movies and TV series airing today, as Robison's research attests, are no more sympathetic or nuanced than films from the thirties or novels from the fifties. Robison notes that audiences' fear of the foreign Other, interest in Catherine's identification with the "dark arts," and the perennial fascination evil characters hold in the popular imagination might all be responsible for Catherine's continued bad-girl legacy.

Elizabeth Johnston focuses on another maligned female figure, the mythic Medusa, providing evidence that the rape-victim-turned-monster has undergone three major transformations. We follow her creation as a figure of patriarchal misogyny in ancient Greek myth, her recuperation in second-wave feminist poetry, and, most recently, her construction in contemporary popular media as simultaneously "terrifying and titillating," revealing a return to antifeminist propaganda. In popular video games, films such as the Percy Jackson series, and commercial images including Rihanna's controversial photographs in British *GQ* magazine—many of these targeting an audience of adolescent males—Medusa's sexualized threat requires male domination, erasing her suffering and justifying her violent death.

The section on "Alternate Realities" ends the volume with a move into a dystopian future. The three essays in this section broaden the parameters, introducing racial, sexual, and even species diversity into the bad-girl trope. Even in these futuristic visions, central female characters continue to question and challenge the restrictive and oppressive forces set against them. These apocalyptic bad girls are featured in a work of speculative fiction, a celebrated TV horror drama, and a fantasy comic book series. In each case, the bad-girl protagonists destabilize and potentially subvert not only the power structures that seek to destroy them, but the unexamined views of their mainstream contemporary audiences.

N.A. Pierce focuses on Nalo Hopkinson's Caribbean speculative novel *Midnight Robber* in which a young black woman finds empowerment and freedom by donning the legendary Carnival persona of the Robber Queen. Trapped in an alternate universe, oppressed by her family and her society, Tan-Tan succeeds in overcoming the forces that limit her by becoming the bad girl of Caribbean legend. She is assisted in her quest by the douen, a non-human species marginalized by the ruling human colonizers, and learns to embrace the figure of the Other in them and in herself.

The AMC TV series *The Walking Dead*, set in a future zombie apocalypse, features another black woman who embraces her difference, the popular character Michonne. As Samaa Abdurraqib claims, Michonne initially embodies the stereotype of the hostile and irrational Angry Black Woman. As the series and her character progress, however, Michonne's layers of depth are disclosed along with her backstory, revealing her as a far more nuanced character. Michonne succeeds in overcoming both her own initial loss of humanity and one of the prominent dehumanizing stereotypes of black womanhood.

Our final offering is, to our knowledge, the first academic treatment of the popular serialized graphic narrative *Saga*, published by Image Comics, which typically features edgy, challenging comic series.[12] In their groundbreaking essay, Mihaela Precup and Dragoş Manea introduce *Saga*'s fascinating otherworld universe along with its multiple species of inhabitants. Prominent among the series' characters are numerous strong females who challenge their cultures' constraints, at the same time challenging our own. The comic succeeds in restructuring the bad-girl paradigm, offering alternative models of desirable, successful womanhood. Analyzing its ironic and destabilizing use of traditional genres including romance and soap opera, the authors demonstrate the comic's subversive potential. The essay thus reveals the transgressive nature not only of the female characters but of the text itself. As the authors persuasively claim, reading *Saga* as "oppositional art" provides us with the image of a bad girl "whose actions are not merely transgressive, but actively transformative: as one who flouts the norms of conventional femininity, destabilizes structures of oppression, and engenders a space of female empowerment."

In conclusion, we do not see this volume as presenting the final word on the issues addressed. Instead, we envision these essays in some cases initiating new dialogues, in others contributing to and energizing ongoing conversations. In fact, the discussions, we hope, will continue well beyond this collection into areas not covered here: issues of non-normative sexualities, of further racial and ethnic diversity, of older women's rebellion.[13] We have little doubt that such conversations will occur: whatever attitudes the bad girl might elicit, we see no imminent danger of her demise.

Notes

1. See, for example, Suzanne W. Hull's classic study, *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475–1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982).
2. As Sarah Appleton Aguiar points out in *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), the seriously "bitchy" bad girl largely disappeared from second-wave feminist literary fiction, as women authors attempted to present favorable female role models. It's fair to suggest, however, that popular culture, particularly movies, provided replacements.
3. In the "InFocus" section of the Winter 2005 issue of *Cinema Journal*, for example, Chris Holmlund identified three major types of postfeminism: "grrrl" postfeminism, academic postfeminism, and chick postfeminism. For

a thorough discussion of third-wave feminism, see *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration. Expanded Second Edition*, ed. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howe, and Rebecca Munford (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

4. See, for example, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 5.
5. Numerous scholarly sources have addressed the postfeminist celebration of unruly behavior and "raunch" culture. For a brief review of the issues, see the Introduction to *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*, ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (New York: Routledge, 2008), "Chick Flicks and Chick Culture," pp. 5–6.
6. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com), *Bridesmaids* grossed nearly $170,000,000 in its first year (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1478338/). *Girls* will enter its sixth season on HBO in 2017.
7. In *The Whole Woman* (London: Anchor, 1999), Germaine Greer warns against accepting this commercialized model of female behavior as a legitimately liberating one.
8. Information on the series appears on IMDB.com (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0460681/), tv.com (http://www.tv.com/shows/supernatural/), and in an admirably thorough and well-researched article on Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supernatural_(U.S._TV_series)].
9. See, for example, Elizabeth Johnston's treatment of the mythological figure of Medusa in this collection. In the case of *Supernatural*, I can't help asking if empowered women are the actual "demons" who have removed the ideal wife/mother from the service of her husband and sons.
10. Virginia Woolf appropriated this well-known phrase for her essay "Professions for Women" from a mid-nineteenth-century narrative poem by Coventry Patmore. Where Patmore used the phrase admiringly—idealizing his future wife—Woolf, on the other hand, put it to ironic use—the use that is far better known today.
11. See, for example, Diane Negra, *What a Girl Wants?: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (London: Routledge, 2008) and Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*.
12. Image Comics is also the publisher of the original graphic series of *The Walking Dead* by Robert Kirkman, the source of the AMC TV series.
13. Scholarly consideration of "unruly older women" has in fact already begun in the collection *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism: Harleys and Hormones* edited by Imelda Whelehan and Joel Gwynne (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). See in particular the chapters by Rosie White, "Funny Old Girls: Representing Older Women in British Television Comedy," pp. 155–171, and Elizabeth Rawitsch, "Silence Isn't Golden, Girls: The Cross-Generational Comedy of 'America's Grandma,' Betty White," pp. 172–186.

PART I

Crime and Punishment

CHAPTER 2

"How Do You Like My Darkness Now?": Women, Violence, and the Good "Bad Girl" in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Kaley Kramer

At a panel discussion for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in 2003, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) offered the "very first mission statement of the show": "the joy of female power, having it, using it, sharing it."[1] As part of the DVD commentary on the first episode of the series, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," Whedon claimed that his intention behind the heroine was to invert the conventional horror narrative in which "a little blonde girl … goes into a dark alley and is killed."[2] Each claim can be understood in relation to the central dynamic tension between femininity and violence that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* explicitly explores. The "little blonde girl" that Whedon invokes is a "good girl," a necessary figure in Gothic fiction and horror film, whose body, "endangered, punishable, and silent," functions as an index of (masculine) violence.[3] Violent *women* have a place in Gothic narratives but only as "bad girls": as aberrant, unnatural, evil. Buffy's connection to violence challenges these associations by repositioning women's uses

K. Kramer (✉)
School of Humanities, Religion, and Philosophy, York St John University, York, UK

J.A. Chappell, M. Young (eds.), *Bad Girls and Transgressive Women in Popular Television, Fiction, and Film*,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-47259-1_2

of violence as strategies for resistance to certain kinds of injustice and inequality. Individual tussles with vampires and demons in dark alleys give way to longer, more complex meditations on women's relationship with violence on political and social scales. Buffy's exceptionalism ("one girl in all the world," as the opening sequence reminds viewers) evolves into a locally shared responsibility throughout Seasons 1 through 6 and, finally, dissolves into a global sharing of "female power" in the series finale.

As Alice Rutkowski notes, Buffy is no longer alone. By the early twenty-first century, "powerful girls [were] everywhere … even in genres previously populated only by men."[4] But the subject of critical and cultural contention is not necessarily "female power," but female violence. This is an important distinction. Hannah Arendt's definitions of "power" and "violence" are useful here to understand the different reactions to women's "power" as opposed to women's "violence." While "nothing is more common than the combination of violence and power," they are not synonymous.[5] "Power," for Arendt, is "never the property of an individual" but "belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together."[6] *On Violence* reflects specifically on the political and cultural context following World War II; the French Revolution offers a context equally open to the kinds of distinctions that she makes, particularly between violence and power. Violence, for Arendt, is instrumental; it is a *means* and "stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues."[7] Female characters in eighteenth-century Gothic narratives serve to indicate where power—manifested in patriarchal constructions from the family to the nation—has failed, where the "group" has broken down. Violent women, who traditionally act from the margins, are without "guidance and justification": they are erratic and unpredictable. If violence is, as Arendt understands it, a means to an end in the hands of the empowered, the chronic disempowerment of women means that they are, by default, unable to be "properly" violent, at least, their violence cannot be understood or sanctioned in a system that understands violence as such.

While Arendt's reflections deal with violence writ large in politics and culture, the dynamics that she explores are evident in individual actions and roles as well. Men have available to them the figure of the "just warrior," a role with an established historical precedent and considerable cultural power.[8] Eighteenth-century male Gothic characters, both villains and heroes, use violence (if not always successfully then at least with impunity). "Good" men can command violence as a means to the greater good; their deaths are sacred, sacrificial, and fit into noble patriarchal narratives.

The corresponding role in this paradigm, as Frances Early notes, is the "beautiful soul": the maternal war supporter whose vulnerability demands male protection (Helen of Troy, Guinevere, the "mother of the nation" in war propaganda). At the margin of this paradigm is the female fighter, "an identity in extremis, not an expectation"—the result of an extreme threat that has temporarily displaced the patriarchal protection offered through men.[9] Where women are violent in traditional narratives, it is frequently as a last resort or for reasons that serve to reinforce passive femininity: in defense of their virginity, their sexual purity, their children. Only very rarely are women permitted to use violence in defense of a man. Women's violence—whether in a singular event or as part of their personality—generally results in their social exclusion, either in relation to the event or because of their exceptionality. When required, women's violence to *themselves*—honorable suicide—is accepted as properly feminine, another defense of the *quality* of femininity that requires the destruction of the tainted example. Buffy's own suicide at the end of Season 5 (rarely considered such by either fans or scholars) repositions her as a redemptive sacrifice, whose gift of (love) herself defeats evil and saves the world. The sixth season reveals the inadequacy of this action, however, and the analogy falls apart. Buffy is forcibly resurrected into a world she considers "hell": even her sacrifice is denied—if the "hardest thing to do in this world is live in it" (Season 5, episode 22), then she cannot take the easy way out. If death is welcome, life will be her punishment.

Violence is a conventional feature of the Gothic mode and serves to distinguish "masculine" and "feminine" in its deployment and effects. While women most frequently serve as indicators of off-page or off-screen violence, they also function as a litmus-test of defensive or chivalric violence. Again, in keeping with the paradigm above, male violence ensures female preservation and through this, serves to hold up qualities which masculinity requires access to but not association with: innocence, purity, submission. The masculine hero preserves and treasures these qualities but does not embody them. In this fashion, then, the thrust of a sword, the swing of a fist, or the crack of a gun can be justified as a means to an end, and the fundamental disregard for innocence/purity/submissiveness that is built into violence can be excused, and the perpetrator is paradoxically valorized for "protecting" precisely those qualities he ignores. Violent women upset not only the binary between "masculine" and "feminine" but threaten the foundation of patriarchal ideology, which requires ongoing violence in the service of an imagined (but never realized) future peace.

Gothic literature, from Horace Walpole's inaugural *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), privileges the "good girl": the virtuous, passive, and submissively suffering woman. Indeed, Walpole's novel features *only* "good girls" in the persecuted Isabella, the martyred Matilda, and the suffering Hippolita. Demonstrating its debt to the eighteenth-century "culture of Sensibility," the Gothic made full use of the connection between femininity and passivity, placing virtuous heroines in scenes of increasingly extreme distress. Regardless of the situation, Walpole's female characters adhere to the cultural strictures forbidding women's violent action. Women who responded in kind to violence or who manifested through their actions the violence implicit in ideology are unredeemable. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) provides a dramatic example of this in the fabulously corrupt and spectacularly violent Prioress, who takes sadistic pleasure in condemning the pregnant Agnes to slow starvation and death in a cell. Even in a text that takes pleasure in graphic violence, the Prioress faces a "most summary and cruel vengeance" at the hands of an angry mob (*not*, importantly, by the hand of the heroic Lorenzo), who, after stoning her to death, "exercised their impotent rage on her lifeless body … till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting."[10] Ann Radcliffe's genre-defining novels of the 1790s include examples of violent women as mad (Laurentini in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [1794]), and dangerous (Marchesa Vivaldi in *The Italian* [1797]). It is not until Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya; or, The Moor* (1806) that a "bad girl" enters the scene in the character of Victoria di Loredani.

Splendidly unrepentant and "strikingly criminal," Victoria is violent by nature and violently nurtured. As Kim Michasiw notes, her crimes "are more ambitious and more extensive than those of her nearest parallel … Laurentini di Udolpho": while the latter "haunts" Radcliffe's novel, Victoria takes center stage and is, albeit temporarily, successful beyond the dreams of even Lewis's infernal Monk, Ambrosio[11]:

> She commits three premeditated murders, only one of which has any claim to having been provoked by a fit of passion. She is the direct cause of a suicide. She is untroubled by her illicit sexual liaisons—except by their not taking place. She leaves polite society to live among banditti with no male guardian save the Moorish servant for whom she entertains increasingly explicit sexual longings. She never ceases to blame her erring but pathetic mother for all her troubles … and watches over the final convulsions with a fixed smile of contempt.[12]