

“Suddenly I’m This Punk Rock Star / of Stage and Screen”:  
Genre-bending and Gender-bending in Hedwig and the Angry Inch

The overwhelming (and unlikely) success of John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask’s transgender rock musical Hedwig and the Angry Inch (1998) has prompted scholars and critics alike to herald the text as one which effectively subverts traditional understandings of sex and gender, largely due to its successful negotiation of the shortcomings of the oft-maligned rock musical genre. Mitchell’s 2003 film adaptation of the musical has exposed Hedwig to a larger pool of scholars and critics, and its praises as a successfully subversive text have continued to be sung. The film has been accorded the same degree of acclaim as the musical, despite how it significantly changes the musical’s narrative technique and dispenses with several of the characteristics for which it earned much of its original admiration. Drawing upon Linda Hutcheon’s A Theory of Adaptation in order to respond to variety of scholars and stage critics who locate Hedwig’s engagement with traditional gender norms primarily within its status as a unique example of the rock musical genre, I argue that the film adaptation of Hedwig not only preserves the musical’s subversion of sex and gender but communicates a more refined and productive understanding of identity. In particular, I examine the film’s explicit separation of the identities of Hedwig and her former lover Tommy Gnosis (in contrast to the stage production, which calls upon one actor to play both roles) as well as its exploration of Hedwig’s story over a longer period of time (in contrast to the stage production, in which Hedwig narrates her life story, including her brief, scandalous reconciliation with Tommy, in retrospect). These departures from the stage production draw closer attention to Hedwig’s gender performance as it proliferates throughout a variety of different experiences and events. Ultimately, I conclude that Mitchell’s film adaptation more effectively allows Hedwig to transcend the Platonic creation myth which frames her story in both texts.

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Abstract:

Where are the Women? : Unearthing Femininity in The Road

The essay argues that although female characters are seldom physically present within McCarthy's The Road, numerous examples of femininity are presented within the text of the novel. The author posits that the realization that the novel is not devoid of femininity complicates the tendency that some have to label McCarthy's works as "misogynistic." Using discussions of McCarthy's other texts by scholars such as Sullivan, Spurgeon, and Fisher-Wirth, the father-son journey is analyzed for all of its feminine qualities. The discussion begins at what would seem the obvious point, the deceased mother—who continues the McCarthian tradition of deceased female characters (Sullivan)—and proceeds by looking at the barren landscape as an antipode of the "fruitful mother and untouched virgin...offering nurturing fertility" (Spurgeon) that it is traditionally perceived to be, in favor of understanding it as the abject feminine (Fisher-Wirth). Femininity in the novel is further analyzed in the form of a womb-like bomb shelter that is discovered by the father-son duo, in which they find warmth, nourishment, and security that helps to transform the pair from the dying beasts that they are when they enter the shelter, into the recognizably human creatures that exit it. The father is then examined for aspects of his character that seem to be feminine, specifically his loss of blood throughout the novel, which is viewed as a form of symbolic menstruation similar to that of John Grady Cole in All the Pretty Horses (Sullivan). The argument is concluded after the inspection of two women who are physically present in the novel: the mother in the family who adopts the boy after his father dies, and the woman cradling the man that was shot with a flare gun. The essay deliberately avoids scrutinizing the depictions of femininity that it uncovers for their misogynistic tendencies, instead leaving the topic open for continued argument, and ending with the assertion that there are both positive and negative depictions of femininity in The Road, which suggest that the argument of misogyny in McCarthy's texts is not so clearly one-sided.

“‘Necessity Being the Mother of Invention:’  
Generative Acts in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*”

Criticism of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* has long been centered on the repression of the March sisters’ creative expression. Clark and Keyser agree that while the novel does contain moments of brilliant generative acts, the Marches and their creativity are later repressed by a patriarchal society and the pressures of a nineteenth century society. Fetterly relates this repression to Alcott’s own compromise of authorial ambitions. Standing notes the necessity for personal space for imaginative acts. While many critics have centered on the repression of these generative acts, few have troubled themselves about their origins. The March sisters’ necessity, or lack of luxury, spurs them to pursue generative acts or products. The Marches attempt to compensate for the differences in their social and economic classes. The connection between necessity and creativity can be seen especially when the March sisters are juxtaposed against the wealthy Gardiners, Moffats, and Chesters. While highlighting differences between the classes and their capacity for generative acts, Alcott seeks to demystify the creative act. She sees the artist not as a being especially receptive to inspiration, but one who has a need which must be met. The criterion of necessity is met by those of middle economic class, like the Marches, who struggle to exist in an upper class social circle. Jo creates plays and props to bridge the gap between her middle class economics and upper class social tastes. Meg and Amy not only generate products, but acts as well; they pretend to have finery in an attempt to create an illusion of wealth. Laurie, by association with the Marches, attempts to follow suit with the generative product of a requiem to win Jo’s love, but fails, reflecting the inability for the upper class to reproduce creativity due to a lack of necessity. Alcott should not be admonished for repressing the creative acts of the Marches at the end of her novel, but celebrated for enlightening her readers about the origins of creativity in the necessity of the March family.