
The 'Cool Wife' turned 'Nasty'
*A Reading of the Femme Fatale in Gillian
Flynn's Gone Girl*

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Abstract

This article rewrites the Femme Fatale as the "trickster" and the "nasty woman" in the American novel *Gone Girl* (2012), by Gillian Flynn. Both concepts represent a threat not just to traditional gender roles but also to the contemporary depiction of women in fiction. The figure of Amy is central to this discussion of a subversive discourse that places her against traditional gendered masculine novels that depict males as intellectual, active yet females as Cool Girls. This article provides an innovative analysis of Amy that expands on the current debate; both in terms of women's, gender and sexuality studies. It demonstrates the "trickster woman" in contemporary fiction-whose unethical perversion marks a shift in the contemporary literary scene. It argues that female "nastiness and trickery" have provided Amy with flexible strategies through which she can undermine taboo subjects and put herself as the prototype to the Ultra Nasty Femme Fatale.

Keywords: Gone Girl; trickster; nasty woman; cool girl; ultra femme fatale.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Gillian Flynn is one of the female American writers who mirror the interests of women in contemporary post-feminist American society. Her writings demonstrate greater interest in post-feminist themes, including female agency, female amorality, female rage, female perversity and malice, among others. Her novel *Gone Girl* (2012), examines the anxieties of the contemporary American couple, Amy and Nick Dunne, about marriage and mad love reassessing the traditional bond of marriage and female rage in a post-feminist discourse which looks to show why when feminism encouraged women to be independent and self-sufficient does this woman like Amy Dunne resort to the "Cool Girl."

The nasty woman, also known as "the neo-femme Fatale," is a notion introduced by the interdisciplinary scholar Agnieszka Piotrowska (2019) to reflect on female agency, subjectivity, and also "shady ladies" (p. 1). It presents the struggle between misogynistic and feminist views as reflected in Trump's phrase about Hillary Clinton who "was unable to withstand the ultra-patriarchal nasty man that Trump embodies" (Piotrowska, 2019, p. 2). Female "nastiness" is perceived as a liberating tool for women and it builds "new allegiances with men" (p. 20) yet it can be "a desperate gesture" that leads to tragic ending (p. 9).

The trickster is one of the most famous mythical figures. As described by Marilyn Jurich (1999), she is "'on the boundary' of society and serves to mediate oppositions, bring together those elements which have always been at odds" (p. 70). Doty G. William and William. J. Hynes (1993) strongly emphasize the ambiguous nature of the trickster, considering it to be the embodiment of an "'out' person, and his activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, out -of -order" (p. 34). Among the main characteristics of a trickster, according to Jurich (1999), are the ability to undermine any person, place, and belief, no matter how sacred it is. The female trickster is witty and "played the fool to shape-shift reality and expose the real foolishness of human institutions" (p. 70). In other words, the female trickster or the "trickstar" wears virtual masks to subvert taboos, transgress ordinary reality and break down the prevailing social order.

Gone Girl revolves around the story of a married couple, Nick and Amy Dunne, who encountered obstacles in their marriage. The female heroine in this novel, Amy Dunne, is portrayed as a deviant wife who changed from a well-behaved and obedient wife to a perfidious wife, bringing a psychological degradation to her husband's life. Amy is missing, and her husband Nick is suspected to be her killer. *Gone Girl* shows Amy Dunne as a dangerous wife who is alive, but tries to trick people and the media by creating a false story that her husband has killed her. The ending of the story depicts how Nick is forced to live with Amy as his wife to take care of the upcoming child, although he knows that Amy plans to destroy his life. Through the stories of Amy and Nick, *Gone Girl* projects the subversive discourse of female retaliation against the masculine world, which Amy considers misogynistic and manipulative.

Gillian Flynn's ambivalent view towards feminism, as shown by the dark marriage between two altering narrators Amy Dunne and Nick, has been highlighted by critics such as Carol Iannone in an article entitled "What *Gone Girl* Tell Us about Feminism." Relying on Flynn's perception of feminism and feminist studies, Iannone (2020) perceives *Gone Girl* as a "scathing allegory of contemporary feminism," asserting that Flynn splits up from feminism, "kill[s] feminism" and adopts a post-feminist perspective (p. 172). She states that *Gone Girl* illustrates an "unmistakable

subtext subversive of feminism” (p. 172). According to Iannone, Flynn’s post-feminist stand is asserted by her anti-feminist reflection.

The present study is dedicated to an analysis of Flynn’s cynical perception of feminism from the perspectives of Agnieszka Piotrowska, Betty Friedan, William. J. Hynes and Marilyn Jurich about the “female trickster” and the “nasty woman.” In fact, a considerable criticism has been directed at Flynn’s work with little emphasis placed upon the impact of contemporary theories on it. In “Cool Girls and Bad Girls: Reinventing the Femme Fatale in Contemporary American Fiction,” Kenneth Lota (2016) considers Flynn’s *Gone Girl* as being both grossly feminist and misogynist. He claims, in this context, that “both versions of *Gone Girl* work to make us aware of Amy’s exceptional status” (p.168). In her article entitled “Is *Gone Girl* Feminist or Misogynist?” Eliana Dockteman (2014) maintains that Flynn’s novel “is both [feminist and misogynist], and that’s what makes it so interesting” (p. 1). The present study draws on an alternative perspective to approach Flynn’s novel via Piotrowska, Jurich and William Hynes concepts while casting Amy Dunne as a prototype to the Ultra Nasty Femme Fatale of Contemporary fiction and the feminist heroine.

Additionally, in “Corkscrew in the Neck,” Jacqueline Rose (2015) contends that *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn is misogynistic and “repellent” (p. 25). In the opinion of Rose, *Gone Girl* is “the perfect enactment of a brand of misogyny that has women’s minds – as much as, or more than, their bodies – in its sights” (p. 26). Rose deems Flynn’s fiction as deeply anti-feminist because of the cruel manner the female protagonist punishes her husband, Nick. Our article does not follow the same line of the previously mentioned reasoning as it looks to demonstrate Flynn’s eagerness to present the female protagonist as a prototype for the ultra Nasty femme fatale. It also reassesses feminine concerns, the roles of women as nurturers, and the constructive image of the female heroine in the contemporary literary scene.

II. THE KILLING OF THE COOL GIRL

In the contemporary literary scene, a tremendous emphasis is laid on the trope of “the Cool Girl,” or simply “Amazing Amy” which is a marker of Amy Dunne’s idealized model life with her husband Nick. Gillian Flynn’s archetype of the “Cool Girl” reiterates the status of women as belonging to the domestic space of the home. As Betty Friedan (2001) puts it, women have “learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, high education, [and] political rights” reinforcing the fact that they cannot properly construct their identity far from the tyrant patriarchal doctrine and the domestic space (p. 46). This American trope is intimately related to, Coventry Patmore’s “The Angel in the House” (1854), John Ruskin’s “Of Queens’ Gardens” (1865), and Barbara Welter’s “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” (1966) that praise the ideal qualities of the true English and American woman. However, Amy complained in her MONOLOGUE of the “Cool Girl” of being entrapped and playing the role of a ‘Cool Wife.’ The life of Amy, for example, under the guise of the “Cool Girl,” is seen as “the woman a man wants them to be,” as “for a long time cool girl offended [her]” (Flynn, 2012, p. 218). Amy, under the umbrella of the ‘Cool wife’ appears to be “masked” within the domestic sphere, one which she thinks “strange” as it deprived her of “[her] Independent Young Feminist card” (p. 43).

Gillian Flynn conceived the female protagonist as a ‘Cool’ woman who hovers over her and says, “[be] hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping.... because Cool Girls are above all hot” (p. 218). However, this

typical female figure 'dream girl' had always been a male fantasy rather than a real image (p. 219). Amy Dunne's husband, forbidding female complaint or intellectuality or autonomy, sounds very much, in fact, like Antoinette's husband in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who turns her into a Barbie doll "they try to make it sound like you are the cool girl so you will bow to their wishes" (p. 220). With Amy's recognition of the 'Real Amy,' she is liberated both from the restraints of the "Cool Girl" and the need to satisfy the patriarchal society, in particular, Nick. She realizes that either of these requirements would have denied her true self. In the passage of the "Cool Girl," she states: "Nick wanted Cool Amy anyway. Can you imagine, finally showing your true self to your spouse, your soul mate, and having him not like you?" (p. 220). Amy recognizes that "a Real Amy in there, and she was so much better, more interesting and complicated and challenging than Cool Amy" (p. 220). Hence, Amy manages to kill the "Cool Girl."

Yet she knows that within her lay a 'Real Amy,' entrapped and unreachable, remembering herself as a "Cool Girl," she says: "I used to see men—friends, coworkers, strangers—giddy over these awful pretender women, and I'd sit these men down and calmly say: you are not dating a woman, you are dating a woman who has watched too many movies written by socially awkward men who'd like to believe that this kind of woman exists" (p. 218). As this statement suggests, Amy is consciously aware of the tropes of the time. Playing the role of the "Cool Girl" may be explained away or even made a virtue, as a sign of her treacherous traits of nastiness, autonomy and rebellion; but her wit is in fact an act of transgression. As Rose (2015) puts it, "intelligence is not something women deploy to any good" (p. 26). Thus, the "Cool Girl" becomes a feminine property, comprehended by women as a sign of captivity, an entrapment, where they are conceived as marionettes to placate male desire. In the same token, women, as Lamb Vanessa Martins (2011) states, have been taught in school that their "fundamental priorities" as "ideal housewives" are "the maintenance of the house and the well-being of the family" (p. 1).

Nagged by the requirements of the "Cool Girl," the idealized wife, helpless creature and conscious of the patriarchal social norms, Amy fabricates a false story which had the effect of ending her conflict with the boredom of mad love and subjugation. She transcends the polarity represented by married couples in American society; male intellectuality, and strength versus female fragility, and impotence. In this context, Amy is par excellence a nasty woman for she "knows that it is important to imagine another world, in which binaries are got rid of—finally" (Piotrowska, 2019, p. 115) If Amy Dunne, the female protagonist who represents the evil woman, rejects both of these extremes for the sake of her freedom, she nonetheless creates the strong impression that the freedom of the woman—liberation exemplified by the Ultra nasty femme fatale—is the truer dedication. When Amy looked at other "pretender women," she readily perceived how their consciousness of the tropes of the time as 'cool women' had made them 'nasty'; she was as quick to see where they had been made strong. In the name of the "Cool Girl," she pities the foolishness of men who conceived them as "Cool Girls" rather than human beings. Amy perceives that it is foolish for men to "think this girl exists. Maybe they're fooled because so many women are willing to pretend to be this girl" (Flynn, 2012, p. 218). If women could have transcended that myth of the "Cool Girl," that bitter trope of entrapment, Amy thinks, they would have shown their true selves as she did. Yet, it is precisely that bitter trope of entrapment that deprives Amy of her "Real Amy." Although the archetype of the "Cool Girl" is still new in contemporary fiction, the reality of the feminine position in American literature is quite different.

Amy's battle to frame Nick, to fight for one's liberation and self recognition against the smothering embrace of the "Cool Girl," is heavily seen in the "Cool Girl Monologue." An early example in American women's poetry, one of the most brilliant, is Marge Piercy's poem, "Barbie Doll." Published in 1971, the story is the narrative of the unrealistic expectations that the patriarchal society places on women and girls. The girl in the poem spends all the time trying to please society, once she is not able to satisfy the masculine world, inevitably she is being destroyed in the name of the standards of beauty. As we follow her story through her childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood—one of virtual hostage, enforced protection, and impotence—readers gradually perceive that she does not love the unrealistic standard of beauty, nor appreciate them being stereotyped. Amy echoes the stereotypical representation of the girl regarding the "Cool Girl." Rather, she is seething with resentment and bitter disappointment at the "Cool Girl" trope to imprison, control, and underestimate her throughout her life. In her monologue of the "Cool Girl," she sees a 'Real Amy' during her marriage with Nick; a woman who finds her true self and she no longer needs to please anyone, who circles the "Cool Girl" requirements endlessly on her hands and knees, looking for the way out, who is "showing [her] true self to [her] spouse, [her] soul mate, and having him not like [her]" (Flynn, 2012, p. 220).

Amy is pictured as a "Cool Girl," which often places her in a prison. However, this title often places her in a state of glory and triumph as illustrated at the end of the novel. Amy, of course, is herself, trying to save her marriage; but she can do so only by being 'pregnant.' Amy ponders: "Well, now might be the right time. To start a family. Try to get pregnant.' I know it's crazy even as I say it, but I can't help myself – I have become the crazy woman who wants to get pregnant because it will save her marriage" (p. 186). In the story's enthralling conclusion, she exploits the myth of motherhood, systematically faking a pregnancy. Amy's act echoes Barbara Welter's view on women position in her article entitled "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," where she (1966) argues, "the attribution of true womanhood" is based on "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" assuming that "without them no matter whether there [is] fame, achievement or wealth, all [is] ashes. With them she [is] promised happiness and power" (p. 152). Thus, In the role of mother victim, she can express her anger toward her husband; and when at last she gains the public sympathy; and she ensures that she is perceived as a victim of an abusive husband, there is a triumph in Amy's narrative, "The media has turned on [Nick], the public has turned on [Nick]" (Flynn, 2012, p. 207). Yet, she is truly treacherous and nasty; she has defeated him only by embracing the institution of motherhood, the "very thing [she] once mocked" (p. 186).

For Amy, Flynn's heroine, and for many women in American literature, the myth of motherhood is a prison as well as a sanctuary. Being psychologically and emotionally disturbed by the virtues of motherhood, Amy dares to defy society and say what she wants; she struggles vaguely to lure sympathy towards her and takes advantage of every situation offered, in particular societal expectations of maternal duties. On the simplest level, the myth of motherhood offers Amy Dunne a socially acceptable excuse for imprisoning her husband Nick within their marriage; and, conversely, the expression of these "feminine" feelings may be interpreted as signs of Amy's disturbing and ambivalent view of motherhood. Amy reflects the ambivalent lens in her thinking toward the subject of motherhood, in particular her maternal duties. As Nick puts it: "Amy had decided she didn't want kids, and she'd reiterated this fact several times" (p. 103). Amy has to behave in accordance with the role of the

"Cool Girl" before she can confront her husband, the police and the public. Thus, trickery has its privileges, one of which is positioning Amy as an exemplary of the cool mother.

Amy's frustration and rage have been rendered implicitly. Other aspects of her personality, however, are unthinkable, unspeakable, or unmemorable by Nick. The "Cool Girl" commands that her existence and complaints should be avoided, denied or suppressed. Amy has chosen to avoid this trope, and in her monologue and throughout the plot, she succeeded. Amy manifests more ambivalence; she playfully keeps in touch with "taboo" but with significant levels of intelligence and trickery, and simultaneously search for covert, risky ways to keep her marriage with Nick.

III. AMY'S NASTINESS AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE FEMALE TRICKSTER

Amy Dunne goes against the grain of her society, the fabricated story of being missing is one in which craftiness on the part of Amy pays off. For instance, Amy causes anxiety to her husband Nick and the police since she is a "trick-player" (Hynes, 1993, p. 35). This can be seen in the way she maps out her disappearance. Not only does she accused her husband of being her killer, but she notoriously leaves her diary chronicles as proof. To the surprise of the police and Nick, she claims that her husband "may kill [her]" (Flynn, 2012, p. 203). She sarcastically uses such verb "kill" to position herself as a victim and Nick as a murderer. Also, after going through a marriage breakdown, Amy points to her husband's abusive manners that "scared [her and made her] head [ring]" (p. 194). Therefore, Amy, as a female trickster, tricks her husband and media into believing her pregnancy at the close of the story, thereby securing her future, marriage and husband's punishment, though she resorts to marriage institution and the cool wife by this action—for a femme fatale is not allowed to resort to the institution of marriage and motherhood—but Amy shows interest in keeping her marriage and using it as a means of liberation.

Another trickster feature related to this typical figure is her behavior marked by trickery and deceit. In fact, it is a very complex deception realized by a fabricated story of her own creation. The diary entries may actually be a great illusion and a deceit of Amy's design. By framing a fraud disappearance and perceiving the diary entries as factual proof, Amy lures Nick and the police into her game. Amy is aware that the image she created allows her to get support from the American society and readers by changing their perception of reality "I hope you liked Diary Amy. She was meant to be likable. Meant for someone like you to like her. She's easy to like" (Flynn, 2012, p. 231). Amy's main task has been to change the existing reality, which is being entrapped by Desi, her ex-boyfriend and punishing her husband Nick. Such subversion of reality is seen as she brutally killed Desi to end his control over her in a gesture of panic. Thus, Amy believes that playing the role of the 'rape victim' is a means to regain Nick's, the police's and the readers' sympathy.

Amy, the female trickster, is a gifted "situation inventor" (Hynes, 1993, p. 37). For the aim of deconstruction and subversion, Amy sets a series of events into motion, and, through those events, she inverts roles as she adopts many, "I've already been: Amazing Amy. Preppy'80s Girl. Ultimate- Frisbee Granola and Blushing Ingenue and Witty Hepburnian Sophisticate. Brainy Ironic Girl and Boho Babe. Cool Girl and Loved Wife and Unloved Wife and Vengeful Scorned Wife. Diary Amy" (Flynn, 2012, p. 231). Also, she redefines "the truth" on her own terms by using media and the diary entries. It is by means of the invented situations that Amy is tested and

reborn, while Nick with the masculine world are challenged and transformed. Therefore, the craftiness of the invented stories and the cunning use of them is a powerful trickster mode of liberation that gives Amy Dunne a space, as well as the displacement means, to gain control over the masculine world, where "no order is too rooted, no taboo too sacred, no god too high, no profanity too scatological that it cannot be broached or inverted" (Hynes, 1993, p. 37).

In Desi's home, Flynn deprived her heroine of her former self-autonomy by leaving her at the mercy of Desi, where strength, self assertion, and freedom were all rendered meaningless for a period of time. For Flynn, it was Amy's desperate situation after being robbed that leads her to seek the help of her ex-boyfriend, Desi. In fact, If the dominant notion of manhood emphasizes males as autonomous, intellectual, and strong, Flynn uses the stereotypical image by focusing on Amy's victimization and vulnerability. As the heroine has been engulfed by an intense possessive and obsessed man, this experience not only disturbs her mind and scares her but also leads her into losing control of the situation. Flynn also uses the stereotypical image as she turned this helpless situation, Amy's increasing panic, and emotional desperation into instrumental means that helped reconnect the heroine and gain the sympathy of her husband Nick, media and readers. The near-captivation situation, therefore, performed the thrilling means because it was only by being trapped by Desi, encountering an intense panic, rather than her perceived strength and power, that Amy has been revealed as a real victim to male dominance.

The capacity for "situation inversion" comes from the female tricksters' inherent talent for tricks (Hynes, 1993, p. 36). Amy Dunne is a female trickster par excellence, for she knows how to play tricks—her "ability to overturn" (p. 37). In Hynes' perspective, the "situation inversion" played by Amy is to "dwell in no single place but to be in continual transit through all realms marginal and liminal" (p. 35). In other words, it is by this behavior that Amy takes reality away from her husband Nick, the police and Desi only to give it back in another form with an alternative perspective. In this sense, The near-captivation and the rape situations are designed acts by Amy to kill Desi and incriminate him to protect herself and her plan in gaining Nick's sympathy. Amy's tricky behaviour successfully affects transformation by means of the violent, the offensive, and the nasty murder of Desi. When such behaviour works, a place of well being and shelter is altered into a place of risk, a place of stabilization is turned into a place of disorder (p. 37). As it happens, things for Nick and his world are never going to be the same again.

Amy Dunne displays a complex set of features. She is at once a "Cool Girl" or "Amazing Amy," but she also functions as an observer, who turns Nick into a spectacle to look at. Thus, Amy deviates from Mulvey's concept of "the male gaze" 'to-be-looked-at' as the story and Nick are under her gaze. Amy states, "I catch him looking at me with those watchful eyes, the eyes of an insect, pure calculation" (Flynn, 2012, p. 203). That is to say, Amy manipulates the gaze by catching the sight of Nick's eyes. In the construction of the relationship between them that gaze is not Nick: it is Amy's. Here, an importance of the sense of the gaze pervades her words. Thus, the sight of Nick was something she enjoyed because he was punished for his betrayal.

The need to punish Nick inevitably leads Amy to transcend social norms, deconstruct the status quo, and break social taboos—all are illustrations of Amy's transforming power. It is through her many exploits of tricks that Amy turns facts on their heads by swaying the perception of media and the police into believing her faked disappearance, rape and domestic abuse; she subverts social structures by playing the role of the victim; and she overturns the national media in thrall hearing

that she is pregnant. As Amy puts it, "Americans like what is easy, and it's easy to like pregnant women – they're like ducklings or bunnies or dogs" (p. 252), thus playing on their sensibilities and gaining their sympathy. Amy's behaviour itself is an integral part of the ultra nasty femme fatale creative and transformative power in the invention of situations, deception and playfulness, ambiguity, and shape shifting.

I argue, therefore, that Amy Dunne can be considered as the prototype of the mesmerizing "female trickster," alongside the figure of 'the nasty woman,' who is "a partial descendant of the well-known figure of the femme fatale" (Piotrowska, 2019, p. 15). Amy is driven to her nastiness and treacherous deeds by not giving up her erotic desire. Interestingly too, Amy's strength is not connected to her subversive sexuality. In fact, one could argue that her rejection of the requirements of the "Cool Girl" is compulsory in her ascent to agency. It is interesting to consider that her metamorphoses into a 'nasty woman' and a 'female trickster' became necessary modes for her liberation. Amy's metamorphosis is a choice that only became essential to face her husband's betrayal and the patriarchal restraints.

The "Cool Girl" is metamorphosed into a staggering "nasty woman." The "nasty woman" and the "female trickster" can be seen as signs of female transgression. However, the "Cool Girl" is a sign of servility; a symbol of the invalid, a meek woman who slavishly conforms to her prescribed role in the patriarchal society. On the other hand, the "nasty woman" and "the female trickster" symbolize self assertion and the capacity for manipulation. Nick describes Amy's threat to him and the patriarchal authority, "I was her little puppet on a string" (Flynn, 2012, p. 224). This statement identifies Amy more with the "nasty woman" and "the female trickster" than the "Cool Girl" for she is a sign of subversion. The issue of motherhood for this "nasty woman" is seen as a significant component for her triumph. Even though motherhood, or child-bearing has been conceived as an opposition to Amy's objectives and career, Amy embraces her role as a wife and a mother to keep her marriage with Nick, "I have become the crazy woman who wants to get pregnant because it will save her marriage" (p. 186). Speaking of this identification of Amy with her natural mission as a mother, and the guilt Nick feels about deceiving her, Nick seems lost and perplexed hearing about Amy's pregnancy as he says, "The reporters pelted the question over and over at me. Nick, was Amy pregnant? Nick, were you upset Amy was pregnant? Me, streaking out of the park, ducking like I was caught in hail: Pregnant, pregnant, pregnant" (p. 192). Therefore, the "Cool Girl" becomes a refuge for this "nasty woman" to keep the institution of marriage.

A femme fatale does not resort to the institution of marriage most of the time. She seems to exercise her sexuality to attain her liberation. Amy echoes features of the traditional femme fatale because she is beautiful; she allures men for her own benefit, she uses her subversive sexuality—and unlike the classic femme fatale, she survives, breaking down the patriarchal force, she is also strong to face the patriarchal norms. Amy betrays the basic rules of American society, marriage and couples, including media. In addition, this "female trickster," in the guise of the "Cool Girl" is very nasty and treacherous to readers. She pretends to use 'the domestic abuse' to deceive Americans and readers. In fact, the extent of her treachery is never quite established.

The "nasty woman" in *Gone Girl* is altered by her rage and desire for revenge. As Piotrowska (2019) puts it, "the 'nasty woman' in Western history who becomes 'nasty' as a response to a sexual violation or a violation of some other kind perpetrated by men" (p. 7). Amy's autonomy is strengthened by her sense of betrayal and desire to be liberated from the restrictions of the masculine society. In fact, it is Amy's

readiness to embrace the institution of marriage and motherhood that propels her to create a change in her life. Thus, it is for Amy to use her body and subversive sexuality, to empower herself. This treacherous woman subverts the masculine icons by deploying the institution of marriage for her own empowerment. In fact, Amy is doubly nasty not because she wants to be so, but this sounds the only manner to punish Nick. First, she is nasty because of her evilness, she uses treacherous deeds to undermine Nick's authority and media. Second, she is nasty because of her intelligence and subversive sexuality to lure men into dangerous situations. Amy's nastiness seems, in fact, the only mode for her fabricated story, for it is her strategy to retain her comfortable life. Thus, Amy appears to be among the most dangerous women that undermine male authority.

The mask of nastiness appears with regularity in Amy's faked pregnancy. In practicing domesticity, for example, Amy Dunne's total embracement of the feminine role is acted out before her pregnant neighbor Noelle, a housewife whom Amy plans to deceive. If crazy Amy seems disgusted by childbirth, bored by being a mother, unimpressed by motherly duties, she can claim to be a normal mother and housewife, and steal Noelle's urine to fake pregnancy. However, vivid or brilliantly appropriate nastiness appears as a response to the masculine power in society; it is neither an act of revenge nor a rage response, but a trick and "a necessary quality that engenders change" (Piotrowska, 2019, p. 5). And as tricks go, it is a very worthy one for Amy Dunne "isn't a puppet on a string, she's the puppet master" (Flynn, 2012, p. 225). Therefore, Amy undermines the patriarchal rules by forcing Nick to perform the traditional role of a husband.

Yet there is great ambiguity in Amy's return to Nick as an ultra-femme fatale, for the ambiguity lies in questioning whether Amy will suffer consequences. Amy is merciless not only with her own sex but with the opposite one. It is to the women and men in her world that she directs her most relentless mockery and trickery. Amy Dunne internalizes all her aggression against men. In fact, she is probably the most ultra-femme fatale as she lies, uses her erotic desire, and kills to get her way. Amy manages to find her true self, but in truth, she has to pour out her anger and frustration on men and women around her, shape-shifting, situation inventor, trickery, nastiness, and playfulness. Thus, she confronts men and controls her fate, much less defeats them.

If one considers the lethal nasty women in mythical stories, the Greek myth of Hylas and the Nymphs is one that features extensively. The nymphs are mythical figures who emasculate Hylas and take away his power by abducting him (Luta, 2018, p.129). The seven water nymphs are the mythical creatures who started as beautiful and mesmerizing, living in water in Greek and Roman antiquity but were sexually dangerous as they gained an unusual power over men. They drag Hylas into the water and abducted him. Much has been painted about 'the watery femmes fatales by British painters. William Etty, William Edward Frost, George Frederic Watts, Lord Frederic Leighton all had their own take on this myth, focusing on their nudity and metamorphoses rather than the artistic beauty of the paintings (p.130).

Amy, herself a pretty nasty and watery femme fatale par excellence (the goddess of lust and transformation), in a rage at her Husband's betrayal transforms herself into a creature which any man must fear forever: she is nasty, she drags her ex-boyfriend to his demise and tricks the media and the police. It is fascinating to consider that Amy resembles the watery nymphs as she chooses to make the victim of rape, Desi, into a tool of her fury, thus punishing and killing the latter too. Amy gains immense power by dragging Nick, the police and the media into her own world

which “is a form of pulling them into an element where they are powerless, an environment that land-dwelling men do not have control over” (Luta, 2018, p. 127-128), she regains herself, she forever kills the “Cool Girl:” the rape victim situation evokes sympathy but is also constructive to Amy's case. There is something enthralling in the story and its fascination goes beyond the myth of the nymph for, clearly, it touches both on the fear of males towards female power and the inevitable triumph that it carries with itself once experienced by a woman.


In terms of the nasty woman and the prototype of the ultra femme fatale, there is Amy Dunne who is not punished by the close of the story; unlike the classic femme fatale. Even though motherhood appears to be her reward, one has suspicions whether Flynn deliberately asserts the necessity for women to conform to the patriarchal norms at the end of the narrative or she overturns social norms by allowing Amy considerable agency and liberation to influence social change. In fact, Amy who becomes nasty after her husband's betrayal, and who is driven to nastiness by Nick, is seen as a trope of female freedom. The notion of nastiness, which might seem a way out of the indigenous patriarchy that treats women as nothing more than chattels, has been a possible tool in the liberation of Amy. In fact, Amy in Flynn's narrative seems to be stripped of her agency in the main narrative of the story and her nastiness becomes a mandatory plot that leads to her triumph – not as an unconscious response but rather as an inevitable result of marriage betrayal. The nymphs myth is reiterated here as men in this story often get punished and abducted too by a “nasty woman” – usually it is too late for men to save themselves from this alternative world, once dragged by women. The message conveyed by Amy's nastiness and trickery is clear: any gesture against women's willingness and freedom is risky behaviour and will leave the one who tries it completely disempowered, impotent, and probably dead long ago. Desi and Amy's husband Nick are good illustrations of this.

IV. CONCLUSION

This article has shown that the concepts of “the nasty woman,” “the female trickster,” and the guise under the umbrella of the “Cool Girl” have become mediums for Amy's self-assertion and liberation. In one way, killing the “Cool Girl” and masking under the umbrella of this trope have become flexible strategies for Amy, where each strategy reflects her concerns and hopes. The use of the “nasty woman” and “the female trickster” granted Amy triumph over her husband Nick and the patriarchal restraints she grappled with. In this light, both concepts emerge as mediums of liberation by means which taboo thoughts or female experiences find expression. Therefore, they function as impulsive grounds where transgressions and subversions are explored, and veiled taboos are undermined.

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