



Sissy Spacek as Holly Sargis in *Badlands*
(Courtesy Warner Bros/Photofest)

Coming of Age in the 1970s: Revision, Fantasy, and Rage in the Teen-Girl Badlands

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Partway through Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (US, 1973), the teenage narrator of the film, Holly (Sissy Spacek), enters into a kind of daydream, triggered by images in her father's stereopticon and advanced by her voice-over. From within her forest idyll with the outlaw murderer Kit, who has dispatched her father and driven her from her burning home, Holly imagines an alternate narrative for herself as Kit goes about daily chores. With her eyes in the viewfinder, Holly asserts that she is really "just a little girl" with "just so many years to live," and then the scene shifts to her point of view—the screen is masked off to mimic the viewfinder, and then a picture slides toward the camera (and presumably Holly's eyes), bringing us in alignment with her view through the stereopticon. Holly's voice-over, possibly inspired by the first image, asks a question that indicates her desire to begin rewriting her story: "Where would I be this very moment if Kit had never met me, or killed anybody?" The images then proceed from one location to another as the voice-over contemplating her life continues—

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images of the Sphinx, a mother and child, two women by a piano, and lovers in a field. Immersed in Holly's point of view, the scene offers a montage of possibilities: for instance, what might have happened if her mother had never died or, in the future, whom she might marry. In this one small interlude, we see the female teen simultaneously as spectator *and* as storyteller. The last shot in the series zooms in on a man and a woman in a field; the male soldier's face is turned toward the ear of the woman, who is looking out of the frame. Holly's voice-over ponders what her future husband is doing (clearly indicating it will not be Kit), but the image shows a woman lost in thought or in her own faraway vision, much like Holly here and in the final scene of the film. The voice-over may be describing a male partner, but the scene is expressing a female viewpoint and a female consciousness, one that seems to have revisionary powers.

Unfortunately, the critical assessment of Holly has not recognized this revisionary potential, consistently deeming her a vapid, passive conduit for the messages of consumer culture in the United States of the 1950s, and particularly for those sold in fan literature. Loosely based on Caril Fugate, the female half of a real-life criminal pair (with Charles Starkweather) from the late 1950s who went on a killing spree that began with Caril's family, Holly narrates nearly the entire film, while Kit (the Starkweather figure, played by Martin Sheen) behaves more like a character of *her* invention. As a very young Sissy Spacek plays her, Holly's demeanor and narration are ethereal, the words tumbling out in a dreamlike, languorous monotone. Early on, critics picked up on the strangeness of Holly's narration as a major defining feature of the film, although their assessment of it was never too flattering. Vincent Canby praised the film as one of the great "intelligent" surprises of the New York Film Festival of 1973, but his patronizing view of Holly, a view not to be undone despite protestations from the filmmaker,¹ reveals itself in the very first paragraph of his review: she is "on the verge of being pretty though she still looks something like a cookie that hasn't yet been baked," passing the time by reading "aloud from a movie magazine."² This image of Holly as a naive, unfinished, uncritical pre-teenybopper, whose vocabulary and

imagination seem to have been absorbed entirely from popular culture, remains relatively unchanged in the critical discourse on the film.³ Like Canby, most critics ignore the significance of a very young, female character being given charge of an authoritative voice-over and relatively omniscient narration (she discusses events in Kit's life that happen in her absence, and her narration frames the film from some time after the events of the plot), although he does recognize that it is her voice we repeatedly hear on the soundtrack, employing "the flat, expressionless tone that an uninterested schoolgirl might use when reciting Joyce Kilmer's 'Trees.'" Further, the world of the film, according to Canby, "could be an extension of either a television series or one of the stories Holly reads in *True Romances*," though he qualifies this possible nod to Holly's creative powers with a reminder of the true talent behind the masterpiece, Malick, who remains "clear-eyed and mostly without any romantic notions," in contrast, of course, to his addled, sentimental female narrator.

While many critics, such as Brian Henderson, continue to highlight an ironic distance between the filmmaker and a narrator who remains unreliable "by virtue of her youth and naiveté, by her inability to grasp the nature and meaning of what she describes" and who, therefore, becomes "the victim or butt of the implied author's irony,"⁴ the rare feminist attempt to recoup Holly and the dominance of her narrative voice does exist. Joan McGettigan commends the two female narrators from Malick's first two films, *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven* (US, 1978), as exceptional in their briefly empowered positions as governing voice-over storytellers. However, McGettigan ultimately agrees that Holly's voice-over is limited by the clichés of pulp-fed romance. On the one hand, Malick's female adolescent narrators contradict the traditional use of male, authoritative voice-over in Hollywood film and speak from both diegetic and extradiegetic positions, resulting in voice-overs that "serve more to destabilize the discourse than to provide the traditional interiority of character narration."⁵ Holly, for instance, stands above the viewer in the hierarchy of knowledge, since she is clearly privy to more information and doles it out as she sees fit, sometimes even assessing the feelings and interior motivations of

other characters and self-consciously establishing the main themes and structure of the film. On the other hand, though, the themes and patterns Holly provides for the film come to her, according to McGettigan, “via the rhetoric of the romance novel and home economics class,” and this rhetoric confines her: “Holly’s voice-over relentlessly interprets events we witness in terms of romance; no matter how we may react to her and to Kit, the voice-over reminds us that she considers this the story of her first love” (34, 35). Accordingly, she narrates with the clichés she has learned about such a “first love” plot.

In the end, McGettigan cannot ignore the reality of Holly’s life as a female adolescent in the 1950s. She is a character who “has little opportunity or ability to control her own life” since the “film presents the two men [father and gun-crazy lover] as her entire range of life choices” (36). In sum, this reading identifies the tone of Holly’s narration as empty, bored, or, at times, disillusioned by her dream lover and celebrates her control of the narrative as disruptive of classical Hollywood modes. Nevertheless, the critic ultimately places Holly back in a familiar story. She has “no alternatives” to the path from father to husband, and she appears “willing to accept her role” (38). For all the power she has wielded as narrator, Holly still remains a “helpless and disadvantaged” character, and it is the *male* characters who “take action” (43). Their *acts* of violence set the story in motion, and the female commentary afterward merely follows the pattern provided for it by popular romance.

Rather than acquiesce to this sort of convenient resolution of Holly’s disturbing voice, I would like to remain with that female adolescent narrator and the disruptions she creates, even working within clichéd language and the generic conventions of the lovers-on-the-run plot. What, I ask, would it mean to think of the entire film as Holly’s creation? What kind of new perspectives might be gained by imagining the entire film as her fantasy? How would one then theorize her evocation of a James Dean stand-in as her father’s killer, only to tear him down in the end, having him arrested and sentenced to death? What kind of fantasy or wish fulfillment might we be witnessing? And what would such an explo-

ration offer in terms of conceiving an adolescent spectator and film fan, particularly a female one, in the 1970s? Through the narrator of *Badlands*, this essay examines the revisionary possibilities for the young female audience and proposes that these spectators might be more critical and active readers of the conservative ideology of the films than previous work on the genre has suggested. Critics who dismiss or disparage the female spectator of teen film, casting her as the “little sister” duped by narratives that reinforce the bond between father and son and through that bond reassert patriarchal order, have simply not considered the likes of Holly.

From the perspective of the early seventies, *Badlands* revisits what might be called the primal scene of teen film, paying tribute to its most legendary icon, James Dean. However, through the frame of spectatorial fantasy, the film may also rewrite that scene from a female perspective. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis describe the primal fantasies as representations of the “major enigmas that confront the child” in the guise of origin myths, such that “the primal scene pictures the origin of the individual; fantasies of seduction, the origin and upsurge of sexuality; fantasies of castration, the origin of the difference between the sexes.”⁶ According to this definition and proposing the film as *Holly’s* fantasy produced sometime in the future, I envision both a return to the origin of teen film and, moreover, the origin of the female spectator for those films, whose idiosyncratic and challenging perspective provides a way to understand or even problematize the teen viewing subject. While not strictly a “teenpic,” the film marks Holly as a fan and, with her return to the 1950s and the use of Dean, suggests the resistance and revisions possible for female (teen) audiences from the perspective of the 1970s. Holly’s retrospective point of view reveals an ironic, at times cruel, distance from the male teen idol, and perhaps more important, her fantasy also *involves* her in a violent refusal of the patriarchal home, emphasizing the capacity of female adolescent fantasy to rewrite the conservative resolutions of Hollywood films. In *Badlands*, Holly, the supposedly simple teenage girl, proves to be an active, even aggressively destructive fan who has an agenda and fantasy all her own.



Spacek as Holly and Martin Sheen as Kit
(Courtesy Warner Bros/Photofest)

Not-So-Giant: Holly's Vision of Young Love

In order to establish the possibility of an overarching fantasy structuring the film, one might begin with the ethereal and strange, even affectless, qualities in Holly's voice-over, as well as her framing of the plot from a position some time and some place in the future. Furthermore, privileging Holly with a kind of authorial control does not constitute a huge leap in the critical understanding of the film, since critics like Henderson have already hinted that this world is, in a way, her domain, contending that her framing voice-overs "enclose the narrative" and give her "dominion over it."⁷ More provocatively, Adrian Danks finds that Holly's "chilling but homely voiceover" rationalizes or familiarizes the film's "otherworldly imagery," making her "relation to the events of the film . . . equally multifarious and strange."⁸ But while Danks does not pursue an examination of this strange relation and then,

without further explanation, attributes Kit's resemblance to Dean to his status as an "emanation and reflection of the image culture he emerges from," I would argue that these two points are intimately connected. The fantasy hypothesis would explain Holly's "strange" relation to events "of the film" and events offscreen or beyond the diegesis and would posit her as the source from which this Dean type emanates. Rather than just being the translator of the film's "deeply troubling and inexplicable events into a simplistic, conventional, 'negative' narrative of self," as Danks suggests, Holly creates these deeply troubling events, composing a narrative of self that is far from simplistic, and that is, indeed, radically *unconventional*.⁹

This fantasy reading also provides a reason for her unreliability as a narrator: caught up in the dreamlike world of *Holly's* fantasy, the viewer might feel unmoored at times and dependent on the unpredictable and yet oddly familiar work of the unconscious. Even the one possible obstacle to recognizing the entire film as Holly's fantasy—Kit's one brief voice-over toward the end of the film—might be attributable to the radical flexibility of her fantasy. During the Nat King Cole dance scene, Kit's voice overtakes the music on the soundtrack, pleading, "If I could sing a song like that." However, Holly's voice quickly reasserts itself: "Kit knew the end was coming." A simple explanation from psychoanalytic work on fantasy may suffice to account for this nearly ghostlike entrance of Kit's voice. Several theorists since Sigmund Freud have noted the flexibility of positions for the subject to occupy in her or his own fantasy. Such movement and flexibility is one of the central features that makes fantasy so attractive for feminist critics. It allows for an oscillation between gender roles, sexual orientations, passive and active positions, and masochistic and sadistic desires.¹⁰ All work together in the same subject throughout all different points of the fantasy, including the very structure of the fantasy itself, which Laplanche and Pontalis explain as "a scenario with multiple entries" such that in the phrase "A father seduces a daughter" nothing clearly affirms "whether the subject will be immediately located as *daughter*; it can as well be fixed as *father*, or even in the term *seduces*."¹¹ In other words, Holly, as the subject producing the

fantasy, can be located in all the figures in the fantasy, as well as in the very actions of the scenarios.

In addition to the recognition that the particular structuring work of fantasy can create the plot of the film as idiosyncratic to Holly's desires and flexible to change and detours according to her whims or needs, I would emphasize the point that her fantasy is reliant on the popular culture, including films, that she has consumed. In defining Freud's term *phantasmatic*, Laplanche and Pontalis note that this central structuring principle for the subject and the subject's fantasies has "its own dynamic" and that the fantasy structures are "constantly drawing in new material."¹² Therefore, contrary to the view favored by critics that Holly is "*limited* by her pulp-magazine perspective," one might look to Freud's patients who helped to develop the psychoanalytic understanding of fantasy in order to discover how those examples of popular culture might function in Holly's narration.¹³ The young women who admitted to beating fantasies in "A Child Is Being Beaten" rely on other narratives to fuel their fantasies, particularly melodramatic adolescent fiction like the "Bibliothèque rose" ("The Pink Library") or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in fact "competing with these works of fiction" by producing "a wealth" of fantasies and imagined (brutal) situations.¹⁴ Likewise, *Badlands* seems to exhibit just such a competitive spirit: as Holly and Kit wander through the open, western fantasyscape, and she becomes increasingly disappointed or dissatisfied with the plots she develops as well as with her James Dean-like leading man, her fantasies become more violent. As her frustration with the imperfections of her imaginary world grows (or as her competitive spirit increases), it seems as if she metes out even more punishment and exhibits less patience with the progression of her plots.

Most important, though, Holly's imaginings illustrate the revisionary potential of fantasy, providing an example of the rewritings of patriarchal law brought to light by feminist rereadings of the beating fantasies. Defining fantasy as a restaging of Oedipal scenarios or, in D. N. Rodowick's terms, as "a contingent event, the possibility for renewing terms of meaning, identity, and desire," feminist theorists propose the possibility of subverting or revising those familiar scenarios in fantasy.¹⁵ Indeed, Holly's vision—the

humiliation of the male outlaw-hero, a vengeful murder of the father, and the denial of patriarchy—presented as what Patricia White terms “female-authorized popular culture,” defies the resolution Freud constructs for his female beating patients and replaces his male authorial voice with hers.¹⁶ In *UnInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability*, White recognizes a subversive rewriting of the beating scenario in Todd Haynes’s short film *Dottie Gets Spanked* (US, 1993). Working from Gilles Deleuze’s rereading of Freud’s male masochistic fantasies in which the father might be hidden in the role of the person being beaten, White contends that Haynes’s film “illustrates the homoeroticism of Freud’s version and the subversiveness of Deleuze’s and suggests that the father is hidden in the spanked and the spanking Dottie.” This example provides White with a filmic representation of her notion of “retrospectatorship,” in which Haynes can “rewrite patriarchal law enunciated from the (gay) male point of view, a wish that grants power to the female acculturating agent” (199). Essentially, I offer Holly’s fantasy here as another example of such a rewriting, although from the female (sadistic) point of view. *Badlands* stages the possibility of a female-authored fantasy of the 1950s from the place of the 1970s, a “retrospectatorship” that “revises cultural authority” (in the guise of Kit–James Dean and Holly’s father) in a mocking, violent, and destructive way (202).

The film opens, innocently enough, with a young teen in her bedroom with her dog, the private sanctuary in which, stereotypically, much daydreaming and fantasy play occur for young girls.¹⁷ But quickly, *Badlands* differentiates itself from the innocence and dreamy young love one typically expects from early teen fantasy through an abrupt shift in scene to the back alleyways of Fort Dupree, South Dakota, and to the decidedly unromantic work of our male lead: garbage collecting. Instead of depicting the naive, moony-eyed gushing of a young girl in the midst of her “first love,” as critics like McGettigan suggest, the first major section of the film uses irony and simple rejection to mock and thwart the fantasy lover. This fifteen-minute montage of vignettes outlining the progression of their relationship, which is almost completely dominated by Holly’s voice-over narration, identifies Kit as a James Dean

look-alike and attributes to him an overabundance of romantic qualities, but it also hints at the underside of this fantasy—the cruelty, aggression, and destruction later to appear more prominently as its driving force.¹⁸ While Holly approvingly admits in voice-over before their second meeting that Kit is “handsomer than anybody” she has ever met—“He looked just like James Dean”—the image track both supports and lampoons the likeness. From the first, Kit appears a rebel without a cause indeed: we see him, dressed in a white T-shirt, jeans, and boots, failing to succeed as a garbage collector or to convince his coworkers to agree to dares or bargains, and he is almost run over by the garbage truck driver when he asks for a cigarette. Furthermore, at the whim of his fifteen-year-old creator, who says at their first meeting, “I shouldn’t be seen with anybody who collects garbage,” he changes from Dean-as-teen-rebel to Dean-as-upstart-cowboy (as in *Giant* [dir. George Stevens, US, 1956]),¹⁹ moving from one fantasy role to the next faster than Holly can say, “I gotta run.”

Holly’s story proves, at least initially, to be an ambivalent fantasy—one that conjures up a dream lover, who seems possible only in a fifteen-year-old girl’s imagination, just to refuse and abuse him. When Kit first walks up to Holly twirling a baton in her front yard and asks her to take a walk, she responds by saying, “What for?” At their second meeting, directly following her voice-over wherein she appreciates his Dean-like handsomeness, Kit greets her on her porch, and she quips sarcastically out loud from within the diegesis, “Well, stop the world.” At this moment, she begins to reveal how tough an audience she can be: she takes a line directly from Dean’s costar in *Rebel without a Cause* (dir. Nicholas Ray, US, 1955)—“Well, stop the world” is the greeting Judy (Natalie Wood) offers to Jim when performing her bad-girl role on the first day of school—and seems to use it mockingly. In other words, Kit may look just like Dean, but Holly does not always give him the star treatment. He asks her to take another walk, and she demurs, pleading homework. Still, he persists, and on their walk he wonders if he can call her “Red.” She refuses his intimate request for a pet name and then complains of a headache, cutting their date short. Furthermore, throughout these brief, early encounters,

Spacek's face occasionally registers mild curiosity, but more often than not her expression is one of discomfort and annoyance. In the first two encounters Holly walks ahead of or away from Kit, leaving him alone in the frame, and she is always the one abruptly to end the meeting.

In the face of this indifference, Kit still relentlessly performs the romantic lead. While Holly describes his new job as "work at the feedlot," he refers to himself as a "cowboy." He platonically courts her—taking her for walks and drives without initiating physical contact—while Holly voices how he is not "interested in [her] for sex." Despite their fairly significant age difference (ten years), he thinks she is "mature for her age," and he appears to enjoy her conversation and company, even pursuing her over her father's objections. Holly reveals in voice-over that she is "not popular" in school, but Kit chooses her anyway, even though he "could have had any other girl in town." In sum, his adoration of and obedience to her seem nothing short of unbelievable: "He didn't care what anybody else thought. I looked good to him and whatever I did was okay. And if I didn't have a lot to say, well, that was okay too." This last remark highlights a notable feature for these characterizations of their romance—they come from *Holly's* voice-over, even when describing Kit's thoughts and feelings. Through a kind of free indirect discourse, Holly provides access to Kit's mind, or, in other words, his interiority is only available to us through her agency. In this way, Holly's fantasy can rewrite Kit's speech and his involvement in their relationship retrospectively. She offers her details of their budding romance and, I would add, stages their rendezvous. Holly has created the most understanding, romantic, and acquiescent leading man possible, yet she does not reciprocate in kind.

Instead, Holly rewards his romantic efforts with more indifference or even mockery in her act of storytelling.²⁰ While the voice-over tells of his appreciation and approval of Holly, as cited above, the screen (or visual projection of her fantasy) shows him going about his unromantic work at the feedlot. She announces, "Little by little we fell in love," but on the screen we see Kit running a machine to restrain cows at medication time, then feeding cows,

kicking them in the head to separate them, and ignoring a sick animal. This ironic division between voice-over and visual track has been commented on by several critics as a central element of the film, but most, like Henderson, view the narrator, Holly, as the “butt” of the filmmaker’s irony, while I would offer Kit as the object of *her* irony. In a sense, what the film might be dramatizing is a female spectator’s revision and humiliation of James Dean. Shot in soft afternoon sun, this sequence shows him dressed the part, in a denim jacket, jeans, cowboy boots, and hat, and her voice-over tells of his romantic nobility, but the virtual tour through his day at the feedlot undercuts both Kit’s posturing and the ethereal quality one might expect of a young girl’s romantic daydream.

As the initial sequence continues, her derision of the Dean-like romantic lead turns darker, escalating to the point that she humiliates and belittles him after what should be the climactic moment of this young love plot: blissful union. The next scene in the feedlot accentuates again the cruelly ironic juxtaposition of image and voice-over suggested above. A medium close-up of Kit staring through barbed wire is recontextualized by Holly’s voice-over, “In the stench and slime of the feedlot, he’d remember how I looked the night before,” followed by a long shot of cows in the mud. Moreover, the dire fate of the cows at the feedlot haunts these moments as they struggle or appear sick or trapped, and a foreboding sense of danger creeps in. In fact, briefly after the second scene at the feedlot and after Holly reveals that Kit “wanted to die” with her, the sequence is disrupted by an interlude about her fish, whose untimely death Holly orchestrated, though she now regrets it. One cannot ignore the disjunction between the images of lovers cuddled together, with her voice-over attesting to his undying love (or death wish, as the case may be), and the sudden cut to her pet fish in its bowl, soon being carried into the backyard to die. Perhaps taking the foreshadowing too far, the scene ends with a close-up on the fish gasping for life in the seemingly innocuous garden behind Holly’s house, and the fish appears, gasping again, on Kit’s nightstand during Holly’s vision of him at night in bed.

Shortly after the fish’s demise, the two young lovers consummate their union, but with little fanfare. Kit expresses his

desire to commemorate their first lovemaking by smashing their hands with a rock, but Holly's reaction indicates the aggression of her growing indifference and boredom with her male lead. While his wish for commemorative mutilation points to an underlying masochism, her refusal to attribute significance to the event or represent it romantically indicates quite the opposite desire—pleasure in cruelty. She verbally assaults his male prowess and deflates her own rite of passage. Appearing absolutely unimpressed by her “first time” (a familiar trope from teen films), Holly asks, “Is that all there is to it?” and then adds a vicious final jab: “Gosh, what was everybody talkin’ about?” As in the earlier scenes, she walks away from him, while he pursues her out of the frame, pathetically still inventing ways to memorialize the occasion—first, smashing their hands, then taking the rock with him, and then choosing a smaller, more portable, commemorative rock. Such an indifferent and cruel response to her “momentous” sexual initiation, coupled with the harsh treatment of her fish, possibly forewarns that it will not be too long before Kit finds himself in the dirt gasping for air.

In short, the voice controlling and structuring this narrative does a good bit more than tell “the story of her first love.” There is a fantasy here that incorporates the fictional icons of a first-love plot, but that ultimately proves bent on aggressive violence, first aimed derisively at the Dean-like romantic lead of heteronormative fictions and then more viciously at institutions of power, such as the patriarchal home or law enforcement. Because the fantasy abuses and humiliates a young man, it evokes the model mentioned above of Freud's female cases from “A Child Is Being Beaten.” In this essay, the female patients have fantasies that Freud separates into three phases, but two of the phases involve the beating of another child, not the fantasizer, by an adult. The first phase can be represented by the phrase “a child is being beaten,” which Freud transforms later into “my father is beating the child,” but the third phase increases the number of (male) victims and excludes the father, selecting a surrogate for him.²¹ Furthermore, this last phase of the female beating fantasies has received significant attention from film theorists for its model of spectatorship: the girl pictures a boy—or, usually, a group of boys—being beaten by an authority

figure (fatherlike) while she “looks on.” Obviously, since the female patients describing their beating fantasies to Freud never appear to be the child being beaten, they may be considered sadistic and violent. Freud does his best to reintroduce masochism into the picture, since these are after all *female* patients, by introducing a middle phase to the string of fantasies, an unconscious phase only discovered during *his* analysis wherein the beating is turned back on the female patient’s self as punishment for her incestuous wish for the father (“I am being beaten by my father”). Several feminist critics have questioned Freud’s logic on this point and reasserted the idea that the fantasies establish a very clear example of fluctuation between sadism and masochism, or in Rhona Berenstein’s words, “cross-sexed and nonspecified identifications and desires” that include even “cross-sex identification with sadistic adults.”²² What I am suggesting here is that Holly’s fantasy offers something more than simply a return to female masochism and the incestuous wish for the father.

For this reading of *Badlands*, the beating fantasies do suggest at least one precedent for female fantasy wherein a primary pleasure derives from someone else’s pain and humiliation, particularly a boy of similar age. Holly’s sarcastic quips that ridicule Kit’s Dean pose make sense if she is allowed the pleasures of sadism. Moreover, I find in Holly’s retelling a position suggested by, but foreclosed in, Freud’s analysis of the beating fantasies, where he finds only “the form” of the third phase to be sadistic, not her “satisfaction” from it.²³ In Holly’s case, she has placed herself in the fantasy and becomes the active creator of the humiliation (beating), further emphasizing the intense sadism of this particular fantasy. She does not merely look on but assumes the abusive, controlling role of the father or father surrogate in the beating fantasy—a position denied by Freud’s analysis but valid within the framework of the phantasmatic where, as noted above, she can be located in the position of “daughter,” “father,” or “seduces.” Holly verbally assaults Kit, wishes for his death (“at times I wished he’d fall in the river and drown so I could watch”), and eventually betrays him, which results in his capture and death sentence.

Furthermore, this fantasy is not satisfied with abusing and

humiliating Kit. It turns to more serious prey and attacks Holly's father, bounty hunters, and even Kit's friends. In other words, Freud's version of the beating fantasies does not go far enough to explain (or restrain) what is played out in *Badlands*. Unsurprisingly, not once in Freud's female cases is the beating fantasy directed at the father or authority figures, but considering the contortions he goes through to place the girls in the masochistic position, other "complications," to use Freud's term, seem just as valid. If the girls, having turned away "from their incestuous love for their father," can somehow "abandon their feminine role" and spur their "masculinity complex" into activity, which allows them, "from that time forward," to want to be boys—specifically, masochistic "whipping boys"—might not this same process spur their masculinity complex into another role entirely, that of the sadistic "other person in authority" performing the beating (191)? In fact, might this not be yet another example of the contingency of fantasy—that its pleasure is fluid and revisionary, locating the subject in the role of the spectator or in the role of the masochistic male "whipping boy" (adolescent girls finding their masochism in the Freudian male homosexual role?), or in the role of the abusive authority figure? Fantasy makes all of these "complications" possible.

The example proves even more fruitful when we consider, as I mentioned above, that the impetus for the third phase of the beating fantasy is the adolescent literature the fantasizer has consumed and against which she competes in the productive act of fantasizing.²⁴ According to the critical assessment, Holly's narration suffers from her "corrupted-by-pop," clichéd, "pulp-magazine" perspective, which is supposedly mocked by the true controlling voice, Malick's. But the beating fantasies introduce another possibility: Holly may be consuming that popular culture and using it to formulate a competing fantasy in which she can control the action, as well as the male lead, and use the terms of popular culture to disrupt its messages. In other words, through her fantastic creation, Holly gains authorial control and uses this voice for a pleasurable dismantling of the male lead *and* the popular culture that invented him. As White's term *retrospectatorship* proposes, classical Hollywood film "belongs to the past" but can be "experienced

in a present that affords us new ways of seeing” and chances for revision or even, in this case, a kind of revenge.²⁵ Accordingly, one might consider this fantasy, which Holly retells after some time has passed, as originating in adolescence and being reworked and revised many times over, incorporating memories, experiences, and popular culture such as characters and even dialogue from that archetypal teen film *Rebel without a Cause*. While it is unclear exactly when Holly’s fantasy takes place—since she wonders at one point about the identity of her future husband but in the end recounts Kit’s execution and claims that she married the son of the lawyer who got her off “with probation and a lot of nasty looks”—it must be considered significant that the “present” of *Badlands*’s release, which would offer “new ways of seeing,” is the early 1970s, a period of great progress for second-wave feminism in the United States (in fact, *Roe v. Wade* was decided in January of the same year the film was released). One might even say that this female-authored adolescent fantasy, while always possible, found the historical moment for its enunciation in the 1970s—a point I will explore more fully below.

Holly Knows Best: Patricide in the Badlands

The radical potential for Holly’s authority becomes pronounced as the initial love plot ends. Possibly dissatisfied with, or bored by, the first-love story (and its male lead), Holly shifts her narrative focus and once again rewrites Kit’s role, dramatically transforming the fantasy from humiliation and play to violent revenge. After Kit commits his final act of sentimental commemoration, letting a balloon drift off with their keepsakes attached, the action turns to another field, where Holly and her father are having a disagreement. She calmly reveals in voice-over that her father has discovered her “running around behind his back” with Kit and plans to kill her dog as punishment, but the emotional impact of the scene is revealed by the change in the soundtrack to a frantic chiming piece from Carl Orff’s “Musica Poetica,” which is paired with Holly’s silently screaming face on the image track. The next cut presents the recipient of her undeniable but muted rage: a long shot

of her father in the upper right of the frame, coolly pointing his gun, first at the camera and then lower at the dog, who is out of focus at the bottom of the frame and motionless, with his back to the viewer. The loud, traumatic gunshot, which causes a quick movement in the dog, marks the first sound in the scene from within the diegesis and is significant for its return in the parallel scene of Holly's father's slaying.

For the crime of killing her dog, her father is shot only a few scenes later in a strikingly similar way, and the fantasy lover—who attaches sentiment to keepsakes, but then quite literally does not prove much of a lover—performs much better as an agent of revenge and anger. Kit appears in the same stance as Holly's father in the field: he stands in the left side of the frame, at medium distance, with his left hand at his side and his right hand holding the gun pointed low, while the father is out of focus in the bottom of the frame, though further to the right than the dog. Additionally, the soundtrack emphasizes the connection. As the sound of Kit's gunfire fades, only Holly's voice and a dog barking in the distance can be heard. Simply, Holly has had her revenge. More or less abandoning the romance plot, Holly's fantasy instead releases the aggression only hinted at previously and plays out desires for adventure, criminality, and sadistic violence—ultimately, a murderous wish fulfillment whose target is the father, or his surrogates, even if one of those surrogates turns out to be Kit.

In the end, what makes *Badlands* such an exceptional film is its consistent and aggressive denial of traditional values, social structures, and authority, particularly paternal, up to the final frame. Moreover, as Kit becomes enamored of the law and more like her father, Holly becomes less enamored of him, until she eventually abandons him completely. In other words, as that bond between father and son completes its Oedipal cycle and the son ascends, Holly kills off that new father as well. Several critics have noted Kit's growing appreciation of the law and his likeness to Holly's father. Malick himself puts into perfect relief Kit's particular brand of conventionalism: "He thinks of himself as a successor to James Dean—a Rebel without a Cause—when in reality he's more like an Eisenhower conservative."²⁶ No 1950s rebel, Kit aspires to

be like the rich man he chooses *not* to kill toward the end of the film, reciting conservative homilies into his Dictaphone: “Listen to your parents and teachers. They got a line on most things, so don’t treat them like enemies,” and “Consider the minority opinion, but try to get along with the majority of opinion, once it’s accepted.” He even takes the rich man’s panama hat, which makes him physically resemble Holly’s father. One critic, Neil Campbell, contends that this ascension to the father’s role drives Kit’s actions in the film. The young killer’s “search” turns out, regrettably, to be about “*becoming* a father to Holly and about finding a level of acceptability within the community in which he lives.”²⁷ That this search becomes the central joke of the film—and, I would add, a reason for Holly’s aggression toward Kit—nonetheless appears to Campbell as more of a tragedy than a triumph.

Holly’s narrative vision has little patience for Kit’s quests, especially not for his authoritative longings, and, in her repeated ridicule of him, she undermines the authority and cultural myths he mimics. For Campbell, in Kit’s “quest for conformity and responsibility,” he adopts the “voice of reason and lawfulness, in imitation of the ‘adult’ acceptability his violent actions undermine,” but his imitations all sound “humorous.” However, his ties to “classic, mythic American traits” such as rugged individualism and his likeness to “the frontiersman his gunplay suggests” somehow turn his imitations of authority from comic to tragic (43). Campbell concludes that both Holly and Kit are “contained by home and the law, and all their potential energy and imagination turned to waste,” leaving only “a chilling circularity reflecting a pessimism about society’s motivating values” (47). On the contrary, I find that Holly’s imagination, rather than going to waste, proves to be a source for this damning criticism and understandable pessimism about any number of “society’s motivating values.” While Campbell reads Holly’s narration as a “romantic fantasy of love and honour,” I contend that Holly’s fantasy acts, instead, as the major source for the ferocious criticisms and dark humor of the film (39).

The backbone for Campbell’s “classic, mythic American traits,” namely, paternal authority or dominant masculinity, receives the brunt of her fantasy’s criticism, ridicule, and violent

rejection, which resonates with other films of the era in which *Badlands* appeared, though with a difference. Robin Wood, without focusing on *Badlands* in his work on 1970s film, contends that the era is notable for producing a number of new American works with “incoherent” structures and plotting that served to disrupt and criticize conventional order: “The questioning of authority spread logically to a questioning of the entire social structure that validated it, and ultimately patriarchy itself: social institutions, the family, the symbolic figure of the Father in all its manifestations, the Father interiorized as superego.” The reading of *Badlands* offered in this essay would certainly support both Wood’s notion of the disruption caused by feminist protest and his contention that, in the 1970s, the “possibility suddenly opened up that the whole world might have to be recreated” (here, in fantasy),²⁸ but Holly’s particular, female-centered version of criticism and rejection is neglected in Wood’s work, as well as in other accounts of the era. Indeed, *Badlands* fails to fit the mode of a new American cinema characterized by “raging bulls” or discontented, fragmented *male* heroes—for example, Travis Bickle of *Taxi Driver* (dir. Martin Scorsese, US, 1976)—representing the “critique of the patriarchal hero” in 1970s film (69). Malick’s film has been likened to *Bonnie and Clyde* (dir. Arthur Penn, US, 1967) and has obvious parallels to the earlier film, even an acknowledgment in the credits, but through Holly’s narration, it presents a much darker, more critical tone and perspective on the outlaw couple.²⁹ It is as if, instead of relegating this strange and deeply disturbing young voice to the margins, as Scorsese does in *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* (US, 1974), *Badlands* places her front and center, giving over the narrative to her increasingly derisive point of view. Unlike in the films just mentioned, Holly’s narration or female authority evokes an active, even aggressive, feminism that most popular films of the era, even films by the new auteurs of American cinema, worked to silence or assuage with the resolution of heteronormative romance.

More often than not in the context of 1970s film, critics confine *Badlands* within the model of the so-called nostalgia film. Marsha Kinder compares *Badlands* with two other films of the period, Steven Spielberg’s *The Sugarland Express* (US, 1974)

and Robert Altman's *Thieves Like Us* (US, 1974), which are "set in rural America sometime in the past" and depict sudden violence "juxtaposed with humor or nostalgia."³⁰ As a reaction to male buddy narratives dominating 1970s cinema, these three films, for Kinder, "revive the heterosexual couple" but place it outside the law and in a "powerless" past where it can reflect back on a "sick society" in the present—Kit as "the banality of evil, personified by Nixon," and Holly as his pathological, passive, and emotionless accomplice (3–7). In a more derogatory way, many critics liken the film to George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (US, 1973) or, to a lesser extent, Peter Bogdanovich's *The Last Picture Show* (US, 1971). For example, in his work on teen film, Jon Lewis couples Malick's film with other "hopelessly romantic" and "nostalgic works" such as *American Graffiti* and the television series *Happy Days*, describing Holly's voice-over as "clouded" by the "teen magazines she reads incessantly," so that her voice "underscores the banality of nostalgia."³¹ Eager to fit the film into a genre he feels is dominated by "nostalgia for authority," Lewis neglects the terrible violence and darkness central to *Badlands* and, I would contend, fails to see how Holly's narration itself vividly defies nostalgia and its regressive, filial longings. Although Vera Dika's comparison to *American Graffiti* does reassert aspects of nostalgia in *Badlands*, it also suggests a countering "emotional tone" to the film "better described as rage or despair," which I would clarify as expressing sadistic desires in a film tending toward rage more than despair, a kind of antinostalgia.³² Holly's female-authored fantasy and revision surfaces at a historical moment in which feminists launched an impassioned resistance to the regressive and conservative desire for simpler times indicative of nostalgia and so central to Lucas's film, and her active subversion of any romantic notion of the 1950s seems to echo that resistance.

Appropriately for such a fraught political moment, this dangerous, dark, and humorous vision, delivered in a young girl's deadpan, poses a serious threat to both Kit and Holly's father.³³ Not satisfied with just humiliating and controlling Kit, although he proves useful in meting out her punishment, she has her father murdered and solidifies her control. In the two parallel murder

scenes, she reveals how she can manipulate Kit, remove the obstacle to her desires, and punish him as the guilty party. Her father is literally shot down like a dog, and she remains blameless: she suggests far too late that they might call a doctor or the authorities but excuses her own involvement—“Listen, I’ll say how it happened . . . the part I saw.” Nevertheless, the overwhelming visual splendor of the sequence comes with her father’s destruction and the burning of her childhood home, indicating again our access to *Holly’s* vision. While Kinder may find that “the nostalgia and ritual” of this scene “are slightly overdone, almost reaching an exaggerated expressionism,” I am impressed by a joyous destruction, devoid of nostalgia and thrilled by engulfing so many symbolic objects.³⁴ The addition of a choir to the children’s music sets up a mock ritual, while the enormous flames consume the patriarchal home, with the patriarch in it. Other significant objects engulfed by flames include a painting of the baby Jesus, Holly’s bed (shot from several angles), her dollhouse, her father’s work, and even the family piano. Holly leaves the house uneventfully, as if she were setting off for a vacation, and her voice-over, which notably returns as Kit is lighting the flames, seems to take an ironic view of Kit’s actions: “He was gambling for time.” But the visual star of the scene is surely the fire, majestically elevated by the choir’s voices and emphasized by the camera’s lingering over its devastation. Rather than grieve, the film seems to celebrate the father’s annihilation.

Once her instinct for cruelty and violence is let loose against patriarchal order, the desire for more seems insatiable and transfers itself to Kit as he increasingly indicates his authoritative aspirations. With the patriarchal home in flames, Holly’s plotting turns to a familiar next step—lovers on the run. But this plot really only has one conclusion: one of them has to die (and it is not going to be the fantasizer). While the lovers are hiding out in a forest à la *Swiss Family Robinson*, their mock honeymoon initially appears amusing, but then one of their chickens dies, like the cows and fish before it, announcing that their new idyll is as shaky and doomed as the young-love plot. Unfortunately, Holly’s treatment or representation of Kit has not become kinder due to his service as an agent of revenge, and his success in creating a home in the forest only

betrays him as a father figure and, therefore, dooms him. Shortly thereafter, he fails at catching fish for their dinner, resulting in Holly's wish that he would drown so she can watch. It is at this point that she begins to imagine a life without Kit via the stereopticon. Consequently, when three potential captors (bounty hunters) come into their forest fairy tale and Kit murders all of them, the fantasy might be coldly working out *his* eventual capture and death. Any pretense to a romance story has been abandoned in favor of violent action, and the aggression again takes representatives of male authority as victims, presaging Kit's downfall by tying him to both the father and the most recent victims. What might have begun as a beating fantasy with the romantic lead as its whipping boy has suddenly entered an entirely new phase, as a staging and replaying of patricide in whatever form that symbolic figure takes.

A Blossom Fell: Reenvisioning Teen-Girl Spectatorship

Significantly, for theories of spectatorship, it is at this moment that the film most clearly marks Holly as a film fan. Although her acknowledgment of Kit's resemblance to Dean and her witnessing of the murders have already exposed her identity as a spectator, her evident boredom and growing disregard for Kit place her pleasures as an audience member at the forefront. Needless to say, she proves to be a disenchanted, aggressive, and tough crowd of one. For the remainder of the film, failing to interest Holly becomes a capital offense. The anxiety about pleasing her is palpable when the couple finds a new hideout with Kit's old coworker Cato. While eating lunch at his house, Holly herself tries to break the boredom and anxiety by telling a joke, and Cato responds with a fantastic tale, desperate to keep her interest or at least to distract the pair of killers. As if cued by a knowledge of popular culture, he attempts to appease her by inventing a buried-treasure scenario (old Spanish coins found in the neighboring field), but once the story proves a ruse, Kit shoots Cato in the gut as he tries to slip away. Back in the house, with Cato slowly dying on his bed, Holly still appears bored, looking through catalogs and playing with Cato's pet spider. Even the young couple who shortly there-

after drives up to the house fails to interest her and therefore cannot stop the inevitable progression of the violence. She speaks to the other girl as if she were a confidante about sticking by Kit, but after he shoots at the couple, she loses interest in him as well. Judging from the last few scenes, the worst trait for a character in *Badlands* has become not his or her moral reprehensibility, but his or her monotony. Losing Holly as an audience, Kit finds, brings severe consequences, expressed as isolating indifference: “At this moment, I didn’t feel shame or fear, just kind of blah . . . like when you’re sitting there and all the water’s run out of the bathtub.”

The sepia-toned manhunt fantasy immediately following this remark indicates that the search targets Kit alone, and from this point, he can expect exactly such an outcome. He and Holly remain together on the run, but Holly is no longer emotionally there. In the rich man’s house, she separates herself from Kit’s actions, removing herself from blame again, insisting that she never told Kit to shoot anyone. Therefore, when she says in voice-over, “We couldn’t go on livin’ this way,” and Kit answers from within the diegesis, “Why not?” one begins to suspect that his days are numbered. The exchange here between Holly’s voice-over and action within the diegesis, even dialogue by Kit, offers more proof that the entire story is one of Holly’s inventing. She composes the voice-over and invents the male lover who will be her companion. She can even invent dialogue for him and dress him like James Dean, going as far as giving him Dean’s mannerisms. However, unlike Dean who died tragically young as his career was taking off, Holly’s leading man outlives his welcome and must be killed off.

The true confirmation comes ironically when the film most clearly designates her as a film fan and a consumer of fan literature. At one moment she reads with enthusiasm from *Star Hollywood* about Pat Boone (an issue whose cover the camera reveals to picture Tony Perkins and James Dean), and shortly thereafter she declares Kit’s fading, for her, as a star: “He needed me now more than ever, but something had come between us. I’d stopped even payin’ attention to him.” Like a fan who stops writing letters to and about her favorite star, Holly goes quiet, spelling out entire sentences on the roof of her mouth “where nobody could read them”

(least of all her previous creation, who is beginning to have an inkling of his fate). Their dance to Nat King Cole's song of betrayal in love, "A Blossom Fell," repeats her feelings and foretells her coming unfaithfulness, but her voice-over points out that Kit realizes the end is near as well: he "dreaded being shot alone, without a girl by his side." True to his premonition, Holly refuses to accompany him in his final flight from the police and remains separated from him until they board the plane on his ride to prison and then death. Furthermore, her confession that she "got off with probation and a lot of nasty looks" implies that she made a deal and testified against Kit. While the police officers prove an eager new audience, one of them even admiring Kit's resemblance to Dean, Holly can barely look at him, choosing instead to gaze out of the window in the film's final moment.

A particular grouping of desires and pleasures—humiliation, revenge, punishment, and annihilation—is thus articulated in Holly's narration and at play in her pulp-fed mind. At times, they work as the main impetus for her fantasy creations, her plotting, and her treatment of her male star. As a teenage consumer of popular culture, particularly as a spectator and fan of film culture, she fills her imaginary with stars and genre conventions, even stealing dialogue. That active sadism, an instinct for cruelty and mastery, fuels her narration should not be an unfamiliar idea for film theory. As Laura Mulvey famously wrote, "sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in linear time with a beginning and an end."³⁵ But also famously, Mulvey was speaking of a male sadism that takes the female as its guilty and passive object. Perhaps it is here that we find the main obstacle for critics of *Badlands*—that an instinct for cruelty and mastery lies behind a raw (unbaked cookie), passive, blank, *female* face. A young teenage girl with her mind filled by film images and gossip from the latest movie magazines cannot possibly have fantasies like these, can she? Well, yes. For example, the girls who fantasize about boys being beaten while they look on in "A Child Is Being Beaten" are not only adolescent but also influenced by popular literature, although Freud does his best to diminish

or disavow their sadism. Moreover, it might just be this teenage girl's film spectatorship and movie fandom that encourages both an active, sadistic relation to the screen and a fantasy work that can rewrite all sorts of plots, even patriarchal ones. Holly's fantasy, on this score, may even rewrite the beating fantasies, finding the boys and the father interchangeable.

The beating fantasies and their representation of female spectatorship have received much attention from film theorists who find in them the seeds for a new understanding of the cultural and personal fantasies confronting one another at the moment a viewer sits down to watch a film. Particularly important for this reading of Holly's narration, Patricia White's return to the fantasies makes a case for their centrality in developing a theory of fantasy that "helps us to understand how representation is subjectively engaged, how it transforms consciousness and the unconscious and shapes the way our desire is structured and lived."³⁶ Retrospectatorship, then, underscores the subjective fantasy of viewing and re-viewing films, wherein the personal interacts with the cultural including the "memories and experiences of other movies" enjoyed by fans. As White stresses the importance of fandom and fan communities in encouraging both fantasy and revision of the codes of Hollywood films, so Holly's reading of fan magazines therefore becomes central for understanding the way in which she revises the stories offered to her, rather than passively accepting them and regurgitating them as a first-love popular romance.³⁷ However, unlike White's representative example of retrospectatorship in the film *All about Eve* (dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, US, 1950), *Badlands* contains a sadistic fantasy that re-views the experience of teen female spectatorship as characterized by disturbing interactions between *male* stardom and (ostensibly heterosexual) female fandom.³⁸

Holly's omniscient voice-over and controlling vision not only show that female authority and authorship are possible, but they also expose a female spectator's mind at play, sometimes cruelly, with popular culture, male Hollywood stars, and patriarchal order. At fifteen, she may have been in love, but Holly can also retrospectively use her imagination to recast the lead roles in that romance and revise it according to her desires. While masochism

may exist in her fantasy, Holly also very clearly exhibits a desire to master, especially with regard to her male lead. Telling the story from some distant future in which she may be married to the son of her lawyer, Holly is, for some critics, recuperated under male dominance and conventional order—first obeying her father, then Kit, and now her husband. But why not see this fantasy as her escape from or refusal of the resolution that marriage represents, a feminist refusal particularly resonant in the 1970s? More important, the basic mode of that escape is figured as a retrospectorship that can only be set in motion through avid film spectatorship and fandom. Holly's narrative establishes the possibility of a different teen spectator: a girl who consumes film and popular culture only to subvert it, rewrite it, and bend it to her desires—a marginal subject reenvisioning Hollywood's conventions as female-authored adventure, violence, and a punishment of patriarchal order.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the particular object of popular culture so prominently featured in Holly's fantasy—James Dean. One might consider Holly's marginality intimately connected to her membership in possibly the least valued film audience in cinematic history—teenage girls—so her evocation of Dean and even of *Rebel without a Cause* might be exact revenge.³⁹ As with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for Freud's patients, the melodrama to which she returns in formulating her fantasy is a kind of originary moment. Often considered the archetypal teen film, *Rebel without a Cause* represents the origin of the American teenager, which Holly views from a decidedly disenchanted future moment. The 1950s and this defining film for the decade represent a desperate attempt to reassert a normalized, Oedipal family drama. The passionate male hero, Jim Stark (James Dean), aches to know the "right" role for him in society, with his peers, and in his family. Despite his gloriously tragic alienation (and method acting), Jim simply seeks a return to normative gender roles and Oedipal order, to a place where a father can confidently tell his son what to do "when you have to be a man." Jim is even willing to attack his own father—throttling him while his mother screeches in psychoanalytically informed horror, "you'll kill him!"—in order to learn how to "stand up" as a man. In another troubled 1950s Hol-

lywood resolution of melodramatic eruptions, Jim does “stand up” in the end, reasserting heterosexual union with Judy and winning the approval and firm support of his father, but only through the violent erasure of an alternative plot represented by Plato’s desires. For Judy, who begins the film in the police station after having been picked up for walking the streets, the narrative serves to beat her into submission, just as her father slaps her at the dinner table for expressing her incestuous wish (a request for a kiss). She finally finds “love” with the very boy she sarcastically greeted with “Well, stop the world” and acquiescently smiles in Jim’s arms in the end.

For critics of the genre, Judy’s fate signifies the place for any girl in the genre and, moreover, for any girl watching. Jon Lewis briefly considers the female teen only to conclude that the pairing of father and son acts as the representative model for the destabilization of authority in postwar teen films and the resulting quest to resecure it on the part of the wayward son. Lewis encapsulates Jim’s angst neatly: “What Jim wants most is hardly the stuff of a rebel. He just wants his father to tell him what to do.”⁴⁰ When, in the end, Jim does solve that conundrum, the film, “like so many other teen films, reinscribes the family ideal” (27). This narrative of wayward sons, so much like descriptions of 1970s new American films, performs a love story in which the female part merely serves as a pathway “between men,” to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s well-known phrase. Within this framework, the female star and female viewer are resolved, neglected, or used within the loop of filial desires. Vicky Lebeau characterizes this situation in terms of a different family contest, wherein the female viewer becomes the pathetic sister duped by her brother’s pretenses to patriarchal legacy; she is complicit in her brother’s rightful ascension to his father’s place and ultimately becomes “the daughter of a seductive paternity working within and beyond cinema.”⁴¹ From these perspectives, films like *Rebel without a Cause* enact a male teen fantasy of rebellion from and eventual rescue by the good father who has temporarily failed his duties. When the father does not appear, the films act as a paean to his absence, at their heart nostalgic. For the female viewer, though, they encourage complicit agreement with, if not active support of, this other romance.

If only for this reason I have explored Holly's story, her wonderfully funny and terribly dark refusal and humiliation of James Dean. Like an avenging Natalie Wood/Judy (who has no last name in the film, presumably because she will take her husband's soon enough), Holly interrupts that father-son love story, destroying one and then the other as the latter takes the former's place. From a later time in which a romantic view of the 1950s can be contradicted by the damage done by adjustment therapy, the suffocation of the nuclear family, and "the problem that has no name," she revises the story she has presumably witnessed many times through subjective fantasy; the family ideal is burned to the ground and Dean does *her* bidding, follows her plotting, and exits the stage before her final close-up. *Badlands* refigures the (teen-age) female viewer and fan, projecting *her* fantasy—a fantasy full of rage at and criticism of the popular culture and the patriarchal order that keeps trying to silence her.

Notes

As a feminist scholar-in-training, I have had the incredible good fortune of receiving the guidance, humor, and acute understanding of two magnificent mentors, Sharon Willis and Karen Beckman. This essay, in large part, is the product of their indispensable readings and advice. Also, I would like to thank Amelie Hastie for shepherding me through the editorial process with such patience and grace.

1. In an interview a year later (Beverly Walker, "Malick on *Badlands*," *Sight and Sound* 44, no. 2 [1975]: 82–83), Malick refutes these assessments of both Holly and his own attitude toward her (and Kit). He claims that the narration points back to *his own* influences for the film, which were novels like the Hardy Boys series, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Huck Finn*, and, particularly, the Nancy Drew series, and argues that the humor around Holly derives mostly from her "mis-estimation of her audience, of what they will be interested in or ready to believe." Insisting that there is no distance between Holly and Kit and himself, Malick simply describes Holly as a "typical Southern girl" whose narration reflects her scrupulousness and "strong, if misplaced, sense of propriety." And if she does speak in clichés, they do *not* come from pulp magazines, "as some critics have

suggested”; they come from the language of the “innocent abroad” (like Nancy Drew or Tom Sawyer) and are “not the mark of a diminished pulp-fed mind” (Malick perhaps willfully forgetting here the clear mark of a pulp-fed mind that Mark Twain puts on Tom). As proof of his sincerity, he concludes not only that Holly is “in a way the more important character” but also that he likes “women characters better than men” (82).

2. Vincent Canby, “The Movie That Made the Festival Memorable,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1973.
3. Pauline Kael comes to similar conclusions about Holly, but without the approving gush toward the new film talent, Terrence Malick, observing disapprovingly that “Holly narrates, in her corrupted-by-pop, fifteen-year-old baton twirler’s notion of a literary attitude” and the “whole movie is filtered through the callowness of her childish, Southwestern voice and her soap-operatic confessional phrasing” (which, according to Kael, is meant to elicit the audience’s laughter). Pauline Kael, “Sugarland and Badlands,” in *Reeling* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976), 304. See also Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 116.
4. Brian Henderson, “Exploring *Badlands*,” *Wide Angle* 5 (1983): 41. See also Jon Lewis, *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 32; and James Morrison and Thomas Schur, *The Films of Terrence Malick* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003). Morrison and Schur fall into a similar wordplay on Spacek’s name as does Henderson: “The whole point of Holly’s voice-over narration—that odd amalgam of romantic clichés, dime-novel pieties, fervent convictions, and *spacey* reasonings, is to suggest a constant undercurrent of thought and feeling that never manages to intervene in, and certainly does nothing to halt, the remorseless progression of action” (17, emphasis added).
5. Joan McGettigan, “Interpreting a Man’s World: Female Voices in *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*,” *Journal of Film and Video* 52 (2001): 34.
6. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 19.

7. Henderson, "Exploring Badlands," 42.
8. Adrian Danks, "Death Comes as an End: Temporality, Domesticity, and Photography in Terrence Malick's *Badlands*," *Senses of Cinema*, www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/8/badlands.html (originally published in *Metro*, nos. 113–14 [1998]). See also Robert Zaller, "Raising the Seventies: The Early Films of Terrence Malick," *Boulevard* 15 (1999), which suggests Holly's use of fantasy, which he also calls "adolescent make-believe" (145), and insists on her unsettling power in her "guilefully self-deceptive as well as manipulative" thought processes and her seeming control of the camera "obedient to her will or at least complicit with it" (146).
9. Ethel Person's book-length study of fantasy, *By Force of Fantasy: How We Make Our Lives* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), attributes many roles to the fantasizer, "as the author of the fantasy script, as a player in the drama—often the star of it—and as the audience for whom the fantasy was devised" (7). However, her reading does not offer to women, for the most part, the kind of fantasy I will contend Holly is formulating, since "sadistic and violent fantasies are more the province of men" (77).
10. See, for example, Rhona Berenstein, "Spectatorship-as-Drag: The Act of Viewing and Classic Horror Cinema," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 231–69; or Miriam Hansen's work on Valentino and his female fans in *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Also, D. N. Rodowick, in *Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference, and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1991), and Kaja Silverman, in *Male Sexuality at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), discuss at length these particular fantasies and their ability to disrupt conventional (and psychoanalytic) gendered subject positions, for instance active masculine versus passive feminine. Finally, see also Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), for a reading of the fantasy's potential for disruption and revision by a lesbian subject.
11. Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," 22–23.

12. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988), 317. For an application of the term *phantasmatic* to film, see Elisabeth Lyon, "The Cinema of Lol V. Stein," in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. James Donald (London: BFI Publishing, 1989), 152.
13. Ginny B. Machann, "Ceremony at Lone Tree and Badlands: The Starkweather Case and the Nebraska Plains," *Prairie Schooner* 53 (1979): 169; emphasis added.
14. Sigmund Freud, "'A Child Is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1955–74), 17:180.
15. Rodowick, *Difficulty of Difference*, 94.
16. Patricia White, *UnInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 208.
17. It also may remind one of perhaps the most famous film depicting a midwestern adolescent girl's dream work (and her little dog, too), *The Wizard of Oz* (dir. Victor Fleming, US, 1939), although Kit's discovery of a dead collie in the second scene of the film does signal a violent departure from that classic film.
18. Jacqueline Rose has attempted recently to theorize a now seemingly commonplace connection between stardom or celebrity and the murderous desires or wishes of the public and/or fan: "It is as if the violence and sadism of public acclaim have been suddenly laid bare (you are accorded it as a type of punishment). . . . There is, we could say, something murderous in our relation to celebrity. On this score, Salman Rushdie would be exceptional only for having the murderousness precede his status as a celebrity rather than the other way around." *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 211.
19. I would contend that the allusion to *Giant* occurs before the direct citation astutely noticed by Morrison and Schur: the image of Kit balancing a rifle across his shoulders, resembling nothing so much as a scarecrow, while the sun goes down in the desert

(still reproduced by Morrison and Schur, *Films of Terrence Malick*, 15–16).

20. In light of the era in which the action takes place, one might propose that Holly's behavior reflects the coyness and indifference demanded by the female teen's role in 1950s courtship. Stressing the "double standard" working against teenage girls in the 1950s, Susan Douglas summarizes the popular press's advice about sexual intimacy as similar to a game with marriage as the supposed prize in *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994), 63. See also Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs, "Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 94–95. However, Holly's indifference strikes me as markedly different from the "crafty, cool, and careful" girls considered by Douglas and Ehrenreich et al. (91). She has no intention of marrying Kit, in fact does have sex with him, and becomes less interested after the seduction is consummated.
21. Freud, "A Child Is Being Beaten," 185.
22. Berenstein, "Spectatorship-as-Drag," 241–42.
23. Freud, "A Child Is Being Beaten," 191.
24. Also, notably, Anna Freud's essay "Beating Fantasies and Daydreams," in *The Writings of Anna Freud* (New York: International Universities Press, 1974), 1:142–56, finds that girls of fourteen or fifteen begin producing fictional stories inspired by their beating fantasies (142–44), which is, of course, Holly's age during the action of the film.
25. White, *UnInvited*, 197.
26. Walker, "Malick on *Badlands*," 82.
27. Neil Campbell, "The Highway Kind: *Badlands*, Youth, Space, and the Road," in *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*, ed. Hannah Patterson (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 42.
28. Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 50.

29. Marsha Kinder claims that Malick treats the elements from Penn's film "ironically" as satire, taking all the romance and passion out of the legend. Marsha Kinder, "The Return of the Outlaw Couple," *Film Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1974): 8. See also Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Coppola, Scorsese, Altman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), for a reading of Penn, whose films, along with others of the period, "carry on ideological debate with the culture that breeds them" but never "confront that culture with another ideology, with other ways of seeing itself" (9).
30. Kinder, "Return of the Outlaw Couple," 2.
31. Lewis, *Road to Romance and Ruin*, 32.
32. Vera Dika, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56.
33. Perhaps only Robert Zaller has perceived how serious a threat Holly might be, but unfortunately, the price for such power is, of course, demonization. This girl, "ideally presentable as a victim" and "absorbed in fantasy," grows up to be "a woman devoid of affect," a survivor moving toward "the life of banality for which she was made." Kit may be a bastardization of the frontier myth, but "in Holly, we sense the presence of a possible evil" ("Raising the Seventies," 148). It may very well be possible that *evil* is the only word we have to describe a controlling, guileful, and consequential teenage girl who defies the authorities she is supposed to obey and adore.
34. Kinder, "Return of the Outlaw Couple," 9.
35. Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 22.
36. White, *UnInvited*, 202.
37. Other feminist film theorists emphasize active female consumption of popular culture and the anxieties surrounding that consumption. See Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*. Also, Shelley Stamp documents female film-going behavior in the 1910s such as shouting during serials and fraternizing with boyfriends that "frequently disrupted expectations about ladylike decorum" in public and finds that these "movie-struck girls" unexpectedly selected "tawdry vice pictures, 'blood-boiling' serials, or

polemical suffrage treatises” for viewing (Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000], 197). Though pathologized as “unable to separate film viewing from romantic dreams of their own stardom” (198), these female spectators did upset attempts to constrain and integrate them into “cinema’s social arena” (199).

38. That this aggressive play and violent, sadistic fantasy originates in a supposedly heterosexual girl represents a departure from conventional accounts of female violence wherein the aggressive or criminal woman is marked as lesbian. In *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), Lynda Hart recognizes the equation between women who kill or aggress and women who transgress heteronormativity: “It is likely that when women are represented as violent, predatory, dangerous, the reverse would also be operative—the ‘castrating bitch’ would carry the presumption of lesbianism” (76). See also Chris Holmlund’s “Cruisin’ for a Bruisin’: Hollywood’s Deadly (Lesbian) Dolls,” *Cinema Journal* 34 (1994): 31–51.
39. See Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*; and Georganne Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence: Film Representations and Fans, 1920–1950* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), for a historical overview of both Hollywood’s representation of teenage girls and of the teenage female audience, particularly as consumers of fan literature.
40. Lewis, *Road to Romance and Ruin*, 22.
41. Vicky Lebeau, *Lost Angels: Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1995), 50–51.

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