

A Thesis Presented to
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Male/Female Partnerships in Contemporary Film and Television

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Media literacy is an important skill that is not commonly taught in any level of schooling. Yet with how much film and television people consume now, and how much of that is popular or mainstream – not thought of as “high culture” - this is something I think we must learn and teach students. In the English major we learn how to read texts; novels, poetry, short stories. I feel like these skills of analyzing and pulling apart texts can be applied to different types of “texts” - film and television. I feel it is important to, while you can always enjoy something, to think about the media you consume on a daily basis in a more critical way.

I, like a lot of my generation, watch a lot of movies and television. Much of the genres I am interested in are thought of as “male-oriented” - action, science fiction, crime/detective – ones who have male leads and only a few scarce female characters. Because of this, I am always in the back of my mind being very critical of how these genres portray gender. Whether it's thinking that a male character could easily have been cast as female or that the secondary female character with two lines could have their character expanded and made more interesting, I am constantly wishing that women had better parts and could be better represented in genre film and television. Yet I don't see this happening very often - the target audience for much of this genre film and television (*especially* that of science fiction, action, or crime drama) is young men. However, this is not always true to the actual audience consuming the media. The New York Film Academy recently did a study on how gender is represented in popular film. They found that while half of movie tickets sold in the U.S. are purchased by women, only 30.8 percent of speaking roles in films are portrayed by women. Not only that, but female characters are sexualized – a third of female characters “wore sexually revealing clothes” (NYFA). The overwhelming majority of contemporary popular films do not have a balanced cast of female and

male characters. Because of this lack of or mis- representation, I find it extremely important to be aware of how the film and television we consume depicts gender.

The majority of the time when there is a female character along with the main male protagonist, she is secondary and is not allowed to have her own individual back story and motivations and reasons why she's gotten to the point where the film is telling her story illustrated – she does x, y, and z, and feels a certain way. The viewer is not told why, but is expected to suspend their disbelief and take the female character for granted. Female characters should be able to have their own motivations and complex and even contradictory traits – I find it problematic when a woman is only allowed to be one thing and not allowed to be portrayed as a full, realistic human being.

There is an idea floating out there in popular culture (not everything, but I see it a lot) that femininity equals weakness. This is not only seen in depictions of stereotypical masculine characters, but also in female characters who are written as trying to be a “Strong Female Character”. This idea of a female character only being a feminist depiction when they are “strong,” often from a very masculine place – they can physically fight and hold back their emotions but are also an object of male desire – is one that I find very limiting. Simply changing a male role to a female role and calling it a portrayal of a “strong female character” is implying that the only way to have well-written women in film and television is to have them be men. Instead, I want to see more women characters written as diverse as they come in real life – a “realistic” character is not one that is only “strong,” but can be a multitude of different character traits.

So while writing female characters into typically male roles can be a way of representing women more in genres they usually aren't, it's not as simple as changing the name from John to Jane. This is why I chose to analyze and explore how the film *Pacific Rim* and the television show *Elementary* depict gender. *Pacific Rim* is a science fiction action movie wherein there is a female heroine alongside the male protagonist, who has her own separate background and motivations, and is able to take on the role of "action hero" without being overly sexualized and still able to be vulnerable at times and strong in other moments. *Elementary* is a crime procedural adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's works on his character Sherlock Holmes, where Watson is re-cast as a female and is able to be in an equal partnership that is not romantic with Holmes. Also in *Elementary*, the characters of Irene Adler and Moriarty are combined and depicted by a woman, placing her in the position of the only woman to every outsmart Holmes in canon and his greatest adversary. Both the film and television show I analyze use the base of a type of character that is usually thought of as and portrayed by men, and, I think, are largely successful in portraying them as complicated, well-written and interesting characters.

One of the other reasons I chose these texts and characters were because of their creator's intentions in writing them. For *Pacific Rim* director Guillermo del Toro, says that he "...wanted to show that men and women can be friends without having a relationship" and that Mako and Raleigh's narrative "...is a story about partnership, equality, and a strong bond between partners. It's important for little girls to know not every story has to be a love story and for boys to know that soldiers aren't the only ones to triumph in war" (Terrero). I feel like, setting aside whether he was successful in this or not, del Toro wanting to comment on how gendered stories are depicted in these types of films marks an attempt at changing how the action genre depicts them. Too often in the action genre do female characters become solely the love interest of the male

protagonist or an over-sexualized object of male desire; del Toro is attempting to avoid both of these stereotypes.

The writers of the television show *Elementary* have no intention of including romance between Watson and Sherlock now that one of them is female – unlike quite a few crime dramas with a similar set up (*Bones*, *Castle*). Executive producer Rob Doherty stated from the very start when asked about a romance plot line that, “For me, [romance is] completely off the table [...] It's just not in my head for season one and, looking ahead... I just don't feel like that's a part of the show” (Jeffery). Not only did they specifically re-cast canonically male roles as female, but the writers of this show are explicit about not reducing the newly female Joan Watson into so limited a role of love interest of Sherlock Holmes – it seems important to them to depict her as a valuable companion to him and able to question and challenge him on an intellectual level.

All in all, I think it is important to evaluate all the media we watch in terms of gender depiction (as well as other subjects, but I think gender is a crucial aspect that is not represented well as a whole in contemporary film and television). We need to evaluate what kind of progress media is making and how it can be improved on, not only in representations of women but also in relation to how we think of gender roles as a whole. I feel like placing female characters into roles we view as “male” is just one step in trying to break away from depiction of gender as binary and trying to stop limiting expressions of gender in mainstream media.

Genre film and television typically acts to reaffirm stereotypes of how male and female characters are supposed to act; they offer a prescribed formula that creates a narrative that the viewers are able to easily understand. According to Ann E. Kaplan, fitting characters into archetypes, such as Mother, Ingénue, Hero, and Genius, for example, can help create a world that is recognizable and enables the story to move along faster as a result (“Troubling Gender” 71). While Joanna Russ writes about gendered myths in relation to literature in her article “What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can’t Write,” Her writing on cultural myths can be transferred well onto analysis of popular genre film and television, since those common myths are what they tend to draw from in the telling of their stories. Russ points out that these myths are overwhelmingly centered on what culture perceives as the male or “masculine” (proving or finding manhood, political/governing power, and the suffering artist) or, alternatively, the downfall of what is feminine: the corruption of the innocent virgin, the importance of passive domesticity, and mindless lust (201).

The way these stories tend to be built upon gendered characteristics can result in one having difficulty when we attempt to retell and reshape these myths in new and progressive ways. When female characters are placed in the roles we view as “male,” they stumble upon problematic representations of women. This is partially a consequence of what we perceive as “masculine” and how we choose to transfer those coded character traits onto women. Though stereotypical presentations of masculinity that may be portrayed in popular culture such as film

and television are not always representative of the various ways it can be and is expressed in real life, Roger Horrocks, author of *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Culture*, argues that as viewers we have come to expect portrayals of “dominance, arrogance, and power” in roles we think should be masculine (26). These stereotypical expectations are perpetuated on screen.

In spite of this expectation and the ensuing (and perhaps cyclical) perpetuation of it, representations of masculinity have become more nuanced as genre film and television has progressed, allowing male characters to be written as more vulnerable and compassionate: they can be portrayed with characteristics we usually attribute as “feminine.” A popular example of this would be the character Joey from the television show *Friends*. Portrayed as a not too intelligent, goofy womanizer, Joey is nevertheless very sensitive.

Yet there is still a persisting way in which these kinds of characters are expected not to be too effeminate – the male protagonist of a classic male myth isn’t allowed to become a woman. Yvonne Tasker points out that because of this dependency on “gendered types,” it is difficult to break out of the commonly used archetypes when working in the formulaic confines of a particular genre (84-84).

I have perceived two common traps that films and television shows fall into when attempting to place their female characters into roles typically given to men. The first is that the woman becomes overly masculinized; they become less emotional, aggressive, and physically strong, all traits we link socially more to males than females. The masculinized female character takes on all the aspects of her male counterpart with little to no “feminine” qualities, leaving nothing to define her as a woman and effectively turning her into a man. The viewer therefore

views her as an “unnatural” woman or a “bitch.” In 2013 film *Elysium*, actress Jodie Foster was cast as a character originally written as male: Secretary of Defense Jessica Delacourt. Her character’s position in government puts her in a position of leadership usually delegated to men in popular film. However, the film doesn’t allow her to fulfill even her role as the main antagonist, as she is killed off by a secondary antagonist before the climax of the film when he takes over that role. Her character also fails to be received as well as her traits of being aggressive in her ambition and ruthlessness causes her to be seen as a “bitch” by audiences.

The second trap is that the female character becomes overly sexualized. Because the woman is simply a sexual object and not a fully developed character, she is left with little to no ability to make her own decisions separately from the male character. Many times this sexualized woman is simply a two-dimensional character written solely for sex appeal, one who has cosmetic changes and a single masculine quality superimposed onto the surface of her character. This type of sexualized female character may take on the masculine qualities of the male character she is written to reflect, but it is in order to have her become an object of desire for the male viewer: i.e. a woman with no agency. The character Mikaela from the film *Transformers* is a good example of this. A bombshell beauty and the main love interest of the male protagonist, she fulfills all the requirements for the damsel in distress stereotype. Yet in an attempt to present her as “different” from stereotypical female love interests in action films, the writers show her as being able to fix cars, something we see as a masculine trait. While this is supposedly a way to try to write a “strong female character,” her character’s perceived “strong” trait (the repair of cars) does not serve to change her character enough to avoid the damsel type; her character does not further the plot of the movie except to give the male protagonist someone to chase after in-between action sequences and save during them.

Does a typically male role rewritten for a female character have to end up going down one of these routes? Phillipa Gates briefly introduces her article discussing representations of women in the traditionally male role of detective by pointing out that this is a debate that critics argue over within the context of genre film as a whole (24). Can such a character be portrayed in a way that supports feminist ideology? While there are many examples of representations of women in the stereotypical ways stated above, I find that there also examples in contemporary film and television of successful regendering. While popular culture has a bad reputation as “low culture,” the movies and television people consume reflect the way we view our society and our gender expectations, and perhaps that viewpoint is diverging from one of thinking about gender as a binary relationship between male and female. In this paper I will discuss and evaluate the way gender is presented in two texts: the science fiction action film *Pacific Rim* and the detective/crime television show *Elementary*.

In order to see how gender roles can be subverted in genre film and television, I must first consider more carefully how gender is typically portrayed in both movies and television both in general and in certain genres specifically, as well as discuss the male gaze in which the overwhelming majority of popular media is filmed.

In general, genre film and television focus on narratives central to a male protagonist. Except for in what Annette Kuhn identifies as “women’s genres,” melodramas and soap operas, the female characters in genre have, at best, a secondary plot line which does not revolve around the woman as an individual, but around a man (146). A stereotypical and problematic way in which women are portrayed in genre film and television as secondary is when being the love interest or potential love interest of the male protagonist is their primary purpose in the film or

show. An example of this is in the first *Back to the Future* movie, where the main protagonist Marty has a girlfriend named Jenny who doesn't appear at all in the main arc of the film (Marty traveling back in time to 1955), but is only present in the very beginning and end as a side note to Marty's character. The viewers get to know an extremely small amount about her besides the main fact about her – that she is Marty's girlfriend.

Too frequently, female characters are only objects used to further the plot of the main male protagonist. In a “damsel in distress” stereotype gone bad, if a woman is killed in a film, it is not usually as a consequence of any of her own actions, but as a consequence of being the main man’s wife, lover, potential lover, or even daughter. The woman here only functions to fuel the man’s cause for revenge or his pain, or perhaps motivate him to do something he was shown as being unwilling to do at the opening of the film. For example, in Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*, William Wallace's love interest and wife Murron MacClannough appears in only less than the first third of the film. In the beginning of the film Wallace is portrayed as an adamant pacifist, only wanting to build a family and live quietly and not fight the English, as evidenced by his fast love and secret marriage to Murron. In quick sequence, Murron is attacked by English soldiers with little provocation, escapes for a moment by Wallace's help, but is ultimately killed by the English as an example because Wallace is not there to save her. Because of this Wallace is incensed to change his stance on fighting the English and becomes a leader in a Scottish rebellion. Murron's character is undermined by her purposeless (for her character) death and Wallace's later love interest, a French woman, and the fact that by the end of the movie the viewer has all but forgotten about her character except for that she died. All too often, this culturally constructed notion of feminine self-sacrifice is used as a plot point to explain a male character's actions, reducing the female character to a motivation.

Even in so-called “chick-flicks” or romantic comedies, the main female character's plot and actions revolve around succeeding in getting into a relationship with the man. This kind of female character's main goal in life is presented as finding a man, and without that her life is portrayed as unfulfilled and uninteresting no matter what else they may actually have – family, friends, a career. Take the movie *The Wedding Planner*, for example. The female lead, Mary, is depicted as fantastic at her job, a perfect storm of organized, driven, and competent. She even initially refuses to even be set up with a man, choosing her career instead. But when she meets the man who she is planning a wedding for, suddenly she is bemoaning her single status.

Even being a man in a genre film has its traps. Being the leading man sets expectations upon a character to, a lot of the time, be ultra-masculine to the point of absurdity. This is still, as Falkof points out, a prevalent image in American popular culture; the “Hero,” whether action or otherwise, “...is a profoundly gendered archetype who operates autonomously within a hostile or challenging environment” (34). The stereotype of the masculine character is an opposite of the passive female character type, and much of his aspects focus on traits such as “...toughness, stoicism, [and] courage” (Horrocks 18). Horrocks offers the example of Clint Eastwood's character in his film *Unforgiven*, an old gunfighter who, while retired, comes back to prove himself once again (17).

Stereotypical portrayals of women in film and television are caused by the patriarchal culture of society and what theorist Laura Mulvey presents as the “male gaze.” This is the way popularized media is shot as if from the perspective of the male viewer through the male protagonist (830). The dichotomy between the male being an active viewer and the female becoming the passive viewer creates a situation in which, while both are viewers, the male is the

dominant one. The woman as a viewer is undermined by how she is viewing: from a patriarchal perspective. The female viewer can only identify through this dominant culture, not her own, and so her own perspective is made meaningless. The female character in the film is there to be looked at by the voyeuristic audience. Mulvey quotes Budd Boetticher: "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance" (837). A major part of the male gaze is how women are overly sexualized, in any and all plots or situations, whether they call for it or not. Kaplan argues that while the male gaze holds active power, any responding female gaze cannot "possess" the way the male gaze can ("Is the Gaze Male?" 121). She goes on to say that even to attempt the equal force of a male gaze in a female gaze "... is to be in the masculine position" (130). This presents a problem: if through the male gaze viewers identify with a male protagonist, and there is not a sufficient equivalent female gaze, under what circumstances can viewers identify with a female character, and how can a film have a female character be the sympathetic, point-of view character for the viewer? Mulvey argues the traditional feminist view that identification can only be made through reproduction and recognition of dominant (patriarchal) culture. Female characters are turned into spectacles, eliminating the possibility of the viewer connecting with them on an emotional level (843).

We typically view the action genre as male-oriented in terms of story, characters, and targeted audience. As Brown states, classic action films "... seem to deny any blurring of gender boundaries: men are active, while women are present only to be rescued or to confirm the heterosexuality of the hero" ("Dangerous Curves" 20). Because of this female action heroines can easily fall into the traps of either becoming overly sexualized or essentially "male." We see

them as simply performing masculinity or turned into sex objects who happen to know how to shoot a gun.

The themes and plot of the action genre, and in particular the action-cop genre or “buddy cop” film, usually follow a specific formula. The protagonists are opposites; forced to work together, they butt heads yet throughout the film learn they are perfect partners, finding they are complements of each other. Often one of the partners has a past haunted by the death of a family member or lover, and their plot is to overcome and take revenge (“Bullets, Buddies” 80). A classic example of this is *Lethal Weapon*, in which the two partners are initially presented as in complete opposition to each other: Murtaugh has a loving family and Riggs has lost his, Murtaugh is sane and logical where Riggs is unstable and unpredictable. Many times in these types of films the action hero sees the world as good and bad, and acts on his own until his partner comes along and it becomes a duo against the world (“Bullets, Buddies” 81).

Masculinity also dominates the detective and crime genre. Palmer suggests that the central drive in this genre, that of gaining knowledge and the use of rational logic, is masculine in and of itself (56). Crime and crime solving is thought of as male territory, and so when women enter the picture, they are entering an arena dominated by men, and thus are lined up with the criminal in that the female detective can be seen as a threat to the dominance of masculinity (Gates 25). Women in the detective genre are either sexual predators (the “Bond girls” in James Bond movies) or not sexual at all (Roth 113). Even these femme fatales do not actively have power; she has power because of her body and sexuality and not her independent mind or decisions (Doane 2). The main problem with a woman in the detective genre is that they are overwhelmingly still operating within a world of men and masculine coded traits (Knight 164).

Much of the time we see these female detectives are seen dealing with femininity as defined by masculinity. Smith suggests that typical ways of presenting masculinity and femininity should, instead, be combined as to create a blurred line between them and thus ungendering the genre (81).

The way of defining male and female characters each as what the other is not and in strict archetypal patterns may serve to build a story that can be shown to viewers without having to over explain to them, but it constricts these characters to a small fraction of the traits they could potentially have. While they are useful and, of course, there are only so many stories to tell, I feel like reusing the same archetypes in the same ways, with simple plot changes around the characters, causes the same problems to crop up again and again. One does not even have to go as far as trying to discard the use of these archetypes, but rather simply tweaking them or casting an actor or actress in a part that you wouldn't automatically think would fit them can have the potential to create new ways of revising old stories. I want to see a space redefined for refreshed representations of women in genre film and television.

I have found that these archetypes are not always used in such a strict way in contemporary film and television. “Feminine” and “masculine” are being portrayed more often as bleeding into each other or simply being deconstructed as ways to solely establish identity around (Horrocks 174). Don Draper, the leading man of the television show *Mad Men*, provides an example. While on first glance he is just another arrogant “lone wolf” character, Falkof illustrates that there is a deeper analysis to be found in his insecurity and interactions with the women around him. Draper both reflects the misogyny of the time period of the 1960s in which he is written and embodies the stereotypes of the masculine Hero, the “man of action” (35). Yet

in addition to this, Falkof argues that he avoids the “lone wolf” portrayal in that he is surrounded by an abundance of women who both support and enable him (32). He is also shown throughout the series failing and making mistakes in multiple ways across his business and personal life, receiving and accepting support from the characters (mostly women) around him, and as insecure about his own masculinity. *Mad Men* re-conceives the cultural myth of the independent hero (38). This way of presenting the stereotypical masculine Hero as layered with traits not typically associated with that stereotype and thus showing how over-masculinization can fail is, as shown by the popularity of *Mad Men*, becoming more frequent in both television and film. Although not anything close to androgynous, Draper is an example of how the breaking down of the masculine can help reconstruct and reconsider the cultural myths with which we are surrounded.

Feminist critic Jackie Stacey argues against Mulvey's view of how because of the culture of male gaze in film, identification cannot be made in a feminist manner. Stacey states that reversing this gaze can be empowering and successful, saying, “Many forms of identification involve processes of transformation and the production of new identities, combining the spectator’s existing identity with her desired identity and her reading of the star’s identity” (208). Even when a film is shot from an obvious male gaze, female viewers have found how to be active in their viewership and found ways to connect with the female stars they see themselves as. People, no matter their gender, are going to connect with the characters they perceive as most like themselves or who they want to be, and for female viewers that is often the secondary, underdeveloped female character. Female viewers have revealed the ability to read into this type of character and expand upon it, creating them into the complex character they could have been (208-209). Stacey posits that not only is a female gaze possible, but that female spectatorship does not have to be a passive role.

I see this rejection in following what the male gaze wants us to look at more often in contemporary culture. This is because of the new ways viewers can interact with film and television. When Stacey researched her argument, she collected letters from female viewers written to or about female stars. Now, audiences can find large communities of viewers to discuss their opinions on what they have watched. This is, in fact, how I initially started to be interested in how *Pacific Rim* and *Elementary* portrayed gender. Both have a large following online, and there are various places dedicated to debating the progressive aspects of each text and the problematic aspects, all in terms of gender and female characters. While these types of genres may not be created thinking about women viewers as an audience who will view and become fans of the material, I have seen a movement to try to change that perception that genres such as action or crime are not ones that women are interested in.

Pacific Rim, a sci-fi action movie directed by Guillermo del Toro, begins with the usual “action hero movie” set up: the alpha-male protagonist Raleigh Becket loses his co-pilot and brother in a fight against a Kaiju (a giant monster) and is so traumatized by witnessing his brother's death that he thinks he will never pilot a Jaeger (a giant robot which needs two pilots) again. We all know how this type of movie plays out – the stoic but damaged male protagonist spends an hour and a half stubbornly determined to refuse anyone's help and, in the last desperate moment, realizes he needs to work with a partner yet is still able to be the gruff, masculine, dominant hero. The action genre in particular has a record for having trouble portraying realistic, well-rounded, well-written heroines considering how much they usually focus on the male lead. The target audience for most of these films are men in their late teens and early twenties, so action films are written to cater directly to that audience, casting a young, good-looking man in the role of the archetypal masculine Hero. While *Pacific Rim* does not radically alter this stereotype, I feel that there was an attempt at change by placing a female lead on equal grounds with the main male protagonist, and portraying their relationship and how the male lead treats his female counterpart as one of respect and partnership rather than falling into the stereotypes of her being solely the love interest or overly sexualized.

Director Guillermo del Toro did not create a film that tried to avoid the stereotypes with which the action genre is riddled with; he gleefully uses them with abandon. But what's different

in his use is that while Raleigh Becket gets to fulfill the reckless hero with a troubled past stereotype and other male characters are able to fulfill further stereotypes such as arrogant rookie and surly authority figure, when writing this film he chose to place the stereotype of the hero's journey or a character who has to go on a quest to enact vengeance (a common myth that is typically enacted by male characters in action movies), onto the female lead. Less than half an hour into the film, after Raleigh is shown as reluctant to re-join the Jaeger piloting program, another character is introduced who he almost immediately feels drawn towards as a potential co-pilot (despite his protests before this meeting): Mako Mori, a Japanese woman who heads the program for restoring Jaegers. Guillermo del Toro says of his intentions with creating this character:

When you say, normally, 'There is a young, Japanese girl pilot', you imagine a super-sexy, skimpy clad girl that has her t-shirt wet every five minutes [...] I wanted very much to have a character that [was] on equal terms with Raleigh; that they didn't have to have a love story, but instead have love and respect as colleagues. It was important for her to be strong, and be strong from a feminine core; I didn't want her to be the girl that turns into [either] a sex object or a guy, which is the normal thing in action movies (qtd.in Clembastow).

Instead of having Mako Mori be the passive support or side-lined cheerleader for the male protagonist, she is given a separate and more interesting and detailed background and progression that follows the stereotypes that the male action hero usually gets to play out. She also avoids the trap that action heroines, when they are written to fulfill the hero's journey, fall

into of being overly sexualized. This is a film that tells a story of two characters coming together and connecting on a human level, each growing through and with each other, not one of a single lone wolf action hero saving the world by himself. While it is certainly not revolutionary or an ideal representation of women, and has its problematic aspects, I feel like the way *Pacific Rim* diverges from typical action heroine stereotypes that we see in mainstream action movies and is attempting to do something a little different with the genre is something we need to see more of and is worthy of being analyzed.

Its initial premise sees *Pacific Rim* with the potential of placing two characters of any combination of gender and identity on equal ground. This is because of how the Jaeger robots are piloted: they must have two pilots, who are connected by a neural bridge and share memories to sync up their minds and control the Jaeger. Thus the film's term “drift compatible” is created, applied to two people who are complements of each other, enough so they can work together side by side. Even though there is no apparent or genetic reason for Raleigh Becket and Mako Mori to be drift compatible (as the majority of the other pilot teams we see are related family members) this is what they are – compatible on the most basic human level. Such compatibility puts them on an equal level when they are in the cockpit, having to work in tandem – no matter their different levels of combat experience (Raleigh has fought five actual Kaiju whereas Mako has only done simulator training but been successful in 51 out of 51 simulations). Even the way in which the fighting stance within the Jaeger changes is significant. When Raleigh is piloting with his brother, Yancy, their stance is characterized by a fist into an open palm. When he fights with Mako, it is an open fighting stance: one fist out and one fist in. This portrays not only a certain lack of arrogance when Raleigh fights with Mako, but also Raleigh's openness to using different technique and relinquishing his own control. Their Jaeger is metaphorically and

physically the vehicle through which these two characters are brought together to work in tandem. The neutral “body” the Jaeger offers, I would say, strips the characters of their gender.

Much of the progressiveness of this film, I think, can be found in how the male and female leads interact. Much of the time in action films the male lead gives little respect to the secondary female character – she is there only to support him unwaveringly. When Mako Mori is introduced to Raleigh, she says in Japanese to another character: “I imagined him differently.” Raleigh sees this reaction and replies, also in Japanese, “Better or worse?” The surprise is apparent on Mako's face – she didn't think he could speak her native language, and even though he caught her openly criticizing him, he doesn't hold that against her, and calls her out not in a critical way, but in a way that helps change her opinion of him.

This openness that Mako Mori and Raleigh Becket have with each other from the beginning helps show an honest and equal relationship throughout the film. Mako freely challenges and questions some of Raleigh's actions, something a female character would usually never be shown doing to the male hero and that subverts the usually submissiveness and acquiescence that female characters usually show to the male protagonist. This, however, proves to foster the equitability between them rather than any kind of bitterness. She defends her father and authority figure when Raleigh disrespects him, and tells him when she knows that he's holding back. Mako is neither submissive nor meek; she is not a cheerleader. She does all this calmly but in an assertive manner – she is someone who knows exactly what she is saying. When Mako informs Raleigh that she has studied his fighting techniques in order to help match up the best possible candidates for his co-pilots, he asks her what she thinks. She answers frankly: “I think you're unpredictable. You have a habit of deviating from standard combat techniques, you

take risks that injure yourself and your crew. I don't think you're the right man for this mission.” She is effectively calling him out on all his stereotypical “male action hero” traits, and instead of taking it as an insult he concedes her point, not trying to prove her wrong and adding in his own combat perspective of how in the moment, people make choices and have to live with them.

Directly after this dialogue comes a scene that, interestingly, subverts the normal male gaze for an action film. When Mako goes across the hall to her own room, she looks across into Raleigh's and sees he has taken off his shirt. This is not only unusual for this genre of film – usually it is the woman being objectified and here we see a male through a female's eyes, Mako's perspective, a perspective that we don't see in most films – but it is also not an inherently sexual gaze in itself. Even though she knows of his fight history, she is still surprised by the scarring on his body. This gives his most recent words to her more impact: she is not looking at him as an object to be sexualized, but is sympathetically viewing his literal scars from the fight with a Kaiju where his brother died.

When Mako and Raleigh finally get into the cockpit together and connect their minds through the “drift,” it is this traumatic memory of Raleigh's brother dying that triggers Mako to fall into her own bad memory and disrupt the trial run in the Jaeger – it is explicitly not she that has failed here, but a tragic combination of both their memories. When Mako slips into the memory of when she was orphaned during a Kaiju attack on Tokyo, Raleigh is right there with her memory self – not patronizing her but trying to comfort her. I think the positioning of these two characters in this sequence is significant. In the “present time,” in the Jaeger cockpit, Raleigh and Mako are positioned as equals. But in the memory, where Mako is reliving being a vulnerable child, Raleigh is not in front of her in a protective position, but, instead, stationed

behind her. Raleigh is backing her up – he is her support and not taking over something he knows she can and has to deal with herself. In this way Mako is granted significantly more autonomy than viewers expect from a female character in an action film.

Every time Mako and Raleigh are shown fighting on screen, either each other or together in the Jaeger, it becomes a dance and not a conflict. Their fighting techniques are initially very different, Mako having a style that complements her small frame while Raleigh is more of a brawler with training, since he is larger. Yet we see after they drift together, a fight scene between Raleigh and another character where Raleigh seems to take on Mako's fighting technique, curling himself smaller and using leverage against a man the same size as him. The whole time, Mako watches this fight with fists up, wanting to join. How in sync they are shows their intimacy, and while their first fight where they are evaluating their drift compatibility can be paralleled with a love scene, nothing is overly sexualized and the two characters each appear to test each other's strengths and weaknesses. At the end of it, it is Mako who literally ends up on top, denying the male gaze (since the shot isn't about the man's pleasure but the two characters' compatibility) and whoever wants to underestimate her.

Color becomes part of the representation of Mako and Raleigh's relationship as equal and contributing partners to each other. Mako is surrounded by blue and gray; with her dark clothing and umbrella, the dyed blue strands on either side of her black hair are the brightest thing about her first appearance. We see this same bright blue on the coat she is wearing during the memory sequences of her as a child running from a Kaiju. These flashback scenes are filled with, on the whole, muted gray colors, the blue standing out against them. This blue that she carries with her throughout the film symbolizes the stain of the traumatic memory of the Tokyo Kaiju attack

which killed her parents and left her orphaned. Raleigh's colors are more earthy – green, brown, and amber. In the lighting after his brother is killed and before he meets Mako, amber light swathes Raleigh. These blue and amber colors complement each other in the way that these two characters do, and we see this especially in the lighting of scenes when they are piloting their Jaeger, Gipsy Danger, together. Mako's bright blue is the more raw, unrelenting color to complement Raleigh's warm, grounding amber. In the end when the fight is won and Raleigh and Mako are together in relief and celebration at their triumph, the green (one of Raleigh's colors) dye comes out from the escape pod they are in and mixes with the blue ocean water surrounding them.

Another color repeatedly connected to Mako's memory is the red of the single shoe young Mako is carrying with her, representing her trauma and, more directly, her heart. This is echoed later in a conversation between Mako and Raleigh during which they speak of the Jaeger Gipsy Danger, which Raleigh piloted and Mako restored. Referencing the nuclear core, Mako asks Raleigh: “Her heart, when's the last time you saw it?” to which he replies, “It's been a long time.” In their final fight sequence their Jaeger cockpit is flooded with red light – symbolizing their shared vulnerability and determination to fight together until the very end.

When Mako and Raleigh win their final fight, the film concludes with them coming together not in the stereotypical kiss but in a pressing together of foreheads, relief at making it and at doing it together. They share chemistry as characters but there is no romantic plot – as much as they revolve around each other and both need each other, their relationship is not reduced to a “get them together” happy ending. Mako and Raleigh are characters who are both fundamentally damaged by separate traumas and who are trying to work through life with the

help of each other's support. Raleigh is not the male action hero who looks down upon his female sidekick (there only for sex appeal). He sees Mako as another human, a human he connects with and who can understand him. While he comes from a very masculine stereotype, he admires Mako as an equal and not an object, to the point of adoration. From the moment he meets her, his narrative and actions revolve and focus around her. In this science fiction film filled with explosions and action, Raleigh, set up to be the typical male action hero, is ultimately the narrator of the female character, Mako's (and, by extension, humanity's) triumph. *Pacific Rim* utilizes common stereotypes and attempts to breathe more complex life into them.

The television show *Elementary* adapts Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective novels and short stories about Sherlock Holmes. As a part of the crime procedural genre, the show takes on a formulaic set up for each episode while still drawing on classic conventions of detective fiction. While a crime procedural set up can cause a certain amount of predictability that can become tedious to viewers, *Elementary* escapes a lot of this repetition by focusing on the growth of the two main characters, both individually and as platonic companions/partners.

Specifically, the way in which *Elementary* revises the genre of crime procedural is that it pushes focus away from the crime that has been committed in each episode, and finding a new way to present the classic detective duo from Doyle's work, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. Not only is it set in modern day New York City, but it also focuses more on Sherlock Holmes as an addict, with a rewriting of Watson as a former doctor turned sober companion, someone to help and support Sherlock through his recovery, who happens to also be played by Lucy Liu. By having a female lead be equal to the male lead in importance to the narrative of the show, and in terms of both screen time and how the male character treats and respects her, *Elementary* is not only rewriting a canonically white male character into an Asian American woman; but it also portrays a woman in a way that does not line up with the crime procedural genre's typical way of portraying women.

The original Watson of Doyle's texts is not quite on the original Sherlock Holmes' level: he acts as a stand-in for the reader, someone “normal” for them to connect with (Roth 105). Holmes is the genius to be looked up to and can do very little wrong, if any, while Watson is the tolerated everyday man. *Elementary's* Watson doesn't fulfill the role of the translator of Sherlock to the audience, as the crime fiction writer Watson did; rather she becomes a translator of the world for Sherlock. Instead of passively remarking on how amazing Sherlock's deductive abilities are and ignoring any social missteps (big or small) he may take, Joan Watson is allowed to set him straight and he, in turn, generally accepts her criticism without lashing back or thinking it unfounded. Instead of having their dynamic be infallible genius and worshiping sidekick, *Elementary's* leads are presented more as complements to each other. I see more bleeding together of their traits rather than having them be opposing types. There is a more symbiotic and beneficial camaraderie between them, I think, when compared to the original source material and a few of the more recent adaptations of it.

A major change to Watson's character in *Elementary* that, I think, helps to change the dynamic between Watson and Sherlock is how Watson, as a sober companion helping a just out of rehab recovering addict Sherlock stay away from drugs, has a professional reason to be around him for the better part of the first season of the show and the emphasis the show puts is on first her professional choice to continue her job and later her active choice as an individual to stay. She is not just a roommate or a friend at first; Watson holds some power over Sherlock because of her being a paid employee of his father to keep him in line and monitor his sobriety.

At the same time, Watson still has the same compassionate and empathetic nature associated with the Watsons of all adaptations. She still fulfills the role of teaching Sherlock

about having sympathy with and how to deal with people in a socially acceptable way; *Elementary's* version of Sherlock seems to take in a lot from her and learn from the mistakes she points out. Still, she does this not in a passive way: *Elementary* allows Watson to have an assertive voice in the show. Sherlock doesn't just tolerate her input or choose when to listen to it and when not to, and Watson actively disagrees with him when he is acting superior. In episode 15 of season one, "A Giant Gun, Filled With Drugs," Sherlock comments: "You seem even more dour than usual, Watson. I would posit it was a menstruation issue but I worked out your cycle. You're good for ten more days." Watson shoots back sarcastically: "Couching it as a scientific observation totally negates the misogyny." Instead of the male protagonist getting away with sexist behavior, *Elementary* has Watson actively confront Sherlock about his behavior and allows him to be a character that does not have to enact a sense of male superiority in these situations, realizing that what he's said is wrong and apologizing for it.

One important aspect of the show's representation of Watson as a woman is how she is not dependent on Sherlock. I would argue that they both support each other, Sherlock relying more on Watson's support than anything else. The integral factor in this part of their relationship is how when Watson stops being paid for her position as sober companion, she is the one choosing to stay with him and learn more about detective work. Sherlock tries to convince her to move on to her next client and continue her career as a sober companion, but ultimately it is Watson who decides for herself that she finds detective work fulfilling and to continue on living with Sherlock, this time in an equal partnership, the terms of which are set by her, and there to not only learn from him but assist him with her knowledge, especially her expertise from being a medical doctor. Throughout the arc of Sherlock and Watson's relationship, they have become friends who respect each other and grow because of and with each other. It is not that one

revolves around the other, but that both of these two characters' lives are intertwined and they are able to rely on, or not rely on, each other if they need to. In the episode "Details," Sherlock, showing vulnerability in a way that other adaptations would not be allowed to, says, "I am better with you, Watson." Instead of someone to adoringly praise him, the Sherlock of *Elementary* recognizes Joan Watson as her own person, a woman who can make her own life choices and one who has valuable wealth of knowledge and outlook on life that he himself lacks.

As a woman portrayed in the detective genre, Joan Watson escapes the traps of many of the women in the genre: simply being victims to be saved or a female detective that, as Johanna Smith states, "remains male-defined" in that they are female characters who take on the stereotypical masculine characteristics such as dressing as a man would or talking with foul language or being brash (80). Watson presents herself in a very feminine manner, dressing sensibly for settings such as crime scenes but still taking care in her appearance and dealing with people in a sociable manner, yet still being able to assert herself and have confidence that she is right in her deductions. As the same way in which Smith argues author of detective fiction Sue Grafton does with her heroine, I think that *Elementary* also "de-masculinizes" the detective genre and resists gender coding by presenting Joan Watson as a detective who just happens to be a woman, not defining her as a "female detective" (81).

Finally, it becomes a turn away from how a lot of shows that have a male and female leads treats their relationship, Joan and Sherlock are decidedly not romantic. Sherlock, unlike previous incarnations, throughout the first season of the show, truly comes to view Watson as his intellectual equal and respects her as such. Not having them be in or developing into a romantic or sexual relationship avoids devaluing their partnership into simply sexual attraction towards

each other, and instead focuses on how their characters can benefit each other as friends and partners first and foremost. If, at any time in the future of the show, the writers choose to have Sherlock and Watson become romantically involved, they will have a long history of character growth together to support that decision and to have that turn of their relationship make sense within the context of the show.

Another character in *Elementary* who is rewritten from the original male into female is Holmes's nemesis Moriarty. By doing this, the show combines two of the classic characters in Doyle's work: Irene Adler and Moriarty. Irene is described as an equal to Sherlock in intelligence, as is Moriarty: the two people who could ever defeat him in a battle of wits. The original Irene is someone who Sherlock sees as "The Woman," encompassing and surpassing her entire gender, whereas Moriarty is his criminal counterpart: how Sherlock could be if he chose a path of crime. So in combining these two characters *Elementary* gives a position of typically male power to a female character and denies the sexist implications of how Sherlock sees Irene. It is also putting into question both the characters in the show and the audience's automatic assumption that Moriarty has to be a man.

When the character of Irene is first introduced, before it is revealed that she is, in fact, Moriarty, the audience finds out that she was supposedly killed by Moriarty because she had a connection to Sherlock. When the show brings Irene back, it subverts the problematic representation of the female character's death as motivation for the lead male's pain or anger – in

this case, causing Sherlock to spiral into addiction. Even as Sherlock feels he needs to help her recover, as Irene her character resists Sherlock's idealization of her as “The Woman” he sees her as by surviving trauma without him and not being presented as a passive damsel in distress. She also resists this as Moriarty: she is not the woman that the great Sherlock Holmes can't deduce everything about, she is the woman who is actually playing a game with him and can successfully hide her intentions from him. Even though the character of Irene is also played by Moriarty, the show depicts her in a way by which she is allowed to be a full character who responds realistically to psychological torture and is allowed to be both vulnerable at times and also shown as able to overcome and work through what she has endured.

As both Irene and Moriarty she is not sexually objectified. During a scene in which Irene is getting dressed, the purpose of this is to reveal a significant clue for Sherlock that something is amiss – a mole that she has had removed, which wouldn't make sense happening while she was being kept prisoner. During this scene the camera doesn't linger on her unnecessarily; there is no long slide up her figure, only a zoomed in shot of where the mole should be on her back. As Moriarty she is not depicted as the “sexy villain,” and in her first appearance as her true character she is in an almost military looking outfit, and for the rest she is very professionally dressed in feminine suits. While she retains the “deadliness” of the classic femme fatale, Moriarty's power does not come from the traditional place; as author of *Femme Fatales* Mary Ann Doane points out, while the femme fatale has power because of her body and sexuality and so is only a representation, a “carrier” of power. *Elementary's* Moriarty is powerful because of who she is as an individual, her intelligence, and is completely self-aware of all the kinds of power she has control over. She doesn't have power “despite herself.” Doane states that the classic femme fatale is not a symbol of female power in terms of feminist ideology. Rather, she is a

representation of male anxiety towards women taking over more masculine roles. Moriarty is that to Sherlock: she holds power over him and is the cause of his fall into addiction. She has pulled his strings since they first met, reversing the “traditional” roles of male/dominant female/submissive.

I would argue that both her relationship to Sherlock as both Irene and Moriarty subverts typical gender roles. Sherlock is put into what we see as a more traditionally feminine role, as Irene is able to manipulate his emotionality and attachment to her, placing her into the more “dominant,” male role. I think they play out a gender reversed story of the typical abuser and abused. Irene uses his feelings for her in key ways that indicate to me that she is in an abuser-type role: in her appearance in the season one finale “The Woman/Heroine,” when Sherlock is accusing her of working for Moriarty, she uses phrases such as “You don't really want to come with me, so you're inventing a reason not to,” and “When you realize the mistake you've made, don't try to find me. I don't ever want to see you again.” Moriarty uses Sherlock’s emotions for her to her own gain without second thought.

Throughout her appearances as Moriarty, it is revealed how she really thinks of Sherlock. She is shown as enjoying using him and the power she gets out of manipulating him. She speaks of him as an “experiment” and sees him as something to figure out; she even says to him at one point that he is “a game [she] will always win.” Her attachment to him is not one of love, it is curiosity and fascination with a person she sees as similar to herself. Her downfall is one of pride: wanting to manipulate him into becoming more like her and wanting to possess him like an object.

When these two rewritten characters come together, it is ultimately Joan Watson who figures out and beats Moriarty. Joan is the character, not Sherlock, who devises a plan to use Moriarty's fascination with Sherlock against her and draw her in by having him fake an overdose. While Moriarty actually knows how to manipulate Sherlock, he is not the one to defeat her in the end. It is Moriarty's underestimation of Watson and her ability to figure out her weak points, not seeing her as an equal to Sherlock that causes her plans to go awry. The fact that two canonically male characters can be successfully recast as females who still have agency, are fully developed characters and can be well received by audiences is evidence that traditionally male roles are being seen in a different light. *Elementary's* dynamic between the male and two female characters expresses a divergence from trends in which female characters are only secondary to the male and instead can be portrayed as working with (or against) them as another equal human being, not as a stereotype of a female character.

While the depictions of male/female partnerships in *Pacific Rim* and *Elementary* are not revolutionary, I argue that they are progressive in that they are depicting women in roles usually thought of as “male,” and are treated with respect and humanity by their male counterparts. They are not perfect representations of women; however, I think the most valuable aspect of these two texts are that they are written as realistic and do not fall into repetitive stereotypes of women. By placing a woman in a “masculine” role the texts attempt to avoid over-sexualizing or reducing their character. They are allowed to have their own motivations, their own backstory, and be contradictory in their various traits. They are human, and perhaps in this way these texts are a small step towards breaking away from depicting gender as binary.

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