Female Identity and Experience in ABC's LOST

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Female Identity and Experience in ABC's LOST

(TITLE)

BY

Jennifer Reichart

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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2014

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE
“Female Identity and Experience in ABC’s LOST”

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Master of Arts in English
Literary Studies
Summer 2014
This thesis is an analysis of the female characters and their roles as mothers, daughters, and lovers in the television series *LOST* (ABC, 2004-2010). During its original runtime, the series presented intriguing yet complex women whose personal experiences were revealed in flashbacks. With the move from these flashbacks to flashforwards and flashsideways, the series further complicated both its form and its content by demonstrating how individual identity and experience informed each female character’s decisions, motivations, and agendas. In this way, the series deconstructs various stereotypical roles women are placed in such as single mothers, pampered princesses, and imprisoned women. Oftentimes, these women are disinherit of their physical property or are relegated to the role of property themselves as the objects of a male gaze. Furthermore, both women’s wombs and their children are also presented as property and are thus examined in an essentialist discussion. The first chapter, “Property,” explores the female characters of Shannon and Kate, the second chapter, “Progeny,” discusses Claire and Danielle, and the third chapter, “Procreation,” examines Sun and Juliet.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Melissa Ames of Eastern Illinois University’s English Department without whom this project not only could not have been completed but also would not have resulted in the final product given here. For showing faith of a different kind, I dedicate this work to my mentor, my thesis director, and my fellow in pop culture.
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Special thanks to Eastern Illinois University English professors Dr. Olga Abella and Dr. Jad Smith who both served as readers on this thesis committee. Thanks also to Dr. Charles Wharram for first introducing me to the wonderful world of LOST and Locke.
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Introduction: The Island of Lost Identity

Since the emergence of cultural studies and its integration into traditional literary studies, the theoretical field has become increasingly legitimized allowing for the serious examination of popular culture artifacts such as contemporary television series. The ability to view such series through a critical lens proves that they offer more than mere entertainment value. Such shows provide not only thematic material available for close reading but also promote the nurturing of cognitive reflexes in their viewers, such as long-term memory and information assimilation. In his work, *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today’s Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter*, Steven Johnson states, “[P]opular television shows […] have […] increased the cognitive work they demand from their audience, exercising the mind in ways that would have been unheard of thirty years ago” (62). Critical analyses of recent television series have also revealed large fan bases that communally engage in plot theory prediction, character analysis, and thematic evaluation. In *How to Watch Television*, editors Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell have collected forty articles on various television series which expound on the benefits and merits of actively, rather than passively, watching television for both greater enjoyment and cognitive benefit. Of the several television series that have aired in the beginning of the twenty-first century, perhaps none has emblemized this marriage of entertainment and education better than *LOST* (ABC, 2004-2010).

Lost on the Island

Amidst the series’s startling popularity, many critical works on ABC’s *LOST* have been published. Among these is *Lost and Philosophy: The Island has Its Reasons*, edited by Sharon M. Kaye and published as part of the Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture
Series, one of the most prestigious and well-established book series to examine this ancient discipline within contemporary visual texts. The compilation, which – due to the popularity of *LOST*, was revised, updated, and rereleased during a short period of time to examine all seasons of the now finished television series – includes a range of articles by several authors. In the introduction to the first compilation, Kaye validates *LOST*’s presence in the book series by stating:

> Once you have been lost you are never quite the same. The ABC hit drama *LOST* speaks to our deepest fear: the fear of being cut off from everything we know and love, left to fend for ourselves in a strange land. This fear is a philosophical fear because it speaks to the human condition. It forces us to confront profound questions about ourselves and the world. (3)

While there is much to fear on the mysterious, seemingly-uninhabited island on which the survivors find themselves after a plane crash on *LOST*, the series proves that their greatest fears result most often from internal disharmony rather than external threats. In a strange new environment, they are forced to ask difficult questions about the world around them, but the questions about themselves often prove even more difficult. The question of the self, of internal identity in relation to the outside world, has long been a philosophical subject. Kaye provides viewers with a marked connection between the show’s philosophical elements, both directly through characters’ names which correspond to real philosophers and indirectly through individual analyses of the series, and the “human condition.” This element of the program allows for in-depth character analysis via various philosophical premises. Concerning form, *LOST*’s heavy use of flashbacks in the first three seasons allows audiences to further analyze and identify with
the characters on the island. Their decisions become clearer when viewers see their previous lives and motivations off the island. Ultimately, viewers are allowed to map a character’s identity in progress. While each character is lost in more than one way, it is the female characters of *LOST*, the lost women, who have become the subject of such scrutiny and controversy during and after the series’s six-season run.

For the female characters of *LOST*, the “fear” Kaye describes in her introduction could indeed be anxiety over the politics of gender difference, both biological and cultural, as presented in the emerging society on the island. These characters face unique identity dilemmas, each undeniably connected with their status as women, bringing attention to the body and biology. Due to the series’s complex use of character namesakes, anachronistic plotlines, and intertextuality, *LOST* not only allows but encourages multidisciplinary readings. *LOST*’s complex narrative structure – which moves from character-centric flashbacks to flashforwards and even flashsideways as the series progresses – reflects the complexity of the thematic material. In fact, the series often seems to abandon plotlines, produce red herrings, and insert apparently arbitrary plot devices and visual symbols. This narrative complexity could indeed be a direct reflection of the complexity of *LOST*’s characters. The series focuses relentlessly on the issues of characters’ identities and performances within their given social groups. They make bad decisions, have false starts, and sometimes act (perform) inconsistently. In this way, *LOST* shows audiences that identity is not strategically structured; it is an organic process that occurs little by little over time in seemingly small moments that matter just as much as major events (often housed in season finales).
This project investigates the (gendered) representations of the female characters on *LOST*. These figures are examined in order to attend to the ways in which the program’s character construction comments on female identity in terms of women’s shared status (or “universal experience”) and the varying experiences that individual women often face due to specific life circumstances. This thesis focuses on the various philosophic motifs running throughout the series in order to explore the extra layer of commentary these loose philosophic allusions allow the show to provide in terms of gender relations and bias. Within these feminist and philosophical connections, the following categorizations of women are further explored: women as the property (or object of the gaze) of men, women as performers who manipulate gendered stereotypes that allow them to move in and out of those problematic positions of property, and women whose status is linked to more traditionally defined identities of mothers, wives, etc.

In attending to these motifs, this project highlights narrative trends that serve to underscore these messages. For example, throughout the series, as the various female characters of *LOST* struggle to move toward a fuller understanding of their own identities, many of them die before this process can be completed. Just as quickly as new female characters are introduced, they are also eliminated from the series, often by violent means. Amongst various criticisms of the series’s plot (its narrative instability, abandoned storylines, and perceived lack of direction), the series has most likely received its harshest lampoons due to the initial lack of representation and horrific fates of its female characters. Michaela D. E. Meyer and Danielle M. Stern note that the women even begin the series somewhat outnumbered and marginalized:
With 46 survivors (14 of which are individually featured in the first season), *Lost* has been touted as one of the most diverse shows on television; however, of the main characters featured on the first season only four are women: Kate the ex-bank robber and felon; Shannon, the spoiled, rich princess; Claire, the pregnant lone Australian character; and Sun, the Korean housewife. 

Of these four women (who will all be examined in this thesis), two perish in the main plot of the series while one is continually imprisoned and the other descends into madness after she is separated from her child. The other two women featured in this project are Rousseau, the wild, solitary, previous inhabitant of the island, and Juliet, the doctor to the enigmatic Others who also previously occupied the island. Both of these women die as well. What at first seemed an unkind form of attrition, the deaths of these female characters is complicated since they are replaced with other female characters, who likewise die. This leads to one of the greatest criticisms of *LOST*: its relegation of women to damning fates. In the “Sexist Beatdown” column of the *Washington City Paper*, Amanda Hess “questions the enduring mystery of ABC’s *LOST*: Why have all the compelling female characters been systematically eliminated from the plot, while Jack is allowed to live on as Dr. McFixALot, a character who exists only to fail unspectacularly at everything and shoot enduring looks at Kate?” While this question discredits any power and efficiency Jack has as a strong, male protagonist, it does rightly bring attention to the direction of his male gaze. On a larger scale, it calls direct attention to the series’s seemingly systematic destruction of female characters. These characters are not written
out of the series in ambiguous storylines leading to unclear futures; these women often perish in extremely violent ways.

Since the women often die while attempting to construct individual identities no longer connected to female stereotypes, *LOST* provides a commentary on women’s roles and limited choices in society. Placed in constant categories of objectification – as the object of the male gaze and as property itself – the female characters fight a kind of biological determinism on the island that gives men more chances than women. This will be illuminated later in the thesis when the bizarre mechanics of the island’s biological and population problems reveal a strong gender bias in terms of survival. Given these limitations, the women strategically perform in attempts to reach their goals. They play out these stereotypes to their own, if temporary, advantage. However, at the moment that the women end their performances, they are just as likely to be cut from the series. In the wake of losing these women, unexpected victims are revealed – the men who are left to survive without them. In nearly all cases, the loss of the recipient of the male gaze results in the personal destruction of its perpetrator. The men, both on and off the island, become rudderless, seeking solace in solitude, drug addiction, and even death. While the series may seem to showcase women in stereotypical ways (e.g. as the property of men, as bodies to be gazed upon), the women often exercise their own agency through these established social norms. When these norms change (i.e. the women die) the male characters sink into states of inaction, unable to cope with losing the objects of their gaze. The fact that the men fall into these emotional depressions works as a device to show that female objectification by males is detrimental to both genders. The continued nature of this inactivity could further possibly be a commentary on how little gender norms have
changed over the years in terms of objectification and performance. The ways in which 
*LOST* subtly critiqued societal gender norms/relations throughout its six-year run is 
highlighted within the individual chapters of this thesis.

**Thesis Chapters**

The first chapter of this thesis, titled “Property,” will examine the characters of Shannon and Kate and the various ways in which their property is taken from them and how they are often treated as property themselves. Both characters are the objects of many a male gaze, allowing for interesting intersections of both females’ roles as both object and subject. These two are also examined via performance theory as both women perform various gendered personas and construct different social identities. This discussion begins by studying Shannon, who performs the various stereotypes that men place on her. Rather than resisting them, Shannon uses these prescribed roles to her advantage to manipulate the men around her. It is revealed that Shannon learned to operate in this way when she was disinherited of her own property. Thus, she willingly plays the object of the male gaze in order to procure property from men. However, in the face of personal trauma, Shannon loses her ability to perform strategically and unwillingly assumes one final stereotype – that of the hysterical woman. Confounded by grief, the loss of this ability to productively move in and out of identity roles eventually leads to her death.

In Kate’s case, she suffers a personal identity crisis almost immediately on the island; her persona as savior to the island’s hunky doctor, Jack, is disrupted by the revelation that she was a prison transport on the plane. Kate questions her identity in ways that allow for discussion of Lockean theory. Kate’s status on the island as a free
citizen is defended via a rethought version of Locke’s tabula rasa. Her role as a prisoner invites Lockean analyses of property, and her care for others can be read within Locke’s social contract lens. Kate’s character construction invites these analyses since she is often presented as engaging with herself in antiquated “nature versus nurture” debates, rather than conducting discussions of identity. Similarly, Kate herself focuses on her past identity rather than constructing her present and future self. In this way, Kate appears to be a prisoner of outdated theoretical debates where concerned with identity construction. In Kate, *LOST* literally provides the visual symbol of women being chained to the philosophical past.

The second chapter, “Progeny,” moves these discussions from single, childless women to single women who have been robbed of their children. One of the survivors, Claire, arrives on the island in the full bloom of pregnancy. Amidst anxiety over the wellbeing of her child who will be born on the island, Claire also contends with her fears about being a competent mother. Both on and off the island, Claire’s fears result in desperate, seemingly rash decisions to allow another to raise her child. She engages in a type of contract pregnancy with the Others, the native inhabitants of the island, in a way that raises multiple questions concerning women as mothers, women as vessels, and women as property. Her child itself is even reduced to the level of property while Claire is relegated to the role of an expendable machine of production. These complicated matters of pregnancy, surrogacy, and adoption allow for an even more complicated examination of identity within philosophical frameworks.

Early in the first season, the audience is also introduced to a “Danielle Rousseau,” a nominal reference to the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Before this, a John Locke character is presented on the series, keeping the full name and the sex of his
historical namesake. While the real Rousseau is male, the fictional Rousseau retains her French nationalism but is transformed into a female. Danielle Rousseau represents a reinvented “noble savage,” the famous cultural construct of the historical Rousseau, as she lives alone on the island before the plane crash but seems to still have kept many of her morals; this echoes the series’s earlier attention to philosophy with the reinvention of Locke’s tabula rasa with Kate’s character. Rousseau often aids the survivors of the plane crash and keeps her word with them in regard to mission completions and merchandise exchange, wavering from this and breaking her word only in regard to the well-being of her child, another baby that was stolen by the Others when Rousseau’s own ship crashed on the island nearly two decades before. While the theories of the historical Rousseau, such as social contract theory, are present here, this character also exists to scrutinize the categories of motherhood presented throughout the series.

The third chapter of this thesis, titled “Procreation,” further examines the problematic presentations of conjugal society, pregnancy, and paternity in LOST. In the second and third seasons, it is revealed that the female character Sun, whose unstable relationship with her husband was presented in the first season, is pregnant. Unlike the other previous two women, it is not only first unclear as to whether or not Sun became pregnant on the island but also as to whether or not her husband Jin is in fact the father of her baby. Sun is faced with this horrible verdict: if the child is Jin’s, both she and the baby will most likely die on the island. However, if she was impregnated off the island, they both have a chance of surviving while living with a heavy burden. Here, Sun’s desires surprise the audience, as do her later actions in the last half of the series. Among the wide cast of female characters, Sun presents one of the most complicated identities in
that she is sweet, demure, and caring for others, but in the face of life and death, she makes drastic decisions that endanger not only her own life but also her family’s.

Alternately, this chapter will also examine Juliet, the obstetrician gynecologist who is manipulated into treating the Others’ pregnant women. The Others, so dubbed by the survivors for their enigmatic and assumed difference from their own subjectivity, lurk in the shadows for the first few seasons of LOST, increasingly gaining more screen time. First presented as an underdeveloped society of violent hit-and-run misfits, the third season reveals that the Others themselves are performing. Far more advanced, advantaged, and organized than the plane crash survivors, the Others constantly manipulate them… and each other. A groundbreaking leader in fertility science, Juliet Burke dramatically enters the third season as a woman to be reckoned with. Here, her husband’s namesake of Edmund Burke allows further philosophical analysis of her character. Juliet embodies the subjects of Burkean aesthetics, the sublime and the beautiful. Not only is Juliet angered to be cut off from her sister, whom she helped to conceive a child via her experimental fertility treatments, she must also watch the women and babies she cares for die. Furthermore, she must contend with the Others’ leader, Ben, who not only keeps her against her will on the island for the sake of the pregnant women and their unborn children but also because she is the object of his male gaze. Under extreme pressure from men, Juliet oscillates between the two aesthetics mentioned above, constantly reconstructing her character and performing. Despite Juliet’s passion for bringing life into the world, she arguably receives the most violent death of all. The presentation of Juliet’s character and her death in the bowels of the earth also speak to chthonic themes of darkness, depth, and destruction as they relate to women’s psyches.
and bodies. Juliet must not only engage in willingly destructive behavior to complete her journey toward individuation, but she must also make the ultimate sacrifice, her life, to save her friends. With these themes of death and sacrifice, both Sun and Juliet problematize certain binary constructions concerning female identity: the wife versus the career woman, the mother versus the single woman, etc. Since their fates are the same, despite rather different life circumstances, *LOST* again provides a commentary on the fact that women’s choices are limited and suggests that women cannot successfully fulfill several roles at once.

The conclusion to this thesis briefly attends to other female representations on *LOST*. Among these are Ana Lucia, Charlotte, Eloise, and Rose. While Ana Lucia and Charlotte are young single women who perish violently, Eloise and Rose represent older maternal figures to the Others and the survivors, respectively. While both of these women survive, they make hard decisions for the greater good of their people or the island itself. Once again, women’s choices are limited and their identities are stereotyped. Additionally, this section explores the overlooked consequences of the male suffering when the women are killed off. Without their female counterparts, they not only lack the inertia to continue on with their objectives but also wallow in self-pity and regret. Upon further analysis, it is revealed that this male suffering is as great, if not greater, than that of the women they are connected to. Through the deaths of the women and the failures of the men, *LOST* critiques established roles of men and women while acknowledging differences in identity. In fact, the series invites and nearly demands that its audience identify with male and female characters alike in order to understand difference, oftentimes within the scope of gender.
Finally, the conclusion will briefly posit that the narrative complexity and structure of *LOST* signals a televisual emergence of the “politically and aesthetically avant-garde cinema” also discussed alongside the male gaze by Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (834). With film’s previous focus on women’s bodies and objectivity rather than subjectivity, female characters were coded as mere screen aesthetics; their own desires and motivations were not considered. Similarly, *LOST* has created the illusion of coding women through its strategic stereotyping at the beginning of the series only to immediately begin deconstructing this façade through the first flashback episode centered on the female character Kate. In this way, the female characters are always becoming something new, reinventing themselves within the narrative. And despite this, they often repeat their mistakes their former selves made, allowing the character arches to mirror the show’s own strategic use of reinvention.

After this brief analysis of the ways in which the program’s overall structure highlights its thematic concerns and cultural commentary, I provide an afterword in which I narrate my own journey toward and with *LOST* and how this television series impacted my own identity and experience of the self. Additionally, I provide some various connections from *LOST* to more contemporary programs hoping that these varied speculations encourage more criticism and intertextual readings of the series.
Works Cited


*LOST.* Created by J.J. Abrams, Jeffrey Lieber, and Damon Lindelof. ABC Studios, 2004-2010. Television and DVD.


Chapter 1: Property

This first chapter examines the identities of two young, single, childless women on *LOST*. Even without the element of maternity, the series pays particular attention to both women’s bodies and how they are the objects of the male gaze. Likewise, their identity and social constructions are equally emphasized. Despite the similarities between Kate and Shannon, two prominent female survivors introduced in the series’s pilot episode, their characters differ in how they perform, how they are perceived, and how they interact with ideas of property and the self. Here, philosophy, specifically Lockean theory, is used to analyze the two women through appropriation language and Locke’s image of the tabula rasa. Likewise, Lockean aspects of social contract theory are used to examine how the women perceive exchanges within the society, including their own bodies. More specifically, this essay explores the ways in which these female characters perform actions and construct personas that can be directly related to Locke’s theories on property, appropriation, and social contracts, all the while contending with the pervasive male gaze of their counterparts.

Both original survivors on the island, these two women quite literally bring their baggage with them to their new environment; metaphors for their personal belongings illustrate the fact that these women have been – and, oftentimes, continue to be – seen as property themselves through various legal matters such as disinheritance and imprisonment. In both cases, the program draws attention to the objectifying male gaze each woman experiences and defines her largely in terms of her complex social and familial relations. However, the series in turn deemphasizes the roles of women as property by allowing the viewer to gain the females’ perspectives through flashbacks.
These perspectives on past life experiences present new information that provides the audience with additional artifacts for analysis; the women can sometimes validate seemingly arbitrary actions while other times their likewise seemingly stereotypical roles are questioned through context-specific personal experience. However, the women often experiment with their identities and roles in ways that demonstrate active engagement in reinvention. While the male characters often revert to cultural norms of various societies off the island, the island itself becomes a place of reinvention and rebirth for these women.

A major way that LOST trains its audience to thoroughly engage is through its manipulation of stereotypes in its characters. Common stereotypes of women are presented but audience members engage with characters’ identities through flashbacks. Almost immediately, Kate is cast in the light of a kind, domestic do-gooder, and, just as quickly, the series reveals that she is actually the escaped prisoner of a U.S. Marshal. This is how both the audience and the male characters first view this character. After Kate’s identity as a wanted fugitive is revealed, some characters doubt her previously perceived caring nature. Others who accepted it naturally enough later begin to distrust her judgment when she puts the group’s safety and comfort before her own. The complicated characterization and manipulations of stereotypes contribute to the complex narrative that is LOST. Within each character’s narrative, their subjectivity, their personal perspective and experience of the world around them is illuminated through these flashbacks in the first three seasons. Although the program portrays the female characters as subjects with complex identities, this is sometimes undermined by the fact that they are often simplified and objectified by the males around them. Specifically, these women
are regularly depicted as stereotypical female objects to be looked upon and appropriated. Laura Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze, more commonly used to analyze film than television, is useful in analyzing a program like *LOST*. Mulvey first applied Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytics concerning sexuality and subjectivity to the big screen in her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Mulvey identified “[t]he image of woman as (passive) raw [material] for the (active) gaze of man” (833). Mulvey claims that “[t]his complex interaction of looks is specific to film” (844) can be applied to *LOST* since *LOST* can be described as a filmic television series. Both the narrative structure and the focus of the camera show that there is a play between these stereotypical characterizations and the new survivors these women become. They constantly reinvent their own identities despite or because of their status as objects of the male gaze.

The female character, Shannon, the spoiled daughter of privilege and wealth, reveals herself to be possibly the greatest performer of all. Through multiple exchanges, Shannon reveals that her stereotypical dumb blonde charade is nothing but attire; she can cast it off and just as easily wear it to manipulate the men around her. Shannon is also the most obvious object of the male gaze; throughout the first season, it is revealed that her bikinied body is actually most coveted by her stepbrother, Boone, fellow survivor and unintentional heir to Shannon’s original inheritance. At first glance, Shannon’s status as the object of the male gaze – highlighted by the show’s continued emphasis on her youth and beauty – seems problematic from a feminist standpoint. However, upon closer analysis, the series reveals that Shannon is actively engaging with her status as the object of the male gaze, perpetuating it in many ways through her multiple identity performances. Arguably, Shannon’s status as the object of the male gaze – be it by her
own choice or not – contributes to her character often being equated to/treated like property (an object to be owned) by the men on the island. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the character Locke takes a particular interest in her relationship with Boone, pointing out to both of them that they have too much interest in the other.

Another female character, Kate’s own manipulations of gender stereotypes are enabled by her status as a prisoner, making her a different form of property. Unlike Shannon, Kate is showcased continually throughout all six seasons of LOST. While Shannon may be the master manipulator, Kate is definitely the multiple manipulator. Through various aliases, Kate performs continually, and it is exactly these performances that lead to a conversation of Kate’s identity. As with Shannon, Kate’s family life is complicated by a broken home and an absent father, and Kate’s identity is called into question almost from the moment of her birth. It is clear that she is imprisoned by an indefinable identity as much as she is by her male captors throughout the series. While Kate struggles with these crises, she, like Shannon, immerses from them to form mutable identities which allow her to perform for men and reach her own goals. Kate’s character, however, gives the audience its greatest emblem of the tabula rasa, Locke’s own term for the blank innocence of childhood which is reinvented in Kate’s rebirth as a free woman on the island. This chapter explores how both Shannon and Kate strategically perform – often as the willing object of the male gaze – to both conform to and problematize common female stereotypes in attempts to better control their own identities.

“You Do Not Have the Slightest Idea What I am Thinking”

As most of the characters on LOST are initially portrayed, Shannon seems to be a simple, flat character at the beginning of the series. But her depiction is even more
trivialized and sexualized. The audience first sees Shannon as the typical damsel in
distress. During the opening plane crash scene, she is dressed in skimpy attire, standing
without movement, and screaming continually ("Pilot: Part 1"). While she is physically
unharmed yet yelling, she is seen as a very young, immature woman without helpful role
or coherent voice. She is the quintessential passive woman amidst other active survivors.
Even Boone, who actively attempts to help Jack with the injured, is able to contribute
little but still tries while the uninjured Shannon screams. In the beginning, her only
initiative on the island is to paint her nails and suntan in a bikini while waiting for rescue.
When Boone, her brother, confronts her on her lassitude, she lashes out:

    Boone: What are you doing?
    Shannon: I think I was mean to him.
    Boone: What?
    Shannon: Isn't that the guy from the gate? He wouldn't let us have our
    seats in first class. He saved our lives.
    Boone: Come on, Shannon, we're trying to clear some of the wreckage.
    You should help out. You're just being worthless over here.
    Shannon: I'm being what?
    Boone: What do you want me to say? You're sitting on your ass staring at
    bodies.
    Shannon: I've just been through a trauma here, okay?
    Boone: We've all been through a trauma. The only difference is, since the
    crash, you've actually given yourself a pedicure.
    Shannon: You know what? It is so easy to make fun of me, and you're
    good at it. I get it.
    Boone: I wish I didn't have to waste my time making fun of you. I wish I
didn't have a reason. Yeah, it is easy, Shannon.
    Shannon: Screw you! You do not have the slightest idea what I am
    thinking.
    Boone: I have a much better idea than you think I do.
    Shannon: No, you don't!
    Boone: Okay, Shannon. Then what are you thinking?
    Shannon: I'm going with them, on the hike. ("Pilot: Part 2")

Shannon's assertion that Boone does not know what she is thinking strikes to the heart of
their relationship. Shannon believes that Boone's gaze is focused entirely on her body.
While she uses her body to manipulate other men, Shannon wishes for Boone to connect with her on a deeper level, anticipating and understanding the complexities of her identity. However, Boone’s insults do indeed stir Shannon to action here as she joins Sayid, Sawyer, and Kate on a quest to reach a radio signal on higher ground. Boone, however, is not convinced that Shannon can withstand the grueling trek, so he accompanies them as well. Shannon proves to Boone that she is not “worthless” when Sayid intercepts a radio signal playing a looped recording of a French woman’s warning. Only Shannon, who self-admittedly spent a year in Paris “drinking, not studying,” is able to finally decipher the message and relay it to the other survivors (“Pilot: Part 2”). In this case, as in many others, it is not only Boone but Shannon herself who relegates her to the status of the dumb-blonde, party girl. Nevertheless, Shannon’s efficiency is soon proven, as are her reasons for her doubts about her self-worth.

In the episode “Walkabout,” Boone once again baits Shannon by claiming that she will go hungry if she cannot learn to feed herself. Shannon claims that there are plenty of fish in the sea, an obvious barb to Boone as can be seen when the full nature of their relationship is revealed later in the season. At the end of the episode, Shannon produces a fish, although Charlie caught the fish for her after she openly flirted with him and asked him to get one for her. Boone does not believe this “counts,” but Shannon is very forthright, stating, “I told you I'd catch a fish, didn't I?” (“Walkabout”). Shannon truly believes that the work she has done is legitimate having produced the desired result. As in Shannon’s more intimate relationships with all of the men in her life, she willingly plays the role of an incompetent – even to the extent of victimhood – to deflect her own role as property and to thus accrue property from the very males who stereotype her.
While Shannon enlists the help of men by pretending to be helpless in the above scenario, she is reluctant to seek help from those around her when she truly needs it. This point is most emphasized in the episode “Confidence Man” in which the audience first sees that Shannon is asthmatic. Without her inhaler, Shannon withdraws from the group and her overt displays of self-confidence are muted. This is a situation in which her performances cannot aid her, and she resorts to simply seeking comfort from Boone rather than manipulating him. Boone does seem to understand this facet of Shannon’s character, and, perhaps, Shannon still inadvertently manipulates him. This relationship becomes clear when Boone seeks Jack’s help on Shannon’s behalf; Jack tells Boone that he has never seen her have an asthma attack before, and Boone replies, “Because she had an inhaler. She sneaks hits when no one’s looking. She’s been embarrassed about it since she was a little kid. I guess breathing’s not cool” (“Confidence Man”). Because Shannon may indeed find her situation “not cool,” her embarrassment for her weakness drives her to withdraw. As will be shown, when placed in moments of extreme compromise, Shannon is unable to perform but resists the sympathies and help offered by others. Without the façade of her performances to protect her, Shannon’s true identity rejects her constructed stereotype of being a helpless woman.

In the pivotal episode “Hearts and Minds,” Shannon and Boone’s true relationship is finally revealed. Shannon and Boone are in fact step-siblings, and Shannon manipulates him as she does the rest of the men in her life. Just prior to the crash, she creates an elaborate scheme to convince Boone to come to Sydney, Australia to rescue her from an abusive boyfriend, but Boone soon discovers that Shannon has engineered the whole plot to get money and attention from him. In the final flashback scene,
Shannon seduces Boone then dismisses and degrades him as always. As with the money, this is Shannon’s insurance package; she can keep Boone as a backup lover until she finds another male to manipulate. Boone further validates Shannon’s claims as she is always the object of his gaze on the island. But, as explained above, Shannon’s true motivations are more complex. The audience learns that she seduces Boone because she wishes to repudiate her own feelings of admiration and attraction for him after she feels betrayed by Boone’s mother’s act of disinheriting her from her own deceased father’s money and offended by Boone’s offer to help her. Still, Shannon keeps Boone close as a boy toy of sorts with her performance of codependency. She can manipulate him for economic gain; on the island, her former machinations to accrue money from men are meaningless and she deals in food, medicine, and shelter, seeking them from the men around her, including Boone.

The situation with Shannon is further illuminated in the second-season episode “Abandoned.” Flashbacks reveal that Shannon’s stepmother, a wealthy woman on her own terms, received all of her father’s money upon his passing. Shannon asks for a little bit of money to get herself to New York where she has been accepted by a prestigious dance studio. She longs to follow her dreams and her beloved step-brother to the big city. Having been accepted, Shannon feels that she has proved her talent, worth, and labor in the acceptance letter, but her stepmother dismisses her as irresponsible and keeps the entirety of the money. Shannon is left rudderless. When Boone offers her the money to get to New York – while also stating that he is leaving so that he can help his mother run her wedding business – Shannon is offended that he does not believe she will find a way to survive on her own. Shannon believes that there should be an exchange of respect.
along with the money and she feels disrespected by Boone. This distrust in her ability to care for herself actually changes Shannon’s identity so that she becomes a master manipulator of men, always getting what she wants in money and attention by performing for them as a helpless young woman. She even exploits Boone the most for money and attention in a vengeful way. Ironically, this performance makes Shannon a gifted survivor.

Shannon’s disinheritance affects her character development, or lack thereof, as she is initially financially and then emotionally stunted. There are also more tangible issues of property, legality, gender, and family here at play, all of which are considered by Locke. Lockean theory examines both women’s roles as property and their relationship to property itself. In her article, “Early Liberal Roots of Feminism: John Locke and the Attack on Patriarchy,” Melissa Butler delineates the role of women in conjunction with property:

Locke distinguished between the property rights of husband and wife. All property in conjugal society was not automatically the husband’s. A wife could have property rights not subject to her husband’s control. Locke indicated this in a passage on conquest: ‘For as to the Wife’s share, whether her own Labour or compact gave her a Title to it, ‘tis plain, her Husband could not forfeit what was hers.’ (383)

In the above, the compact, or contract, is marriage, and upon death or conquest, a husband’s share would pass to his wife while her own property and wealth could not be taken from her by him in life. It is no coincidence that Boone’s mother, who plays the part of the evil stepmother to Shannon and bars her from her father’s wealth through this
exact marriage compact, is the owner of a successful wedding planning business. Boone’s mother hires him to manage the business, and pays him for his time, but she does nothing to help Shannon achieve her own goals even though she is willing to work toward them. Thus, Shannon’s stepmother views not only weddings but also marriages as business; her marriage to Shannon’s father provides her with the monetary benefits of this contract while barring Shannon, the child property viewed as an expendable financial burden.

After Boone dies, Shannon once again withdraws from the group even more. As with her disinheritance and her asthma attack, Shannon initially resists help because she has lost her ability to perform as helpless. Now, she truly is. Only Sayid, and Walt, the only child on the island, can approach her. Before he leaves the island with his father on a makeshift raft in the first season finale, Walt gives Shannon his dog Vincent to care for, claiming that the animal helped him when he lost his mother (“Exodus: Part 1”). In the second season, Shannon has recovered somewhat and has rekindled a budding romance with Sayid, although this relationship is soon endangered, as is Shannon’s precarious role within the group, when she begins to claim that she has been seeing Walt (“Abandoned”). No one believes her, and thus, Shannon becomes associated with the “hysterical woman” as opposed to the helpless woman. After Boone’s death, Shannon is viewed by the other survivors as filling this stereotypical role. She is unable to vocalize the true measure of her grief. Due to her pain, she is no longer able to perform. Without the aid of her performances to benefit her – and without her target audience of Boone – Shannon loses her previous – and willing – stereotypes and sinks into this new stereotype of womanhood. In this subjective position, Shannon lacks the control she held previously and resents that this stereotype undoes her autonomy since no one believes her.
The stereotype of the hysterical woman has been the subject of much historical, sexual, and gender analyses, all concerned with identity. In *Popular Medicine, Hysterical Disease, and Social Controversy in Shakespeare's England*, Kaara L. Peterson maps the portrayals of hysterical women from Shakespeare’s leading ladies, such as Lady Macbeth and Ophelia, to the Victorians’ sexual experimentation on female mental patients. Peterson points out that women’s physical appearances – and more importantly, their perceived performances – were traditional indicators of hysteria: “[…] the swoon, like the tears, was symptomatic of hysterical sexual frustration” (62). More recently, the website tvtropes.org has likewise documented visual presentations of the “Hysterical Woman,” stating, “This trope characterizes women as less rational, disciplined, and emotionally stable than men, and thus more prone to mood swings, irrational overreactions, and mental illness. As a result female characters may be coddled, or their opinions undervalued” (para. 1). It can also be noted that this trope is related to that of the “Screaming Woman”:

When a truly terrifying danger rears its ugly head, maybe a monster appears or a large object is about to fall on them, one of the female characters stands there and screams helplessly, necessitating that one of the heroes pull her out of harm’s way. [The situation] [i]s guaranteed to become even more annoying when said female character sees something dangerous, and stands and screams for the hero to help, when they would have had plenty of time to get out of the way themselves. (tvtropes.org para. 1)
The opening plane crash scene in which Shannon screams definitely fits her within this trope, but now she has transformed into the hysterical woman in the eyes of the other survivors. When Shannon insists on the validation of her claims of seeing Walt, Sayid questions her, saying, “I know what it is to lose someone you care deeply about.” Shannon replies, “You really think that this is all about Boone? I saw Walt, Sayid.” Sayid counters, “Then why are we sitting at Boone’s grave?” (“Abandoned”). Clearly, Sayid believes that Shannon is using Walt as a crutch, a mental construct implemented as a deflection from her grief and desolation over losing Boone. Walt, the “lost boy,” has replaced the irrevocably lost brother in Sayid’s eyes, pointing to Shannon’s new status as a hysterical woman.

As stated above, the stereotype of the hysterical women has been the subject of much analysis. In his critical work *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault describes the historical metamorphosis of women whose roles change and result in perceived hysteria:

> It is worth remembering that the first figure to be invested by the deployment of sexuality, one of the first to be ‘sexualized,’ was the ‘idle’ woman. She inhabited the outer edge of the ‘world,’ in which she always had to appear as a value, and of the family, where she was assigned a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligations. Thus there emerged the ‘nervous’ woman, the woman afflicted with ‘vapors’; in this figure, the hysterization of woman found its anchorage point. (121).

It is quite true that, in the beginning, Shannon was viewed as “sexualized,” often due to her own engineering. She was also seen as the “idle” woman, which can be reviewed in
the above passages when Boone critiques her for doing her nails on the island, and after the loss of Boone, Walt’s gift of Vincent to her when he notices she is listlessly folding Boone’s clothes. She appears on the “outer edge of the world,” contributing little, but she “always had to appear as a value,” which could be seen when she interpreted the French recording on the hike after Boone called her “worthless.” However, her value was mostly sexual, and her incestuous relationship with Boone mixes this value with the one “of the family.” She is “assigned a new destiny,” crumpling under the weight of the fear of pregnancy, motherhood, and responsibility in her “conjugal” obligation to Sayid. Therefore, she appears to the other survivors as the “nervous” woman now, “afflicted with vapors,” unseen entities which take the form of her visual hallucinations of Walt and her auditory hallucinations of hearing the whispers of the Others in the jungle. Indeed, the “hysterization” of Shannon has “found its anchorage point,” and reaching the point of no return, Shannon leaves the camp to find Walt and prove her rationality while at the same time eschewing her potential passive role to Sayid through overt physical action.

Adversely, Shannon’s greatest moment of character development is actually when she remains passive. In “Exodus: Part 2,” she is preparing for hike after Boone’s death when she and Sayid have the following conversation:

Sayid: Do you really need all that?
Shannon: Yeah, I do.
Sayid: Why do you have to bring so much?
Shannon: Don't you have a hike to lead?
          [She drops her suitcase and Sayid finds she has some of Boone's clothes. Shannon grabs them.]
Shannon: I'm fine.
Sayid: These belong to your brother.
Shannon: I need these things. I can't just leave them. What are we doing?
          Hiding? As if they won't find us. It's just -- it's too much. It's too much.
Sayid: It won't be too much if I carry it for you. Now come on, I have a hike to lead.

In the midst of this season’s climax in which the survivors are setting out on a hike to escape the Others, Shannon finally allows another person to help her out of sympathy. She knows that she looks pathetic trying to carry all of Boone’s belongings along with her own, but rather than obstinately insisting that she can do it on her own to protect her self-efficacy, she accepts Sayid’s genuine offer of help because she finally understands that assistance does not necessarily mean that she is weak but that others value her. By allowing Sayid to carry her bags, she takes the pivotal first step in overcoming her emotional baggage. This first step helps her to once again allow Sayid to go with her to look for Walt in the jungle in the second season.

That quest, however, results in dire consequences as Shannon collides with a truly hysterical woman (“Abandoned”). Sayid tells Shannon that he believes her, will not leave her again, and that he will accompany her into the jungle to search for Walt. The audience suspects that Sayid does not believe Shannon; he might be merely humoring her in a paternalistic acquiescence, but he makes the trip anyway because he feels that she is alone in her thoughts and could harm herself on her own in the jungle. But then when Shannon sees an image of Walt and hears the whispers of the Others, Sayid confirms to her that he does as well. In this moment of epiphany, Sayid realizes his error and understands that Shannon’s heightened perceptions of her surroundings are, for lack of a better term, real. Nonetheless, he realizes his personality attribution error too late; Ana Lucia, a survivor from the tail end of the plane whose group has been literally terrorized by the Others, also hears the whispers and emerges from the jungle with a loaded gun. She mistakes Shannon for an Other and shoots her before confirming her paranoid
suspicions. Thus, Shannon dies in Sayid’s arms while he realizes his doubts about Shannon were misguided due to his gendered bias. Faced with the reality of a truly dangerous, hysterical, and volatile woman with a weapon, Sayid replaces Shannon as the despondent, withdrawn outsider within the group.

While Shannon formerly played the role of property as the object of Boone’s gaze for financial gain and emotional validation, she likewise accumulated Boone as her own property. By using Boone as a surrogate boyfriend rather than a brother, she used his jealousy to accrue money from him by pretending to be in abusive relationships with other men. Thus, it is the loss of Boone as property, as the financial source of her future, which causes her to spiral into the role of the hysterical woman. It is only after she has lost this one constant person – and property – that she no longer can perform the female stereotypes of her choosing that so easily allow her to manipulate men. Instead she is thrust into a stereotype that she has no desire to play: the hysterical woman. While she is helpless with grief, she begins her own process of individuation, allowing herself to be valuable to others without performing. However, Shannon dies right at the moment that she completes her identity exploration. On the other hand, the character of Kate lives through all six seasons of LOST. Rather than being viewed as helpless, Kate is seen as a resourceful and sometimes intimidating performer who must be controlled and contained as a prisoner. Furthermore, Kate feels that she is a prisoner of her own complicated identity.

“I Don’t Do Taco Night”

After the fast-moving, explosive opening scene depicting the plane crash in which Jack “meets” many of his fellow survivors, the next scene slows to a calmer, more
intimate interaction in which Jack (and the viewer) sees Kate for the first time on the beach; she was conspicuously absent from the tumult immediately following the crash. Jack is trying to attend to his own wounds after first seeing to the others more seriously injured than himself in the crash, and he initially sees Kate emerge from the trees, rubbing her wrists and looking disoriented. While both Jack and the audience could, and most likely do, assume that Kate is merely in shock from the devastation of surviving a plane crash and is rubbing her wrists in a nervous, unconscious, anxiety-driven compulsion, this false assumption derives from the fact that the writers of *LOST* are banking on their audience’s inattention to detail at this time; they will later be “trained” to peruse the series for details while Jack oftentimes proves to be a slower learner, specifically where Kate is concerned. The following is their first conversation together and likewise the first that they have on the island after the carnage of the plane crash:

Jack: Excuse me? Did you ever use a needle? [...] Did you ever patch a pair of jeans?
Kate: I made the drapes in my apartment.
Jack: That’s fantastic. Listen. Do you have a second? I could use a little help here.
Kate: Help with what?
Jack: (Pointing to the open wound on his back) With this. Look, I’d do it myself. I’m a doctor, but I just can’t reach it.
Kate: You want me to sew that up?
Jack: It’s just like the drapes. Same thing.
Kate: No, with the drapes I used a sewing machine.
Jack: No, you can do this. I’m telling you. If you wouldn’t mind.
Kate: Of course I will. (“Pilot: Part 1”) 

In the above scene, Jack appeals to Kate’s perceived femininity to bring out the caretaker in her so that she can seal his wounds. To Jack, Kate seems simply to be a post-traumatic plane crash victim, a distressed female in need of consolation and a constructive task to occupy her mind. Jack tries to equate sewing up his wound to sewing up a pair of jeans
because he assumes that Kate, as a woman, has sewn something before. When she mentions the drapes, a very powerful allusion to a homemaker, Jack jumps at the equation to enlist her help.

As discussed earlier, though, Kate is actually a convicted murderer who was handcuffed and being transported by a U.S. marshal aboard the plane to Los Angeles after being extradited from Sydney, Australia which is revealed in the third episode, the first episode after the two-part pilot (“Tabula Rasa”). Jack’s endeavor is even further misguided as it is also soon revealed that Kate had in fact been married for a short period of time; she confesses this later to Sawyer in a drinking game, stating “It didn’t last very long” (“Outlaws”). In the third season, flashbacks about Kate reveal that she was married to a police officer named Kevin while she was on the run (“I Do”). In this episode, Kate even calls the U.S. marshal who is hunting her and asks him to quit pursuing her; he tells her that he will if she can actually settle down and quit running. Kate tries to do this, but when she suspects she is pregnant and then discovers she is not, the close call is too much for her. She drugs Kevin and tells him, “I almost had a baby, Kevin. Me, a baby! I can't do this! Taco night?! I don't do taco night!” (“I Do”). The confinement and mediocrity of a domestic life drives the restless Kate to leave her husband then and there, before she can truly become pregnant and thus trapped. Kate’s anxieties about domestic life parallel Shannon’s similar fears in the last section. To Kate, this is simply another form of imprisonment by male captors. Kate again becomes the hunted, and after she is caught, she is once again trapped aboard the plane. Kate’s attempts to live as a free woman are significant throughout the entire series of LOST.
In terms of rebirth and roleplaying, Kate is perhaps the most interesting character in terms of performance. Kate performs many roles, but she is perhaps known best for “running.” In the second season episode of “The Long Con,” Sawyer not only defines himself but also Kate by their previous actions off the island while also clearly stating that they are not able to change their identities on the island: “You run. I con. Tiger don’t change their stripes.” Clearly, Kate is a tiger who seems to like her cage. By repeatedly placing herself in compromised situations that could, and most likely will, result in confinement, whether it be social or physical, Kate vacillates between Sawyer’s philosophy and Jack’s. Sawyer states that actions define identity, and repeated actions make that identity concrete and immutable despite one’s motivations. Jack, on the other hand, views identity as a choice. In a particularly poignant scene, Jack tells Kate he does not need to know what she did to become a criminal after he learns from the now-dead marshal that Kate was the previously unidentified convict being transported on the plane: “It doesn't matter, Kate, who we were, what we did before this, before the crash. It doesn't really. Three days ago, we all died. We should all be able to start over” ("Tabula Rasa"). The title of this episode, “Tabula Rasa,” sheds the Lockean light on Jack’s inspiring speech. In terms of identity, Sawyer speaks of the traditional tabula rasa while Jack’s view reinvents the notion to inspire transformation.

Locke was an avid advocate of the belief in what has come to be called tabula rasa, the Latin phrase meaning “blank tablet” or “blank slate.” In his “Essay Concerning Human Understanding,” Locke expounded on the theory of tabula rasa in the first book of the essay entitled “Of Innate Notions,” which essentially supports the “nurture” side of the “nature versus nurture” debate concerning governing factors in a child’s social
development. The “innate notions” represent what is now modern genetic theory, that impressionistic childrearing practices have a greater weight in establishing the child’s social intelligence and development. In other words, social development plays a larger role than biology. According to Locke, a child’s mind can be described as a “blank slate,” an unpainted tablet on which beliefs and attitudes can be imprinted, beginning at a very early state in the child’s development. Locke describes this process of learning in the second chapter of this first book entitled, “No Innate Principles in the Mind,” describing the child’s mind as an “empty cabinet” on which ideas, language, and names are imprinted (185).

The term tabula rasa has come to mean something entirely different in the modern English language; to have a “blank slate” means to come clean or to return to a state of unspoiled bareness on which to imprint new lifestyle choices, and for the convict Kate, the phrase “clean slate” obviously comes to mind in terms of her identity. Kate is emblematic of this modern tabula rasa which is emphasized by her allotted flashbacks in the title episode and because of the thematic elements of the episode’s plotline. In the episode “Whatever the Case May Be,” the audience receives more clues about Kate’s past off the island. As with “Tabula Rasa,” the title carries a philosophical tone. There is a powerful play on words and metaphor with the passengers of the plane and their luggage; they all have brought something of their past lives with them onto the island, memories that construct themselves as emotional baggage. In Kate’s case, it is literally a case. Sawyer finds a seemingly impenetrable case on the island, and Kate claims that it is hers although Sawyer tells her that he knows the marshal was carrying it. Becoming ever
more curious about its contents, Sawyer plays a game with Kate so that he can not only view the contents of the case but also get more of a glimpse into her true character.

Through the play on words of “baggage” and “case,” the audience’s attention is once again brought back to the ideas of property. While Kate claims ownership of the case and its contents, she also viciously guards her past actions and her current feelings concerning that content. Kate gets the case back from Sawyer only to have Jack see its contents; Kate emotionally retrieves a small toy plane from the case, the previous property of her childhood boyfriend. Kate’s actions accidentally led to his death while she was on the run from the law; this is revealed later in the season in the episode “Born to Run,” another title obviously aimed at questioning Kate’s identity in biological terms. She does not want to share her past experiences with Jack; she feels that her burdens are her own to bear, similar to Shannon’s pride. It is not until the second-season episode, “What Kate Did,” that the audience learns the initial crime Kate committed which started her running.

In the opening flashback scene of “What Kate Did,” the audience sees the title act for themselves. Kate waits on the porch of a house until a man, whom the audience perceives as Kate’s stepfather, arrives home in a very drunken state. Kate helps him into the house, into bed, and out of his shoes. This scene is not affectionate. Kate seems disgusted with the man, and it is obvious to the audience that Kate is the object of her stepfather’s sexual gaze which is apparent in his repeated insistence to her that she is “beautiful.” This scene resonates with the incestuous relationship between step-siblings Boone and Shannon explored earlier, but Kate does not reciprocate this man’s affections.
She instead leaves the house, which is destroyed by a massive explosion seconds later.

Kate had orchestrated the entire setup to kill her stepfather.

Through various flashbacks, the bizarre familial relationships and Kate’s motives are explored in this episode. At first it seems that Kate killed her stepfather out of retaliation against his advances. When Kate’s mother is shown after the explosion, she confesses to Kate that her husband had beat her, already evident by the sling on her arm and her nervous demeanor. Kate explains that she is leaving and that she took out a policy on the house in her mother’s name. Here, it seems that Kate’s actions were born of a desire to protect and provide for her mother, in addition to or instead of herself. But Kate’s interaction with her “real” father reveals the truth:

Kate: Why didn’t you tell me, Dad?
Sam: Tell you what?
Kate: I was making a scrapbook, a surprise for your birthday. So I called one of your COs to get some pictures of you in uniform. The pictures that he sent me had dates on the back, photos of you in Korea up until 4 months before I was born. Why didn’t you tell me that Wayne was my father? Why?
Sam: I didn't tell you because I knew you'd kill him. And your mother loved him. You were 5 years old. I wanted to take you along with me. She wouldn't let me.
Kate: So why didn’t you kill him?
Sam: Because I don't have murder in my heart. (“What Kate Did”)

The above conversation between her and her perceived father figure begs the question as to her motivations behind “what Kate did.” As the last two episodes’ titles have defined Kate’s actions, what she did and how she was “born to run,” they put emphasis on her identity related to her actions. A closer analysis harkening back to the Lockean theory of the tabula rasa reveals that Kate’s actions are purely motivated by her concern over her own character and identity. Kate later reveals to Sawyer that she did not kill Wayne because of anything he had done, such as desiring her, beating her mother, or driving her
believed biological father away; she murders him out of the fear that she too is not “good” (“What Kate Did”). It is ironic that this action in turn helps Sam to define Kate’s identity. When he implies that she has “murder in [her] heart,” he seems to be implying that this is part of Kate’s nature, an integral part of her being that has festered into pure hatred and the act of murder.

The binarism between Kate’s two fathers, Sam, the benevolent and affectionate surrogate father who falsely claimed her as his own and gave her a name, and Wayne, the alcoholic, abusive father who had at some point abandoned Kate and her mother before his return, embody Kate’s own worries over her identity in terms of nature versus nurture. Keeping in mind the fact that Kate carries her adoptive father’s name but murders her true father to kill the source of the her own murderous thoughts, Kate’s character is further complicated. Kate has a preoccupation with identity as being externally validated. Through her use of aliases, Kate is not only protecting her identity but also experimenting with it. In varying situations and with different characters, Kate constantly tries to reinvent herself and establish new experimental identities by changing her name because she believes that her biology is immutable.

Above all else, Kate’s fears biological determinism – becoming like her father due to genetic makeup. Ironically, this fear forces her to act in ways completely antithetical to this goal of defying determinism. Thus, it is not surprising that Kate’s actions are just as complicated as her perceptions of herself. Kate’s propensity for placing herself in problematic, compromised situations which often lead to her continual imprisonment is best exemplified in “The Hunting Party.” Here, Locke, Sawyer, and Jack assist Michael in searching for the Others who have taken his son, Walt. When Kate says
that she can track and shoot, probably as well or better than these men, Jack tells her that she must stay behind to attend to other camp duties. It is also clear to the audience that Jack is most likely attempting to keep Kate separate from Sawyer since he has noticed their mutual attraction sparking while Kate nursed Sawyer back to health in the episode “What Kate Did.” Kate proves her tracking abilities by following the men, but she is captured by the Others and used as a bargaining tool to get the survivors to leave their land and quit seeking to regain Walt. Jack is disgusted by this, and he blames Kate for the entire outcome ("The Hunting Party").

The fact that Kate is taken by the Others once again seems to present a fatalistic view of the women and their choices on the island. However, Kate’s conscience, her concern for her own goodness and the wellbeing of others, must also be taken into account. Unlike traditional views of convicted murderers and manipulators, Kate’s subversive and rebellious actions are hardly ever self-motivated; she disobeys, involving and endangering herself, for the benefit of others. Kate most likely performs in this altruistic way to justify her goodness and dispel her own concerns over her identity. But Jack and Kate are both at the mercy of the Others and both at fault; if Jack had initially let Kate come with the hunting party, she might have evaded individual capture, and if Kate had stayed with the camp as told, the same conclusion would most likely have ensued. While Jack changes his tactic by later cooperating with Kate and allowing her to join others on missions, Kate perpetually defies orders. Rather than acting on her own for her own benefit, Kate, as can be seen from above, continually places herself in compromised situations to aid other members of the group without their reciprocal cooperation. The result is often Kate’s imprisonment. It is interesting to note that Kate,
like Shannon, oftentimes is more successful when she performs and feeds into the societal norms and stereotypes concerning their gender.

In the first episode of the third season, Kate, Jack, and Sawyer have been taken as prisoners by the Others to their side of island. Even though the Others have been observing Kate and the other survivors, Ben, their leader, still incorrectly assesses Kate’s character. He has taken the three of them to manipulate Jack into performing necessary surgery on him through an exploitation of their love triangle. Like Jack, he initially appeals to a perceived passivity and femininity in Kate when he clothes and feeds her:

I brought you here so you'd look out at the water and feel comforted, comforted that your friends were looking out at the same ocean. I gave you the dress so that you'd feel like a lady. And I wanted you to eat your food with a real live fork and feel civilized. I did all those things so that you'd have something nice to hold on to. Because, Kate, the next two weeks are going to be very unpleasant. ("A Tale of Two Cities")

While Ben does provide Kate with fine food, drink, clothing, and a pleasant view, he does all of this for her while she is handcuffed. While Ben misperceives some of Kate’s motivations, he does not underestimate her skills as an accomplished escape artist. Banking on Kate’s desire and capabilities to run, Ben engineers a situation in which he knows that Kate will diverge from the normally expected outcome.

In the episode “I Do,” the present action on the island centers on Kate and Sawyer being held in separate cages at the Others’ compound. At one point, the resilient Kate figures out how to escape her cage, but rather than leaving on her own, she opens Sawyer’s cage as well and encourages him to leave, yelling “Go! Get out of here! Run!”
Sawyer, who has not yet revealed to Kate that they are actually on a different island now and cannot return to their camp, questions her by asking, “You're out of your cage. Why don't you run, Kate?!” (“I Do”). Once again, Kate places herself in a compromised situation as a prisoner, this time actually performing as one since she can truly leave. Instead of trying to escape on her own, she stays with Sawyer hoping that they can somehow figure out a way to return to their island together in the future. At the end of the episode, Kate and Sawyer outsmart the Others, escape their confines, and contact Jack to help him escape as well. Jack chooses to stay but poignantly tells Kate to do what she does best: “Run!” (“I Do”). As when he told Kate to stay with the camp and not go with the hunting party, Jack now tells Kate to run with Sawyer because, instead of keeping them separate like earlier, he now accepts their mutual attraction and encourages her to leave so he no longer has to watch their relationship further develop. Once again, Kate at first seems to agree, but she does return later to rescue Jack even though she again endangers herself.

Kate struggles with following male direction throughout the series. In the episode “Eggtown,” a notable nod to fertility, the action on the island shows Kate nearly sinking into domestic norms with Sawyer in the Others’ abandoned town. She assists Claire with taking care of Aaron and she beds down with Sawyer in one of the houses. At one point, the audience is even led to believe that Kate may be pregnant. However, Kate is threatened again by normalcy while simultaneously fearing the threat to that very normalcy. In an effort to learn what the mercenaries know of her identity and past life, she assists one prisoner, Miles from the mercenary group, into a meeting with the likewise now imprisoned Ben from the Others’ group. When the new leader, Locke,
discovers this, he tells Kate that this is not a democracy, and she accuses him of being a dictator. While Kate is threatened by the relationship she is establishing with Sawyer, she is steadfast with Locke; she despises his attitude toward her but does actually leave when he tells her to go.

When Locke banishes Kate, Sawyer first is angry with Locke but then with Kate when he learns that she is not entirely dissatisfied with Locke’s dictation. He tells Kate:

Don't make this about me, Kate. You didn't want a baby any more than I did. You're just looking for some excuse to split, and now you got one.

But it's alright, Freckles, I ain't gonna hold it against you. I'm just gonna sit right here in my comfy bed. Because in about a week, you'll find some reason to get pissed at Jack and bounce right back to me. (“Eggtown”)

Kate is indeed looking for an excuse to run as she always does as she is not only intimidated by the new norms in the Others’ town but also concerned for her fate if she is in fact rescued from the island. Eventually, Kate is rescued, and Jack as well, but Sawyer is left behind. The flashforward of this episode reveals that Kate does have a very young son, one viewers are led to believe was conceived by Sawyer on the island. The final scene, however, reveals that this child is in fact Aaron, the son of another female survivor, Claire, who arrives on the island pregnant.

After being rescued, Kate claims Aaron as her own child, engages in a relationship with Jack, and remains in Los Angeles. During the trial for the murder of her father, Kate receives “time served plus ten years’ probation in agreement that she does not leave the state” (“Eggtown”). Kate claims that she will do this for her son, that she will not be going anywhere. However, in the fifth season episode, “Whatever Happened,
Happened,” Kate leaves, searching for the island, risking losing Aaron and receiving life imprisonment. At first, the audience is led to believe that Kate is trying to get back to Sawyer, especially since her relationship with Jack is crumbling. However, Kate gives Aaron to Claire’s mother, explaining to her who he really is, and tells her that she is returning to the island to save Claire and bring her back to her son.

While Kate does accomplish this feat, she loses Jack when he sacrifices his life for her, the others, and the island. She also loses the adoptive child she cared for to the mentally-compromised Claire, and she realizes she will face further prosecution for breaking her probation. She even distances herself from Sawyer. While Kate remains in this problematic prisoner state throughout the series, if taken as a whole, it becomes clear that Kate is exercising a kind of self-sabotage, performing various nominal roles. She purposefully manipulates others to in fact help others while inhibiting her own aims. In this way, Kate is the true totem of the tabula rasa. She constantly re-invents her identity while performing various roles. Even categorized as a runner, this stereotype verily points to her ability to run from one identity and performance to the next. Returning to Jack’s speech to Kate when they first arrive on the island, the audience sees resilience in Kate. Unlike Jack, she feels that she must punish herself for her past deeds and correct the wrong choices that she has made. Ultimately, it is Kate’s performative, manipulative, self-punishing pattern that she uses to define her identity, that of a good person who committed horrible crimes. Kate becomes an unstoppable force of nature both on and off the island, acting for the greater good of the group rather than her individual concerns while Jack perishes on the island alone.
Works Cited


Chapter 2: Progeny

Both Kate and Shannon are presented not only as pieces of property on LOST but also as female characters whose ownership of property is threatened as well. While Kate loses her ownership of herself through repeated imprisonment, Shannon is disinherited of her father’s wealth and eventually of her stepbrother Boone on the island. Even while there is particular attention paid to both women’s bodies, often in a sexualized manner on the part of the male gaze, neither woman becomes a mother. True, Shannon acts as the shadow of a mother figure to the displaced Walt, and Kate becomes a true surrogate mother to Aaron when she takes him with her off the island, even though she initially claimed to have no desire to have a child. While these relationships between the two adult female characters and the two child male characters warrant an examination of identity in somewhat gendered terms, the series provides more direct issues of motherhood and property in the characters of Claire and Rousseau.

Both Claire and Rousseau are impregnated off the island. According to the series’s mythology, women who become pregnant on the island often die, along with the child, during the third trimester and/or premature childbirth. However, Claire and Rousseau fit into a kind of exclusionary clause; not without difficulty, both women bear their children on the island and care for them during the first few months of their infancy. Claire vacillates between wanting to keep her child to raise on her own after her boyfriend leaves her and wanting to give the unborn baby up for adoption off the island. She continues to doubt her competence as a single mother on the island and thus is tempted to relinquish her child to the Others when it is born. Since the Others are fully aware of the infertility issues on the island, they seek out pregnant mothers, infants, and
even special children such as Walt to add them to their dying numbers in efforts to sustain their perceived utopian community. After Rousseau’s boat crashes on the island, the rest of her team sinks into a type of insanity brought on by one of the island’s most cryptic characters, the Smoke Monster. After being forced to kill her husband, Rousseau gives birth alone, cherishing the child as the only unaffected member of her now lost team and as her own flesh and blood. However, the Others steal the child while it is still young.

Throughout *LOST*, clear patterns of hesitant parenting, childrearing, and even child thieving persist. In this way, the discussion turns from not only women as property, but to their children as property as well within this economic system. While Kate and Shannon’s sanity is oftentimes questioned, the series presents Claire and Rousseau as truly mentally damaged women after the removal of their children. In both cases, the body follows the mind; clear degradations in both women’s physical appearance can be traced along the timelines from when their children are taken. Holistically, it is clear that these women only recover, even if partially, when reunited with their lost children. In this way, *LOST* presents women as fractured entities when separated from their progeny. They are incomplete without the children that make them mothers. Once again, women are thrust into roles and categories that define them in terms of relationship to others. Their identities are lost along with their children. Their own individual experience and development is arrested, forcing them to become childlike in their own aspects to replace their lost children. With the focus on Claire and Rousseau’s sanity, *LOST* provides a commentary on how women attempt to juggle multiple roles and often fail and fall apart in the process.
In this chapter, the title *LOST* takes on a new role; it delves specifically into the tragedy of lost children and the mothers who must survive alone on the island after their children are taken. While both Claire and Rousseau’s situations differ in specifics, the overarching themes of childlessness after childbearing are strategically similar. In this light, these women can be viewed through an essentialist lens; the notion of woman as a vessel is explored as both women lose their minds as well as their children via an empty womb and an empty crib. In *Essentially Speaking*, Diana Fuss attempts “a materialist analysis of the body as matter” since previous theorists tended to focus on women’s unified experience of their bodies (50, emphasis in original). These theorists overlooked the individual subject’s experience of their bodies due to unique social experiences. Gail Kern Paster expounded upon these ideas of women’s bodies as vessels in *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. As a “leaky vessel,” scholars posited that women experienced their emotions through their bodies, revealing an individual subject’s relationship between the body and mind (Paster 23). In the series *LOST*, the female characters’ individual experiences as woman, vessel, and mother are presented in ways that highlight essentialist views of female identity as being intimately tied to these biological roles/functions women fill. However, when studied further – as with the case of the stereotypical portrayals of Kate and Shannon – the program also explores how these roles are socially constructed and, oftentimes, strategically performed by women.

Once again, *LOST* can also be used to explore the complications of property, by reading the show in relation to contract pregnancy and adoption in modern societies. The rise of assistive technology sparks a plethora of new ethical questions concerning
reproduction. *LOST* engages with these questions, drawing attention to the now almost outdated mindset that would link female identity primarily to the biological function of motherhood. The previous chapter similarly explored the archaic presentation of Kate’s identity in relation to her genetic and social relationship with her biological father. This chapter shifts this focus to how essentialist motifs surrounding Claire and Rousseau move the discussion to women as mothers rather than daughters. While the children on the island are kidnapped and harvested in a ways that might seem more fitting for a dystopian future, these narrative moments may serve to accurately represent contemporary anxieties concerning individual women’s roles as mothers.

The term “mother” has become complicated by contemporary attention to females’ bodies in debates over contraception, abortion, and, as seen here, adoption and surrogacy. The conclusion of this work will explore how the violent deaths of these women on *LOST* provide an avenue for discussion of actual violence against women. Similarly, *LOST*’s presentations of more benign acts of procreation such as adoption and surrogacy provide starting points for discussions of women’s bodies in more polarizing issues such as contraception and abortion. By briefly alluding to these issues yet focusing on Claire’s choices in giving birth to Aaron and adopting him out, the series widens itself to more conservative audiences while still providing a commentary on society’s preoccupation with women’s bodies and roles as mothers.

The acts of adoption and surrogacy again bring the conversation back to issues of property and identity. Since women and children can be marketed and appropriated on the island, this returns the discussion to Lockean contract theory. Due to the introduction of the character of Rousseau, the philosophy of the historical Rousseau, specifically
social contract theory, will be used to both support and complicate the Lockean theory presented earlier within the series. Additionally, these women experience identity crises due to their status as single mothers attempting to raise children alone. However, when their children are taken from them against their will, the mothers lose their minds along with their progeny. In this way, the women identify as mothers to lost children who are only connected to them through the womb and biology. They rarely fill the social roles of mothers but still identify as such. *LOST* repeatedly casts women into complicated roles concerned with motherhood and fertility in ways that draw attention to how much female identity is entrenched with such roles.

“*This Baby is All of Ours*”

The binary construction of negative and positive consequences that accompany communal organization is first introduced within the survivors’ camp. Claire is part of a group based on consent and democracy while the Others, who she briefly resides with, are portrayed as combatants in an army under a dictator. Rousseau, who will be explored in the next section, exists outside such communal structures as a loner without the benefit (or detriment) of community influence. The juxtaposition of these two very different communities is purposeful, as is the connection these contrasting societies have to a fictional tale alluded to within the program. Specifically, the issues of reproduction and communal sustainment that the two communities struggle with are found in one of the texts *LOST* integrates into its narrative. This source material attends to the same Lockean precepts the show itself wrestles with. As in the first chapter, this chapter will explore how these philosophical motifs comment on issues concerning female identity by raising real, modern questions concerning women’s roles in society. Here, the focus will turn
specifically to the normative role of motherhood, as portrayed on LOST, in a discussion of how biology and culture produce constructions of women as mothers and how these constructions affect women's individual experiences while simultaneously ascribing the shared status of “mother” to them, thus inhibiting their own identity development. Once more, women feel obliged to perform in these roles to suit society even if their actions and decisions would be dissimilar if they were not labeled as mothers. Similarly, their own progeny's development and identity are negatively affected by the encroaching concerns of motherhood when these women move into this new category of stereotyped women.

Early in the first season, the character Sawyer is seen reading a worn-out copy of Watership Down. He tells Kate it is a “hell of a book; it’s about bunnies” (“Confidence Man”). The work, the tale of a rabbit diaspora in search of a new warren, has been the target of various philosophical criticisms over the years, despite the author’s insistence that it was conceived merely as a children’s story to entertain his daughters (Adams xvi). However, Rich Policz of Ashland University clearly connects the novel to philosophy, specifically the mode of Lockean theory:

It is likely that John Locke did not have rabbits in mind when writing his great political works. However, a closer examination of Richard Adams’ great literary work, Watership Down, shows that perhaps Adams was discussing more than a rabbit tale. The story, on its surface is about anthropomorphized (in thought and language anyway) rabbits, but at its heart, […] it [is] much more. (par. 1)
Clearly, the “more” Policz refers to is the evidence of Lockean theory in *Watership Down*, which the creators of *LOST* also observed and in turn decided to strengthen through heavy allusion in their own work.

*Watership Down* explores the Lockean notions of contract theory in that the rabbits must first find a new warren in a safer, more natural state far from human interference, establish their own new roles within the group, and also mark the boundaries of the warren to differentiate it from the “commons” and appropriate that land within the group. Locke defines and explains his conception of the state of nature and land appropriation contract theory alluded to in this tale in his *Second Treatise of Government* by stating, “Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property” (28). In other words, when people enter a primal, unappropriated land, they can make that land their own property through caring for and working the land. In *LOST*, this situation is not only paralleled in terms of survival but also in competition; the rabbits of *Watership Down* attempt to free kidnapped does and kittens from the tyrannical General Woundwort, the dictator of a neighboring warren which inhabited the area before the displaced rabbits moved there. A parallel to this is seen on *LOST*, when Jack experiences a rude awakening during his first encounter with a representative of the Others who questions him:

*Tell me, you go over a man's house for the first time, do you take off your shoes? Do you put your feet up on his coffee table? Do you walk in the kitchen, eat food that doesn't belong to you? Open the door to rooms you got no business opening? [...] This is not your island. This is our island.*
And the only reason you're living on it is because we let you live on it.

(“The Hunting Party”)

The Others clearly believe that since they have inhabited the island and worked its land long before the survivors arrived, they have the right not only to the island itself but also to its shelter, resources, and food. However, this Lockean motif is further complicated by the fact that the Others are currently holding Kate hostage during this particular speech, an exchange explored in the previous chapter. In short, they are wrongly appropriating Kate, the lone female survivor, as their own resource and property. They fully know that the other members of the search party, all male, will most likely meet their demands when faced with the image of a woman at gunpoint. Since Kate is the object of both Jack and Sawyer’s gaze, the Others know that they have an increasingly motivating insurance package. Kate’s relegation to the level of a resource mimics the society of the rabbits.

The notion of women and children is further complicated by another parallel between *LOST* and the fictional rabbits. As the Others cannot carry children to term on the island, *LOST* mirrors *Watership Down* yet again. Female rabbits in General Woundwort’s warren often miscarry, self-abort, or die themselves due to the stress of the strict regime and limited resources. A rabbit named Holly remarks on this phenomenon, stating, “Big warrens are often overcrowded and some of the rabbits can’t get enough to eat. The young does get edgy and nervous and some of them don’t have any kittens on that account. At least, the kittens begin to grow inside them and then they melt away again into their bodies” (Adams 194). As can be seen from this quote, female rabbits are relegated to the role of mothers through the exploitation of their bodies, and oftentimes, their bodies reject the role as their minds have already done so. Within the diegesis of
LOST, it is clear that the Others have more than enough land, protection, and resources to sustain themselves. Thus, their attention turns toward women and children in efforts to sustain the society as a whole. This association of women with property, and focus on their bodies as vessels for procreation, is one grounded in essentialism.

Modern medical technologies and ethical dilemmas, such as those presented on LOST, have allowed essentialist discussions to move from traditional pregnancy to surrogate pregnancy, specifically in terms of contracts. In her critical work Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle Over Women’s Freedom, Janice Raymond explores multiple perspectives on the essential views of women as vessels for procreation. She states:

Many feminists who defend surrogate contracts worry that if the mother’s claim to the child is recognized by law as prior and superior to the sperm source’s, and if surrogate contracts are found to be legally void and unenforceable, women will be once more at the mercy of the female biology. They are wary of a creeping maternal essentialism that they contend surrounds the opposition to surrogacy. (34-35)

In other words, some feminists believe that despite the technological advancements involved in contract pregnancy, the relegation of women as the body, as a vessel, will reinstate a “maternal essentialism” in which women are once again defined by their ability to procreate. If women are “once more at the mercy of female biology,” their choices and consents will be subverted by their duty as biological mothers. Raymond continues by investigating further opposition:
What defenders of new reproductive techniques regard as natural, feminists challenge as political. As feminists have attacked the false essentialism that the male sexual urge is uncontrollable and therefore men need prostitutes to satisfy their sexual needs, so too feminists oppose the idea that reproduction is a biological imperative. (xviii)

When viewed in this way, feminists distinguish between “sexual needs” and “reproduction.” The two are not necessarily intertwined. Some feminists believe that sex is not necessary for either satisfaction or reproduction due to these new technologies. Therefore, the idea of reproduction as sexual is no longer a “biological imperative.” The fact that women must perform sexually in an effort to sustain the species is an anachronism that can be viewed as demeaning to women; the technological advances which allow both men and women simply to supply the biological means for reproduction could theoretically replace the norms of sexual society making it an obsolete establishment. Today, pregnancy, paternity, and surrogacy are more complicated than ever before due to changing social and scientific advancements concerning women’s bodies.

On LOST, the character of Claire presents the most complicated yet important case of motherhood and contract pregnancy. She arrives on the island very obviously pregnant. In the first-season episode of “Raised by Another,” the audience learns that Claire was living in Sydney with her boyfriend and father of her child when he suddenly left her out of fear of the responsibility of fatherhood. The audience also learns that Claire has abandonment issues as her own father had also left her and her mother. Ultimately, this episode reveals that Claire boarded the ill-fated plane to travel to Los Angeles and
give her child up for adoption to a couple living there. To say the least, Claire’s pregnancy and her relationship to the yet unborn child is complicated. When Claire is kidnapped by the Others, they become exponentially worse.

In the second-season episode “Maternity Leave,” Claire has been safely returned to the survivors’ camp for many days with no memory of her time or experience with the Others. However, she begins to have flashbacks of this missing time presented as this episode’s own character-centric flashback sequence. It becomes clear that the Others kidnapped Claire in an effort to sustain her body only long enough to extract eventually the living baby from her. While the baby biologically belongs to Claire, she is under the powerful influence of suppressive drugs given to her by her captor, Ethan, and under duress makes the decision to allow the Others to keep her long enough to harvest her baby, unaware that she will die before the process is fully completed. She does so believing that she is in return being given the promise that her child will be looked after and cared for by the Others in a manner that she could not. This loosely-defined, untraditional surrogacy links to Lockean theory in that Claire is forming a contract with Ethan; he is appropriating her baby from her body so that the Others can integrate the child into their group. The “labour” that Ethan provides via medical examination and assistance to Claire validates the Others’ belief that they have a right to the child, subverting Claire’s own physical labor to produce the child.

Some may argue that the Others were simply looking out for their own best interest and therefore this Lockean reading of the exchange between Claire and Ethan is tenuous at best. However, if one compares the other kidnappings against this situation and factors in Claire’s backstory, it does seem more feasible to conceive of Claire as
inadvertently (and albeit semi-coercedly) falling into this surrogacy role. While the
Others are completely motivated by their own predicament and feel entirely entitled to
the child that is not their own, this kidnapping differs from those of both Alex and Walt.
Neither parent was offered any kind of return for their child; they were simply stolen.
Claire’s hesitancy as a parent allows her to be manipulated in a way unlike the other
parents. Her drug-induced beliefs reflect her previous choice to allow Aaron to be
adopted and this hesitancy allows for this unique situation. Both Michael and Rousseau
fought to keep their children so their lack of ambiguity in wanting their children moves
them to action while Claire wallows in ambiguity. This situation triggers her previous
feelings on parenting, and her belief that she is acting as a kind of surrogate for the
Others since she is already resistant to motherhood warrants a discussion since she
herself believes it.

If one accepts the argument that Claire’s situation is a fictional representation of
surrogate motherhood, then the debates concerning this practice become all the more
interesting to study alongside the show. In her article, “‘Surrogate Mothering’ and
Women’s Freedom: A Critique of Contracts for Human Reproduction,” Mary Lyndon
Shanley explores both sides of the arguments for and against contract pregnancy, all the
while keeping “the childbearing woman at the center of [her] analysis” (619). Here,
Shanley uses the term “woman” rather than “mother,” but still maintains that the female’s
role of bearing the child is unequivocally important. Indeed, contract pregnancy involves
exchange, and the term “labor” can be used for both the physical act of childbearing and
in the Lockean sense of “labour,” the act of work that brings an entity out of the
commons and thusly makes it appropriated property. Shanley goes on to further emphasize this point by stating that:

Defenders of contract pregnancy assume not only that gestation of a fetus is work that is analogous to other forms of wage labor, but also that selling one's labor for a wage is a manifestation of individual freedom. From this perspective, prohibiting a woman from receiving payment for her services bearing a child denies her the full and effective proprietorship of her body.

(623)

In terms of *LOST*, Claire believes that she is receiving payment for her labor in the physical form of prenatal health care. However, she places higher value on the fact that in giving up her son she believes she is giving him a better life even if she is unsure of what that life will be. As her backstory reveals, Claire’s lack of confidence in herself and her abilities as a mother make her implicitly trust others’ abilities as caregivers over her own. Therefore, she places her value in her body rather than on her social contributions. She accepts her role as a vessel for a special child because she does not feel special herself. Claire’s past abandonment by her biological father and the father of her own child impact her perception concerning her role as a surrogate, even in a compromised situation.

If Claire’s decision to relinquish her baby to the Others is viewed through a contract pregnancy lens, then she is exercising control over her own body and capitalizing on her reproductive capabilities. As stated above, the Others’ women die in childbirth or during the third trimester on the island. Claire’s unique situation of becoming pregnant off the island and arriving so near to term on the island maximizes her potential for a successful birth. Claire’s situation centralizes her options and decisions
as an imminent mother. Even if coerced, she is given benefits that Michael and Rousseau are not offered at all when their children are stolen. She is receiving medical treatment, inoculations not available to the other survivors, a warm, safe underground place to sleep, and the promise of a better life for her unborn child in exchange for carrying and bearing it. In this way, she is commanding the “full and effective proprietorship of her body.” However, she is simultaneously performing “wage labor” for the Others. Of course, the fact that the Others have a comparatively more established and sophisticated society than the survivors, could allow for this exchange to be viewed as exploitation. Even though this situation takes place on the fictional island, it can be viewed as reflective of modern surrogacy in which often economically deprived females in turn provide eggs, wombs, and labor for parents with funds and medical access more available to them. Surrogate mothers can sell their services to move up in society based on their payment. Ironically, Claire is eventually accepted into the Others’ group but only after she has – accidentally – relinquished her child back to the survivors. If viewed in this way, this obliquely sexual exchange of Claire’s body and the goods it has produced exposes a dynamic of economic inequality most commonly seen in the form of prostitution, another sexual act that has been heavily debated in feminist scholarship. Concerning surrogacy specifically, this ethical dilemma has even warranted legal intervention. In “Surrogate Mothers: Private Right or Public Wrong?,” William J. Winslade attends to these legal concerns:

> Baby-selling statutes were intended to protect poor women from being coerced into selling their children and to prevent economic exploitation of such babies as well as of adoptive parents. It has been frequently argued that surrogate motherhood does not occur among socially or economically
disadvantaged groups. However, a recent report of a survey of surrogate mothers claims that over 40 per cent of surrogate mothers were unemployed or on welfare. (153-4)

Claire’s low economic status is only implied at first but in the episode “Par Avion,” it is verified. After crashing a car and putting her mother into a coma, Claire emphasizes that she cannot afford to keep her mother on life support. A mystery donor arrives to cover all of her mother’s medical bills. Claire is outraged to learn that the donor is her biological father who also happens to be Jack’s. Claire contests that she does not want or need his charity and that she would have rather have had a father growing up. She views the money as offensive compensation for his absentee fatherhood. This exchange reflects Shannon’s similar disgust at Boone’s offer of money amidst his plans to leave the area in which they would both be living to work for his mother. Likewise, these past experiences impact Claire’s identity. Now, she continues to despise charity but warms to Ethan out of his paternal attention to her and his offers of exchange for her child. Ethan’s drugging of Claire, his apparent affection for her, and the fact that she will be killed by the Others if she does not die herself during the natural act of childbirth further obfuscate the entire exchange. However, what is clear is that there is a contract here and that Claire expects a form of compensation for her labor, even if that compensation is for her relinquished child’s welfare rather than her own.

Perhaps one of the most poignant and pivotal scenes in the entire series of LOST is in the episode “Do No Harm.” The character Boone, the fictional Locke’s protégé, has been injured in a fall, and after incorrectly assessing his wounds due to Locke’s misinformation, Jack attempts to save the young man’s life. Jack eventually comes to the
conclusion that he cannot; he decides to respect Boone’s wish to quit trying and instead makes him comfortable, staying with him in his last moments. At the same time elsewhere on the island, Claire has finally gone into labor. In the midst of the first death of a main character, the series reveals to its viewers that there is also new life on the island. After her constant vacillation concerning whether or not to keep her baby, Claire has now reached the point of no return. While she still has the choice of deciding who will nurture the child after the time of its birth, nature has determined that the time for this birth is now.

Amidst the somewhat cliché, audience-pandering dichotomy of one life ending as one is beginning, Kate and Claire present a poignant exchange that cuts right to the core of Claire’s seeming ambivalence toward rearing her own child. The brief conversation reminds the audience that Claire’s role as a potential parent is a choice – a choice which could be read as a type of Lockean contract she wants to form with someone. Her reservations are due to her own confidence in her ability to physically care for the child on her own as her very consideration of letting the child be raised by another clearly demonstrate her emotional care for it. This scene also foreshadows a later character dynamic between Kate and Claire, when Kate becomes the child’s surrogate mother in Claire’s absence.

As Charlie and Jin stand aside, Kate steps up to deliver the baby. She notices Claire is not cooperating, and Kate decides to give her a pregnancy pep talk in “Do No Harm”:

Kate: You can’t stop this - this is happening. Your baby is coming and I need your help.
Claire: It’s not going to want me.
Kate: What?
Claire: It knows I don't want it - that I was going to give it away. Babies know that stuff.
Kate: Do you want this baby now? Hmm? Do you want it to be healthy and safe? [Claire nods]
Kate: Okay, then the baby knows that, too. You are not alone in this. We are all here for you. This baby is all of ours, but I need you to push, okay?

This moment presents a marked dissimilarity from the earlier statements by the Others who claimed the island as property for themselves. Here, Kate claims that the child, which she appropriates as property through her language, belongs to all of the survivors on the island. It is obvious here that both Kate and Claire feel that the baby has a mental connection to its mother, a connection allowed through a shared body. However, the child will soon become a member of the community, so this is the last moment in which Claire and the baby will be one entity.

If Claire and the baby do have a kind of communion, then Claire’s final decision to keep the baby exempts her from some of the arguments against contract pregnancy. Kate asks her if she wants “this baby now” and wants “it to be healthy and safe,” and when Claire accedes, Kate tells her to start pushing. In the act of giving birth, Claire permanently separates the child from her body, but the child, according to notions of identity that bind women to their roles as mothers, will always have a connection to Claire. However, when Kate tells Claire “This baby is all of ours,” she is stating that once the baby has been born, it will become a part of the group; the group will share the responsibility, and thus the “labor” or work, for the child, thus appropriating it to all of the survivors. When Claire’s body and baby are appropriated by the Others through her kidnapping and drugging, this forced contract reflects a perversion of Lockean theory; both consent and community are overlooked at various points in the exchange. However,
when Kate tells Claire that the baby will be appropriated and cared for by all of the survivors, this authentic assistance and Claire’s consent redeem the notion of Lockean contract theory within the series. In short, contracts must be based on community, consent, and mutual trust rather than manipulation, intimidation, and coercion. The two people who offer to help Claire deliver her child are different in that they come from two very different communities (the Others versus the survivor camp), but also noteworthy is the fact that Ethan is male and Kate is female. During this birth scene, Kate’s identification with Claire, despite her lack of children, conforms to the notion of a shared, universal experience among women that is often the center of feminist debates. Kate, more so than Ethan, is able to commiserate with Claire. However, Kate is clearly performing this notion of shared experience to encourage Claire since Kate’s identity dictates that she assists the good and the helpless. Seemingly, Kate’s delivery of the baby specifically points toward childbirth as a typically shared aspect of women’s experience. However, at various points both women also reject this role of motherhood with this same child, leaving others to parent it in uncertain circumstances. In this way, LOST provides a critique of the shared experience of motherhood and how women’s experiences and identities cannot be placed easily and flawlessly into a category of motherhood whether the term is appropriated through biological or societal methods.

The women are not the only ones to suffer from being held to the extreme standards of this role of motherhood. The identities of their children are likewise investigated within the series. The mothers must perform optimally in this role for fear of their children’s failures, and thus identification within society, being attributed to their own failures as a parent. In the episode “Raised by Another,” Claire visits a psychic for
counsel on the predicament of her pregnancy. The psychic tells her that she alone must raise this baby, stating, “Your nature, your spirit, your goodness, must be an influence in the development of this child” (“Raised by Another”). This peculiar statement markedly shows that Claire is not only responsible for the physical wellbeing of the child but that in raising it herself, her non-physical attributes will also play a role in the development of the child through their continued connection. Within the context of the “nature versus nurture” arguments applied to Kate in the previous chapter, Claire is responsible not only for the genetic material passed on to her child but also for the child’s identity after birth. While Claire’s genes could dictate her child’s identity even without Claire’s presence as a mother in his life, her choice to willingly give up her child could just as easily impact his future identity if he is privy to this knowledge.

Claire decides to keep the baby, a boy, and names him Aaron. In naming him, she establishes not only the early identity of the child but her own assumption of her role as mother, even though it takes her a few days to come to this decision. After finally making it, she inadvertently loses Aaron when he is stolen from her by the island’s solitary native woman, Rousseau. Once Charlie and Kate rescue Aaron and return him to his mother’s arms, Claire loses him again after she abandons him in the jungle to pursue the image of her birth father when the Smoke Monster takes on his appearance. When Kate once again rescues Aaron, she takes him with her to the mainland when she and a handful of the other survivors finally escape the island. Pretending that Aaron is her own child, Kate acts as his mother until she finds a way to return to the island to look for Claire. In Aaron’s absence, Claire has become mentally unstable; her unkempt appearance reflects the dissonance in her mind. She despises Kate for caring for her child in her absence, a
situation so similar to her initial aims to give Aaron up to adoptive parents and the
Others. This animosity is further complicated by the fact that Claire abandoned Aaron to
follow the image of her birth father. Claire had practically no emotional relationship with
this man; he basically served as a sperm donor and a bank account for her hospitalized
mother. In contrast, Claire had little to provide physically for Aaron other than the bare
necessities available on the island while her relationship to the child, the goodness that
she was supposed to pass on to him by raising him herself, seems negated in her last
moments with the child. Furthermore, Rousseau begins her appearance on the island as
the original solitary madwoman to the survivors, but her final moments with her
daughter, Alex, prove even more tragic than Claire’s severance from Aaron on the island.

“**She Means Nothing to Me**”

After torturing Sawyer in an effort to regain Shannon’s inhaler, Sayid finds out
that Sawyer never even had the medicine to begin with. Filled with guilt over this action
on the island and his previous role as an interrogator for the Iraqi Republican Guard,
Sayid institutes a self-imposed solitary punishment for himself and leaves the other
survivors on the beach to further explore the island. In the episode “Solitary,” Sayid finds
another self-imposed victim of solitary confinement: a middle-aged French woman whom
Sayid believes is mentally imbalanced. While Sayid’s intimate moments with the
seemingly unstable woman are laced with sexual tension, it is their self-imposed solitary
living which points to a struggle with identity and their place in the outside world.

After learning that this woman, Danielle Rousseau, gave birth to a child, “Alex,”
alone on the island, the term solitary confinement takes on a new meaning. Like Claire,
Rousseau is separated from her child; the Others stole it from her when it is only days
old. While Sayid might believe that Rousseau’s deteriorated mental state is due to surviving alone in the wilderness for years and/or due to a type of extended post-partum depression, her case seems to parallel Claire’s; both women begin truly to lose their minds, along with their attention to personal hygiene and relationships with other people, when their children are taken from them for an extended period of time. Once again, the body and pregnancy are not only present motifs, but are continually reemphasized in *LOST.* Claire and Rousseau’s mental degradation reflect the destruction of their individual identities; they are perceived constantly as mothers even when they do not know the location or wellbeing of their children. At the same time, the series includes philosophical elements, present here in the female characterization of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that underscore this attention to identity.

Like Locke, the historical Rousseau’s philosophies highlighted his views on the state of nature, revolution, and reinstated societies, the roles of nature and nurture in the development of individual identity, and contract theory. Perhaps the most enduring of Rousseau’s motifs is the image of the “noble savage,” the primitive yet virtuous child located in the state of nature:

The more we reflect upon it, the more we realize that this state was the least subject to revolutions, the best for man, and that he must have left it only by some fatal accident which for the common good should never have happened. The example of savages, most of whom have been found at this stage, seems to confirm that the human race was made to remain there always; that this state is the true youth of the world; and that all the subsequent advances have apparently been so many steps towards the
perfection of the individual, and in fact, towards the decrepitude of the species. (39)

In the context of LOST, the “fatal accident” that draws the survivors out of the state of nature is their rescue from the island which results in dire and deadly consequences for many. When the women of LOST are considered against Rousseau’s above premise, their individual improvement and investigation of their identity can be seen as a negative. For instance, Danielle Rousseau embodies the idea of the noble savage in that she exists alone in the state of nature, concerning herself little with the establishment of the survivors’ camp and their attempts to overthrow the dominion of the Others. However, her determination to reunite with her child reveals an individual imperative that discounts the principle of the “common good” among the survivors.

In “Dead is Dead,” flashbacks reveal that Rousseau gave birth to a child alone on the island. Benjamin Linus then steals the child, telling Rousseau to run if she ever hears “whispers.” Therefore, both Rousseau and Shannon are validated in not only their hearing of the whispers, but also in their fear of them. Even though Ben is ordered to kill the baby, he cannot do it and decides to raise the child himself despite the consequences, meanwhile rising to the level of the Others’ leader. As is often the case in LOST, the decisions of the male characters often lead to the disturbing demise of many female characters, and this remains true in this instance.

When Rousseau learns that Claire has successfully had her baby on the island, she steals the child in an effort to give it to the Others, hoping that they will return her child to her for the exchange of this new one (“Exodus: Part 1”). During the first season finale, Rousseau confesses her true intentions, reveals Alex’s gender is female after Sayid
presumed her to be male in a subjective manner, and gives Aaron to Charlie and Sayid so that they can return him to Claire. Previously, Rousseau had assisted the pregnant Claire in escaping from the Others, thereby rescuing her unborn child from the Others as well. While Claire blocks out these memories for some time, they resurface in the second-season episode “Maternity Leave” in which she remembers her contract surrogacy stint with the Others, Ethan, and also another young female who helped her. She tells Rousseau, “I remember a girl – a girl with blue eyes. She helped me. She saved me, just like you did. She wasn’t like the others. She was – good” (“Maternity Leave”). As will be shown, the notion of goodness being passed down maternally is further emphasized by the fact that Rousseau carries the pregnant Claire on her back to the camp (“Maternity Leave”).

Rousseau’s decision to steal the infant Aaron from his mother Claire not only demonstrates her lack of respect for the common good, but also points to another of Rousseau’s concepts: the motif of “natural goodness.” Rousseau believed that all humans were born with the seed of natural goodness within them and they had to be taught to be selfish (29). He goes on to state, “It is […] very certain that compassion is a natural sentiment, which, by moderating the activity of self-esteem in each individual, contributes to the mutual preservation of the whole species” (Rousseau 29). In other words, compassion is a biological imperative; Rousseau believes if humans do not show compassion and nurturing to others, the species would cease to exist. In LOST, this premise is adapted to show that females, in particular mothers, are responsible for breeding such compassion and nurturing. According to the show’s logic, characters such as Claire and Rousseau contribute to their children’s development and personality even in
the very little time that they rear them, implying a sort of innate, female capacity for
goodness. Since both Rousseau and Alex perish while both Claire and Aaron survive, this
goodness does not necessarily ensure survival, however.

Upon closer examinations of these women and their children, the notion of natural
goodness is present in all of them. As stated in the last section, Claire was told that her
goodness would be influential in Aaron’s development, signaling that Aaron was in a
kind of danger, mostly to himself, of growing up to be an evil force in the world. In
contrast, Kate’s uncertain character makes her a surprising surrogate mother for Aaron.
While Kate constantly questions her own identity, she seems quick to evaluate the
relative goodness in others. While she is imprisoned by the Others, Kate is rescued by a
young woman and tells Rousseau that she should help them get Jack back from the
Others because she saw a young woman there who helped them and she thinks it is her
daughter (“Tricia Tanaka is Dead”). Ultimately, Rousseau has a complex relationship
with the survivors. She sometimes exemplifies her namesake’s noble savage with her
natural goodness by helping the survivors without any other motive than compassion. In
other instances, she aids their causes because some kind of social contract has been
established. These exchanges can be seen in her determination to switch Aaron for Alex,
her agreement to help save Jack in an effort to save Alex, and her allowance of Sayid to
have some freedom of motion as her prisoner to fix her music box. Sayid and Rousseau
also exchange their stories of loss. Unfortunately for both, worse losses are yet to come.

In “Through the Looking Glass: Part 2,” Rousseau is finally reunited with her
daughter, Alex. The two begin to form a tentative relationship, but their similar looks and
natures are clear to the audience. When the survivors come under attack by a mercenary
group, Rousseau is shot and killed trying to protect her daughter (“Meet Kevin Johnson”). In the next episode, “The Shape of Things to Come,” Alex is executed in front of her surrogate father Ben when he tells the leader of the mercenary group, “She’s not my daughter. I stole her as a baby from an insane woman. She's a pawn, nothing more. She means nothing to me. I'm not coming out of this house. So if you want to kill her, go ahead and do it…” At this moment, Alex is shot in the head. While Ben believed that disassociating himself from the child that the mercenaries were using as leverage would save her, it actually made her expendable in their eyes. Thus, Alex dies after seeing her mother likewise executed, and the last thing she hears is her surrogate father disowning her and his feelings for her.

Concerning Claire and Rousseau, there are many circular patterns in plot and theme surrounding them. Both have children stolen from them, and one actually steals from the other in an effort to regain her own child. This kidnapping of a replacement child, taken from the new survivors of the island after the Others stole her own, represents Rousseau’s perversity of both the real Locke and Rousseau’s claims about contract theory and the state of nature. Rousseau believes that she can take a child from the commons after her own has been likewise appropriated from her. However, both Rousseau and Alex suffer, possibly for this fault, while Claire, Aaron, and Kate, experience some of the more positive fates of the survivors in that they are ultimately transported off the island. Kate and Claire’s communal celebration of compacts, consent, and shared responsibility could warrant this happier ending. But first, both women must face a kind of reckoning for their past mistakes and become destructive of their past identities before they are rescued, redeemed, and reinvented. After both Rousseau and
Alex are killed, Claire replaces Rousseau as the “insane woman” on the island. Also, Alex is stolen from Rousseau only to be taken back by her, but again it is a male’s decision, that of Ben’s, that causes Alex’s death in the end. Then, Ben is the one made to suffer for this decision. For all of Rousseau good intentions and determination to regain and protect her daughter, men once again take her away, killing them both in the process. Afterward, Ben is left with the guilt and regret of killing his adoptive daughter while also questioning his actions toward Rousseau. These elements of male suffering and circular plots will be examined more in this thesis’s conclusion while the next chapter will focus on the even more destructive decisions of Sun and Juliet in efforts to individuate themselves from men and reconstruct new identities on the island.
Works Cited


Chapter 3: Procreation

While Sun Kwon had been a leading character in the survivor’s camp in *LOST* since the series’s first season, Juliet Burke emerges at the beginning of the third season in the Others’ community. In the shocking third-season opener, the audience is introduced to Juliet baking (and burning) muffins while readying her comfortable home for a book club meeting (“A Tale of Two Cities”). After the book club session begins, one guest finds fault with the obviously distracted Juliet’s book choice and she very directly and assertively responds to him:

I am the host and I do pick the book. And this is my favorite book. So I am absolutely thrilled that you can’t stand it. Silly me for sinking so low as to select something that Ben wouldn’t like. Here I am thinking that free will still actually exists on… (“A Tale of Two Cities”)  

At this point, the house begins to shake. When the group goes outside, an entire community of houses identical to Juliet’s is revealed. As well-dressed people emerge from the other houses and look up, they see a plane fall out of the sky, break into two pieces, and crash miles apart.

It is at this point that the audience realizes this is a flashback scene of the plane crash that took place in the series’s first episode and that these people are the enigmatic Others. The illusion of the Others as primitive savages is shattered. Once again, *LOST* has built this illusion as a stereotype to create a moment of spectacle for its audience. However, the series’s content goes beyond this in that it begs the audience to identify with these characters who have been contextualized and marginalized, labeled as the “other.” This identification begins with the female character Juliet, an actual “Other” on
the island. The audience views her flashbacks to find that she is a complicated (and compromised) female living with the Others against her will for one sole purpose: to solve the problem of women dying during childbirth on the island. While Ben maintains that this is his prime objective for holding Juliet on the island, the fact that she is the object of his male gaze reveals that his motives for keeping her held captive are more personally involved.

Juliet’s introduction comes at the pivotal moment in which the survivor Sun discovers that she is pregnant. Issues of parenthood, paternity, and pregnancy abound in LOST. In his article “Lost Together: Fathers, Sons, and Moral Obligations,” Michael W. Austin asks the question of what male characters like Jack and Locke owe their fathers. As both fathers are lacking in very different ways, Austin argues that sons actually owe fathers nothing for bringing them into the world but that children and parents can become friends as adults if the relationship is first nurtured and allowed to mature (221-6). In her article “Where Have All the Good Men Gone?: A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Absent Fathers and Damaged Dads on ABC’s Lost,” Melissa Ames focuses on how the series constructs its representations of fathers themselves. She states that “[…] [D]espite the shifting parental trends occurring in the twenty-first century – the change in the father’s role as head of the household for example – part of the image of the father figure remains static and unchanging, the product of centuries of solidification” (Ames 430). While these articles focus on male representations of parenthood and childhood, this chapter focuses on how women’s sexuality impacts their roles as mothers and caregivers. As Ames relates with the men, some notions of motherhood have changed over time but some are still deeply ingrained into the human psyche.
While Shannon and Kate were sexually active on the island, neither woman becomes pregnant. However, the married Sun, who ironically is not often showcased in sexual scenes, becomes pregnant. But like most situations (especially those concerning paternity) on LOST, this pregnancy is not as straightforward as it seems. Sun’s situation, like Juliet’s, is likewise complicated and compromised in that she had an extramarital affair just before she crashed on the island with her husband Jin. Initially, Jin is presented as a hostile, controlling, and unloving husband who sees his wife as an object and a burden. Once again, flashbacks reveal that Jin’s actions are determined by unique, previous personal experiences, namely his employment by Sun’s wealthy father as an enforcer for his illegal activities. Jin tries to control Sun to protect her. Likewise, Sun’s seeming subservience to her husband is unmasked by revelations that she learned English without his knowledge, had an extramarital affair also without his knowledge, and is the sole heir to her father’s considerable wealth. Other than Rose and Bernard who will be discussed in the conclusion, Sun and Jin are the only married couple among the survivors. Their love story has become the center of much controversy in the series in that Sun’s seemingly reckless decisions appear to prioritize her love for her husband above that of her love for her own child, both before and after the baby is born. In the final season, Jin’s decisions also seem to reflect devotion more toward a partner than a child, resulting in grave consequences for both of them.

As will be shown in the next section on Sun and the following section on Juliet, the female characters of LOST are doomed no matter what choices they make regarding their own bodies, men, and children. In both cases, the women must make difficult choices to sacrifice parts of themselves. They oscillate between various roles, constantly
performing only to make the ultimate sacrifice: their lives. In this way, *LOST* provides a commentary on women’s stations in society. Women seemingly cannot fulfil multiple roles in career and family without making some kind of sacrifice. Unlike the women examined in the previous chapters, both women in this chapter make choices that eventually lead to them giving up their own lives since they cannot reach their ultimate goals. Sun regains her husband only to die with him and lose her future raising her child and running her father’s company. Juliet sacrifices herself for the other survivors, including her partner, Sawyer, only to have her amazing medical knowledge die with her. In other words, *LOST* provides a commentary on the fact that society presents women with the illusion of choice and the ability to have it all while it in fact limits those choices. Additionally, the choices women make are not only limited but also condemned once they make them, setting them up for failure. Here, the theories of Burkean aesthetics and chthonic themes both seemingly leave room for play concerning gender identity, but the illusion of choice, the very thing that contributes to supposed individuality, once again limits these women’s options and their actions end up seeming futile and their deaths arbitrary. While this chapter focuses on the limited choices allowed Sun and Juliet, the conclusion will further explore the nature and intent of all the violent deaths toward women.

**“The Secrets We Kept; The Lies We Told”**

Sun’s experience may at first seem startlingly different from the other women’s in the eyes of viewers due to her subservience to her husband, her exoticism as the only Asian woman on the island, and her apparent lack of the means to communicate with the other survivors. According to Diana Fuss, “The problem with categories like the ‘female
experience’ or the ‘male experience’ is that, given their generality and seamlessness, they are of limited epistemological usefulness” (27). Fuss maps how one can reject “unequivocally the idea of a ‘class of women’ based on shared (biological) experience,” but then goes on to find fault even here, stating that male authority and women’s empowerment cannot be experienced equally on a social level due to class, race, nationality, etc. (28). Women cannot uniformly call for the political action of women’s empowerment when some women already exercise more authority than other women and/or their male counterparts. This seems to be the case with Sun. Sun’s seeming subservience to Jin becomes clouded when the audience learns that Sun risked her inheritance to marry him, the lowly son of a fisherman who met Sun after working as a doorman at one of her father’s aristocratic hotels. Furthermore, Sun’s experience as the privileged daughter of wealthy Korean parents cannot be culturally or socially equated with Kate’s experience as an American woman dealing with abuse, alcoholism, and poverty in her family. However, examinations of these women can be useful when viewers compare and contrast their similarities and differences, constantly engaging with whether the nature of their shared experience results specifically from shared sex (biology) or personal similarities. When examined in these ways, this process of analysis similarly disrupts categories or stereotypes of women as *LOST* does through flashbacks.

Moving outside the complex narratives within the series, *LOST*’s inception and casting can also be briefly examined in terms of this notion of universal women’s experience versus difference. Character casting involves attention to both an individual’s physical attributes and potential for performance; producers must determine if an actor can both look and play the part. In the case of casting the women of *LOST*, producers not
only looked for specific qualities in the female actors’ physical appearance but also
directly linked these surface qualities with sub-surface cultural stereotypes. In Michaela
D.E. Meyer and Danielle M. Stern’s article “The Modern (?) Korean Woman in Prime-
Time: Analyzing the Representation of Sun on the Television Series LOST,” they reveal
that:

Sun is a significant character because she is the only primary non-white
woman in the series and her character, in fact, did not even exist when the
series began casting. Korean-American star Yunjin Kim who plays Sun on
the series originally read for the role of Kate, but rather than considering
her for this role, [J.J.] Abrams wrote an original role for Kim – a Korean
housewife. (314)

The above casting decision demonstrates a complicated gender issue. Abrams might have
been casting the women in their respective roles due to cultural stereotypes since a
Korean woman, a “model minority,” might not fit the role of a convicted murderer
(Meyer and Stern 314). However, Abrams also might have been sensing the void within
Fuss’s assertion that a woman’s experience varies not only on a cultural basis but also on
an individual one. Either way, Sun’s inclusion in the cast of characters leads to two
important issues concerning her role as the only Asian woman on the island: the
stereotypes surrounding her perceived status as a non-English speaker and her
performance as a housewife to a possessive husband.

In their section “Stereotypes of Language and Possession,” Meyer and Stern first
assert that “In Lost, Sun’s character exhibits many traditional Asian stereotypes,
including her continued submissiveness to her husband and the assumption that she
cannot speak English” (316). While conceding that Asians are often depicted in American television as victims of positive stereotyping following an “Asian Invasion” of minority supporting cast members, they show that Sun is first the victim of negative stereotyping in the eyes of the other survivors:

Sun’s character exhibits numerous stereotypes associated with Asian populations through American lenses, including the belief that Asian people cannot speak English and that Asian women are subjugated as the ‘demure housewives’ incapable of personal knowledge. As the first season progresses, Sun challenges these stereotypes for the white cast members and establishes herself as useful and resourceful. (Meyer and Stern 316)

While Sun is useful and resourceful, she is not the demure housewife of American stereotyping of Asians; her lies, secrets, threats, and manipulations prove this. Oddly enough, these later revelations seem to have little effect on her solid station within the group while her initial apparent differences ostracize her. In fact, Sun places more importance on them in understanding her own identity than the others do in fixing her willingly within the group. But before Sun gains the respect and trust of the other survivors, she is marginalized within the group. Initially, Sun’s use of Korean with her husband, Jin, distances her from the other members of the group while seemingly inextricably binding her to her husband. Meyer and Stern state, “[…] [I]t is interesting that none of the characters ever directly asks whether or not Sun can understand them. No one inquires whether or not Sun can speak English; it is simply assumed that she cannot because Sun and Jin speak to each other in Korean” (317). Sun can, and does, in fact speak English, having learned the language from her lover when she decided to leave Jin
(“The Glass Ballerina”). During her layover in Australia, Sun was going to leave Jin and escape to America, but she decides to remain with him at the last moment out of her love for him ("House of the Rising Sun"). In this way, language provides a unique vehicle for identity construction in that it serves as both a barrier and a conduit for Sun in her various relationships with others.

In a pivotal scene on the island, Sun later reveals to the others, and her husband, that she can speak English:

Sun’s actions are continually overlooked by the white characters on the series until it is revealed to everyone that she speaks English. Sun must reveal she can speak English when Jin faces the wrath of the other survivors who believe he set fire to the raft they were building to escape. [...] The revelation that Sun speaks English is surprising to the white characters that up to this point have almost completely ignored her, and afterward, this revelation distances her from Jin. When Jin refuses to speak to Sun, they both finally begin to integrate with the other cast members separately. (Meyer and Stern 318-319)

It is ironic that Sun first learns English to leave her husband but then reveals it to the majority of the survivors only in an effort to protect him from physical harm. However, this verbal act once again drives a wedge between the two as Jin realizes that she would only learn English in secret so that she could immigrate to America without him. Furthermore, Sun’s increasingly reckless and oftentimes violent behavior seems overlooked or even validated by other survivors after she engages with them in their own language. Once again, Sun seems to distrust her own identity while others place their
trust in her implicitly. While Meyer and Stern provide an excellent analysis of how language provides both a link and a barrier within and without the Kwons’ marriage, they pay less attention to Jin’s and Sun’s respective seeming possessiveness and submissiveness.

*LOST* begins presenting Sun as a submissive housewife right from the start. In the pilot episode, Sun is wearing a long-sleeved cardigan after the plane crash. Even though she has a shirt on underneath it, Jin yells something to her in Korean and motions toward her shirt. The top button of Sun’s cardigan has come undone and she compliantly buttons it back up (“Pilot: Part 2”). Since Jin is Sun’s husband, it is obvious that she is the object of his male gaze but he is also particularly preoccupied with other men looking at Sun. Therefore, he focuses on her outward appearance toward others on the island. After Jin tells Sun to button up, she seeks out Kate since she is wanted back at the camp (“Pilot: Part 2”). Sun finds Kate bathing in the ocean, and rather than approaching her immediately, she watches Kate, wearing only a bra and underwear, wash herself in the ocean water. Sun is still completely covered in her housewife clothes. The camera takes on Sun’s gaze which lingers on Kate’s bare skin. Rather than being the object of Sun’s sexual desire, this mutation of the traditional male gaze shows that Sun is envious of Kate’s comfort and freedom with her body. No man is telling her to cover herself up, and even if they were, Sun has perceived Kate’s assertive nature and knows that she probably would not comply. In this scene, clothing is part of each woman’s performance; one is dictated by a male while the other’s is not. In this way, these performances likewise elucidate each female’s self-identification in relation to being the object of the male gaze. When Sun finally catches Kate’s eye, she speaks to her in Korean and motions for her to
head back to the camp. This intimate moment, although no understood words are spoken, echoes throughout the series. It marks the beginning of an understanding and a friendship between the two women based upon mutual respect despite great difference. Furthermore, Sun’s envy for Kate’s freedom serves as the spark for her own personal reconstruction and identity development.

Ironically, after Sun watches Kate bathing, another survivor witnesses Sun bathing. Not only is Jin focused on Sun’s exposure but also on her hygiene. In the next episode, Sun is searching through the wreckage for Jin’s bag. He tells her in Korean, “Come here. Have you seen yourself? Your clothes. You’re filthy. Go wash up” followed by the seeming afterthought, “Sun. I love you” (“Tabula Rasa”). However, Sun’s compliance leads to another survivor, Michael, accidentally seeing Sun naked while she is cleaning up (“Tabula Rasa”). While Michael’s gaze is also directed toward Sun and she seems to be attracted to him as well, Michael and Jin eventually become friends when Jin discovers Sun’s ability to speak English, decides to help Michael build a raft, and leaves with him to try to reach help (“…In Translation”).

While Sun is obviously distraught that Jin now seems to be leaving her, she alternately seems relieved. At the end of the episode “…In Translation,” Sun exchanges her prim clothing for a blue two-piece bikini. This change in attire signals Sun’s similar change in performance, the beginning of her new identity. She walks up to the ocean water as the sun is setting behind her. She has a towel around her, but as she reaches the water, she lets it float back and lets the wind sweep it behind her. She smiles as she stands alone and bare in the sunlight and the sea spray. The image of the setting sun represents Sun herself; she realizes that she may have lost her husband but she has gained
a part of herself that she will not lose again no matter what happens. This is the birth of
the new Sun, one who is more like Kate in that she is assertive, confident, and free.

Many of Sun and Jin’s attempts to control one another produce the opposite effect
than the one desired, especially when the two do not directly communicate with one
another. When Sun speaks English for the first time, the enraged Jin begins packing his
things while Sun asks him why he is doing so in Korean. When she is met with only
silence, she screams in English, “I was going to leave you! I was going to get away. But
you made me change my mind. You made me think that you still loved me!” (“...In
Translation”). Rather than confessing the truth to him in their shared language, Sun can
only tell the truth in a way that Jin cannot understand. In the face of this masked truth, Jin
chooses to leave her. He is able to see through the language barrier to understand Sun’s
true motivations and thus her identity as an unhappy housewife. This theme is further
emphasized when Sun poisons Michael. Rather than approaching Jin directly and asking
him to stay with her on the island, Sun hatches a plan with Kate to poison Jin only
enough to make him sick enough so that he cannot leave on the raft (“Numbers”).
Predictably, her lack of communication triggers the plan’s backfire and Michael
accidentally drinks the poison instead. In this way, Sun begins to reveal a manipulative
facet of her identity on the island, strengthened by the flashback scenes of her affair and
plan to leave Jin. It is clear that Sun is a performer. Sun seems to struggle less with
identity construction than the other female characters in that she understands that her own
secret knowledge is her power but it also points out her dishonesty with others.

While Sun begins to demonstrate her newfound independence, she progressively
does not mean
that she no longer loves Jin. In fact, quite the opposite proves true. This can be seen when she poisons Jin before he leaves. After Jin sails away on the raft with Michael, Walt, and Sawyer, the rest of the group migrates across the island in an effort to escape from the approaching Others. While they are preparing for the migration, Sun asks Shannon, “Do you think all this – all we’ve been through – do you think we’re being punished?” Shannon asks, “Punished for what?” and Sun responds, “Things we did before – the secrets we kept, the lies we told” (“Exodus: Part 2”). Sun worries that Jin will not return to her alive because she has been unfaithful to him, keeping her affair, her English, and her plan to leave him all a secret for so long. In short, she has kept her true identity from him by performing the role of the simple housewife when in fact she is also a master manipulator capable of trumping Kate by virtue of her extreme subtlety. Throughout the series, Sun and Jin experience time together and time separated but Sun’s increasingly daring decisions could indicate her determination to devote herself to Jin in atonement for previously betraying him by hiding her true self from him.

In fact, Jin does return to Sun, professing his love for her and the need to get her off the island. However, when Jin tries to leave on a rescue mission to help his friend Michael, Sun tells him he needs to stay because she is his wife (“The Hunting Party”). Here, Sun uses her status as Jin’s wife to show that their conjugal relationship is more important than platonic friendship. Later, Jin tells Sun that he did not like being told what to do and she replies that she did not like being told what to do either (“The Hunting Party”). Sun again inverts her status as Jin’s wife to get him to see her point of view. However, Sun’s newfound assertiveness quickly turns to recklessness when Sun agrees to join Sayid and Jin on a different rescue mission (“The Glass Ballerina”). When Jin finds
the mission too dangerous and tries to abort it, Sun tells Sayid in English, “My husband thinks we have to do as he says because he’s the only one who knows how to sail. But he's wrong. I can help you sail the boat” (“The Glass Ballerina”). Due to Sun’s decisions and actions, she not only gets herself into a dangerous situation but also kills a member of the Others in order to escape. The Other implores Sun, saying that she knows her and that she is not a murderer. However, Sun barely hesitates to kill the woman, revealing that her performance is so strong that even the evaluative Others has her identity mistaken. Here, Sun’s skills as a sailor seem to surpass her killer instinct as neither Sun’s own guilt is explored and the other survivors never address the issue.

Sun is in fact pregnant on the boat, and what she assumed was seasickness continues when they return to the camp. She procures a pregnancy test from Sawyer and gets a positive result. She is astonished by this result because the flashback scenes in this same episode reveal that she was visiting a fertility doctor since she and Jin were having difficulty conceiving (“The Whole Truth”). It is also revealed that Jin was infertile. Therefore, Sun assumes he is not the father of the baby even though she swears to him she has always been faithful (“The Whole Truth”). Even after she voices her fear that she is being punished for keeping secrets from and lying to her husband, Sun continues to do both. Jin only learns of Sun’s infidelity through Juliet, which will be discussed in the next section.

Rather than diminishing her increasing recklessness, Sun’s pregnancy accentuates it. In the third-season episode “D.O.C.,” the obstetrician-gynecologist Juliet Burke has apparently defected from the Others after they cast her out with Kate. Juliet warns Sun that there might be complications with her pregnancy and eventually convinces her to
accompany her to the very same medical facility where Ethan held Claire hostage. When
Juliet takes Sun in to a secret room which resembles a delivery room and she asks what
the place is, Juliet responds that it is where they “brought the women to die” (“D.O.C.”).
Juliet tells Sun that she is looking for the baby’s “D.O.C.,” its date of conception. In
determining if Sun got pregnant on the island, the two will not only likewise determine
Sun and her baby’s chances of survival but also the child’s paternity since Sun had an
extramarital affair shortly before the plane crash:

Sun: The baby isn’t Jin's. We tried to have a baby back in Korea and
couldn’t, and the doctor, he told me Jin was infertile.
Juliet: And then you came here.
Sun: What?
Juliet: Did you know that the average male sperm count is between sixty
and eighty million? But on the Island, its five times that. We call
that good odds. You ready?
Sun: Yes.
Juliet: OK, now lift your shirt up a little. [She pours liquid on Sun's chest]
It's cold.
Sun: Will I see the baby?
Juliet: Maybe, it’s your first trimester so it’s a little iffy. If you don't see a
heartbeat, don't worry about it. It’s just early.
Sun: How does it work?
Juliet: Well I take a measurement of the fetus and that will tell us when
your baby was conceived, and then we'll know who. [Sun sighs]
You OK?
Sun: I lose either way. If I'm going to live, that means the baby's not Jin's.
Juliet: Do you still want to do this?
Sun: Yes.
Juliet: OK, moment of truth. (“D.O.C.”)

Juliet performs the ultrasound and determines the baby’s date of conception:

Juliet: Okay, you crashed here ninety days ago. The baby was conceived
about eight weeks ago, so around fifty three days. You got
pregnant on the Island.
[Sun cries.]
Juliet: I'm sorry, I am so sorry Sun. I will do everything that I can...
Sun: [Smiles] It's Jin's!
[Juliet smiles too.]
Sun: So how long do I have?
Juliet: Most of the women made it into the middle of their second trimester, nobody made it to their third.

Sun: That gives me, two months. I am, very happy the baby's Jin's. You gave me good news, Juliet. (“D.O.C.”)

Sun is overjoyed when she learns that the baby is Jin’s. Rather than learn that the baby is not her husband’s, which means that it would more likely survive, Sun revels in the fact that her baby is Jin’s despite knowing that she and the baby will most likely die. In this way, Sun puts more importance on her relationship with her husband than on her own health and her baby’s.

At the end of the fourth season, Sun is rescued from the island so that she is able to give birth to her child safely in Korea. However, she leaves the island believing that Jin was killed in an explosion. A hint of Sun’s possible devotion to her husband over her child’s is in the episode “Ji Yeon.” As a flashback scene, the traditional flash of the fourth season, reveals that Sun does make it off the island alive to bring her also living child into the world; another flash correspondingly shows Jin attempting to make it to a hospital delivery on time. As will be demonstrated in the conclusion with the character of Ana Lucia, this moment marks an important change in structure for LOST in that the scenes with Jin are actually flashbacks rather than flashforwards. The presumed dead Jin states that he has just recently been married and was arriving to the hospital to present a gift to the grandchild of one of his father-in-law’s clients. Thematically, this shocking change in structure and the revelation of an impending death of a main character signals Sun’s curious devotion to her husband. In fact, she imagines Jin as still alive and calls to him during the entire labor.

Rather than mourning her husband and focusing on her child, Sun is overcome with rage at her husband’s perceived death. She directs this toward the other men in their
lives whom she believes are responsible for his death. When Sun returns home after the rescue, she immediately visits her father, her husband’s former employer:

Sun: Hello, Father. I hope I’m not interrupting.
Mr. Paik: No... It’s just business.
Sun: Is something wrong?
Mr. Paik: Just some complications with the company. Nothing you’d understand. How is the pregnancy?
Sun: Don’t pretend to be interested in my baby. We both know you hated my husband.
Mr. Paik: What did you say?
Sun: You heard me. You hated Jin.
Mr. Paik: Who do you think you are? I am your father. You will respect me!
Sun: Oceanic paid us our settlement for the crash. It was very significant. This morning, I bought a controlling interest in your company. So you will now respect me.
Mr. Paik: Why... would you do this?
Sun: You ruined my husband’s life. It is because of you we were on that plane. Two people are responsible for his death. You are one of them.
Sun: I am going to have my baby. And then we shall discuss the plans for the future of the company. Our company. (“There’s No Place Like Home: Part 1”)

In the above conversation, Sun claims that her father has no interest in her baby. However, she only mentions her own unborn child once as a segue into the future of her father’s company in her hands. She also alludes to a second person whom she feels is responsible for Jin’s death. This second person turns out to be Benjamin. In the episode “The Little Prince,” Sun travels to America to gun down Benjamin. While she waits in her car for the opportunity to do so, she not only watches Aaron for Kate but also receives a phone call from her mother who is watching her daughter, Ji Yeon. While Sun speaks to her daughter, it is clear that she feels a small maternal tug but this pull is not as important as avenging her husband’s death. Therefore, Sun ends the phone call quickly and leaves Aaron in the car alone to confront Ben. The only reason she does not kill Ben
is because he provides proof that Jin is alive. Without Jin’s presence necessitating her performance, Sun openly depicts her true identity as a woman of power, means, and obsession.

Sun ultimately chooses her husband over her daughter when she returns to the island without her to find Jin. Even though Sun does not realize how ultimately fatal this decision will prove, it comes as the final reckless choice she makes to regain her lover. It could be argued that Sun is trying to save Jin so that he can finally meet and raise his daughter, but Sun’s acceptance of Jin’s last decision deemphasizes any hint of this notion. Finally reunited again, Sun and Jin’s relationship climaxes in the final-season episode “The Candidate” when Sun is trapped inside a sinking submarine. Even though Sun tells Jin to go, she does not mention their child as a reason to leave safely and seems relieved when Jin tells her in Korean, “I won’t leave you. I will never leave you again,” and then in English, “I love you, Sun” (“The Candidate”). Sun and Jin embrace and die together. The fate of Ji Yeon in the central plot is never revealed.

While some may see Sun’s devotion to her husband as a form of penance for her past indiscretions toward him, Sun’s initiative in returning to her husband and the manipulation of the men around her as a means to reach this aim actually point to a powerful form of feminism. By exercising her choice of returning to a mate at the risk of potentially leaving a child forever, Sun’s character finishes the transformation of coming to terms with her identity in a destructive way which will be explored more in the next section on Juliet. In the beginning, she is viewed as a submissive housewife but she is in fact performing this role to leave her husband. Therefore, Sun seems doomed either way: she must remain chained to her husband or perish. The fact that she is physically stuck in
the sinking submarine reflects this, and Jin makes the choice to stay with her to perish as well.

Rather than conforming to the expected female identity of motherhood, Sun chooses to perform the role of the dutiful and devoted wife after she has been allowed simply that: a choice. Therefore, if interpreted from a third-wave feminist or postfeminist perspective that stresses the importance of choice and individualized definitions of feminism, Sun presents a strong female character on *LOST* whose situation allows her to construct a new identity – even if it is a chosen identity that not everyone would support.

In *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Woman’s Movement Since 1970*, Bonnie J. Dow describes the postfeminist phenomenon “choiceoisie,” “the alternative to feminism” (103). She gives the example that “[a man’s] expectation that a woman be willing to alter her life to fulfill his desires is not about patriarchy after all; it is just about individual differences, about choice” (Dow 103). If this is the case for Sun, she not only alters her life but gives it for her male partner. Rather than giving in to the patriarchy that she believed persecuted her in the beginning, she chooses to reunite with her husband at any cost. It should be noted that Jin was not dictating or even knowledgeable of Sun’s actions, the latter being true for most of the series. The fact that Sun, and Juliet, both die at the hands of natural elements points to a seemingly determinist outcome for the females of *LOST*. Since these women are doomed before they ever come to the island and the men either perish along with them or continue on in apathy, *LOST* could be critiquing the gender norms that both men and women create together. Whether these norms are followed or broken, the result is the same. The habitual death scenes reflect that in the past and at the current moment, despite different
lifestyle choices, performances, and identities, men and women still seem to fall into the same gender traps, hence the symbolic cyclical death scenes on the show. In this way, the series presents these deterministic deaths resulting from natural causes as normative to illuminate the similarly viewed patriarchal pitfalls still evident in various cultures around the world.

“Once Upon a Time”

Like Sun, Juliet transforms from a weak, confused woman to a powerhouse of decision and manipulation only to, once again, be destroyed at the culmination of this transformation. However, unlike Sun, Juliet represents a different kind of controlled woman in that she is the first and only female Other on LOST who is allowed character-centric flashbacks. When Juliet first meets Jack, the Others are holding him prisoner in one of their camps. Jack, Sawyer, and Kate are being held in the Others’ attempt to coerce Jack into performing surgery on Ben to remove an invasive tumor. However, it is unclear to Jack that Juliet, his keeper and the Others’ negotiator, is also being held against her will. She enters Jack’s life in a scene reminiscent of Jack’s first meeting with Kate, only here, Juliet openly appeals to a feminine nurturing side by bringing him food and then immediately inverts this stereotype by telling him that she did not make the sandwich she is offering him; she only put the toothpicks in (“A Tale of Two Cities”). Ben also reveals that he chose Juliet to convince Jack to perform the surgery since he thinks Juliet looks similar to Jack’s ex-wife. This situation is compounded even further when flashbacks of Juliet’s first time on the island reveal that some of the Others believe Ben chose her as the island’s obstetrician-gynecologist because she bears a striking resemblance to his mother (“The Other Woman”). Therefore, while Juliet at first appears
to be a stereotypical Other, manipulating, intimidating, and coercing the survivors, she is in fact a prisoner, pointing back to Kate’s status. After she is freed from Ben’s grasp, Juliet dies tragically and violently on the island. In short, Juliet’s personality, profession, and death all seemingly present a direct, surface intensity when in fact they are all emblematic of a chthonic, female deepness concerned with imprisonment, childbearing, and death:

The chthonic, or the themes of darkness and the underground, is a recurring source of meaning and imagery in the genre of fantastic literature. Appearing in a multitude of forms, darkness and the underground form the narrative base in the fantasy genre and help construct a realm where such elements reflect the inner mechanisms of the human psyche through the utilization of various archetypes and symbols.

(Kılıçarslan 54)

As a television series, LOST’s status as a multi-genre text falls easily into the categories of science fiction and fantasy. Its intertextuality with these literary genres – such as the focus on the fantasy Watership Down explored in the previous chapter – speaks to their influence. Given the supernatural nature of the island’s mythology, there are multiple opportunities for viewers to probe the depth and darkness of the series’s plot, and most importantly, its characterization. There are many external representations of the chthonic, reflections of the “inner mechanisms of the human psyche” on LOST: the hatch, the cave, the temple, all of the Dharma stations. In addition to Juliet’s profession as an obstetrician-gynecologist who is hesitant – or incapable – of having children of her own, the environment in which Jack meets Juliet also points to a chthonic theme. Juliet’s
womb seems as inhospitable as the external setting of the underground hatch. Juliet explains that they are in one of the old Dharma Initiative stations, this one called the “Hydra,” an aquarium-type facility in which experiments were conducted on sharks and dolphins (“A Tale of Two Cities”). The nature and the name of the Hydra, a reference to the mythological monster, also points to a chthonic theme. As will be shown, recurring themes of darkness and the underground pervade Juliet’s life even up to and including the nature of her death.

However, these chthonic themes are not purely natural metaphors for the human psyche; they also present gender constructions – and deconstructions:

Fairy tales and fantasy literature “demonstrate[…] that there is also a distinct gendered difference in the way darkness and the underground function for male and female characters. The chthonic functions in a constructive way for the male protagonist whereas the female protagonist must undergo a destructive chthonic experience in her path towards individuation” (Kılıçarslan 54, emphasis in original)

In other words, men transform in a constructive way while women must first destroy their current identities to create new ones. Through Juliet’s inability to deliver living children on the island and keep the mothers alive, Juliet’s profession embodies the motif of the female chthonic in that she must first destroy to create in both her own life and in others. Juliet must first endure the failed pregnancies of the dead women and babies before she is finally able to successfully deliver a living child to a living mother. Likewise, she is seemingly incapable of bearing her own children in the main plotline but is portrayed as a mother in the flashsideways. Her own seeming inability to bear her own children
strengthens this. In fact, Juliet must actually die in order to have a child; Juliet dies in Sawyer’s arms, childless, but is reborn in the flashsideways with a child by Jack. In this way, Juliet’s chthonic journey into the destroyed Dharma station brings on her own destruction so that she can help to create a new world in which she is alive and capable of bearing children. Like the other female characters in the previous chapters, this situation highlights the high costs that women must pay when attempting to make their own choices to reach a satisfactory state of identity and individuality. The character flashbacks help to dispel these stereotypes while also pointing to a deepness of identity amidst limited choices. While Juliet’s character engages less with stereotyping than the other female characters, her initial presentation as a complicit Other tends to malign her as a villain on the series. However, like all things LOST, Juliet steadily emerges from her shroud of secrecy and gains a tenable place in both the survivors’ camp and audience’s opinions.

Another indication that Juliet’s character is connected with both the natural and supernatural is that her ex-husband’s name is Edmund Burke, a direct allusion to the Irish philosopher and politician best known for his criticisms of the French Revolution. Like Rousseau and Locke, Burke also expounded on contemplations of the self – and self-preservation – within the state of nature. Burke’s thoughts in A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful appear merged in Juliet’s character; she embodies both the feminine beautiful and the masculine sublime in the simultaneous softness and hardness of her character. Juliet changes her appearance and her personality, and her death speaks to the terribleness of the sublime amidst tranquil beauty in nature. Burke gives the following definition of the sublime:
Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (86)

In terms of pain and terror, Juliet feels both in her profession. She confesses to Sun that the male sperm count on the island is higher than off the island, which is “good odds” (“D.O.C.”). However, Juliet knows that the women have a higher chance of dying in or before childbirth on the island. This strange inconsistency on the island points to a possible commentary on LOST about the chances and choices allotted women versus men in society. The women seem doomed by nature even though men advance, reflecting social bias and limitation. The dead women and babies she tried to help hang on her conscience, changing her identity into a woman who will help others at any cost. The fairy tale of bringing life into the world has become a nightmare for her on the island, the source of all her terror. The delivery room has become a death room. Therefore, while Juliet exhibits emotion only in a few scenes, it is clear that she is hiding pain and fear of a powerful and sublime nature.

The fictional Edmund of LOST is only shown in one episode during one of Juliet’s flashbacks in which it is revealed that, before coming to the island, she had found a new experimental way of helping women conceive children on their own in an evolutionary form of procreation (“Not in Portland”). When Edmund tries to manipulate Juliet into giving him the rights to the research, the Others kill Edmund to loosen his hold on Juliet so that they can have her. Juliet is visibly distraught by this incident. It is clear
that she, like Sun, performs for others while hiding her true identity. Juliet is obviously drawn toward domesticity in her profession and her subservience to her ex-husband. As Juliet’s storyline progresses, it becomes clearer that her natural identity is a softer one while her performance becomes more hostile, allowing her to keep those around her that she cares for at a distance, along with those whom she despises (e.g. Ben).

Juliet leaves her newly impregnated sister and her unborn child, the result of Juliet’s scientific labor, believing that she will only be in Portland, Oregon for a short time. On the island, Juliet engages in an affair with an Other named Goodwin who is also disposed of due to Ben’s machinations just as ex-husband Edmund was removed by the Others (“The Other Woman”). Her willingness to insert herself into another’s marriage also speaks to her preoccupation with domesticity. Upon Goodwin’s death, Juliet directly confronts Ben saying, “You knew this would happen. You sent him out here because you knew this would happen. You wanted this! You wanted him to die! Why?” and Ben responds, “Why? You're asking me why? After everything I did to get you here, after everything I've done to keep you here, how can you possibly not understand... that you're mine!” (“The Other Woman”). Thus, Juliet grows to reject the manipulations of the men around her while also abstaining from any sexual relationships out of fear for her male counterparts’ lives. While she formerly would engage in an affair with a married man, she now resists relationships out of a sublime fear: Juliet believes that she kills everything she touches when she is supposed to be bringing life into the world. Thus Juliet becomes the stoic and pragmatic female character who hides emotion and either despises it or manipulates it in others. This can be seen when she tells Jin that his wife had an affair so that he will get Sun off the island so she can bear her child safely (“Ji Yeon”). Juliet later
confesses in this episode that she would do anything to get Sun off the island to save her and her child’s life. In this way, Juliet negates Sun’s emotions of outrage and embarrassment because she values her life more than her feelings. However, Juliet’s actions could be self-motivated since she no longer wants to be stuck in the role of a failed obstetrician-gynecologist.

This cycle of abstinence and assassination reflects Juliet’s own frustrations with her profession on the island: Juliet is incapable of saving any of the pregnant mothers or their unborn babies. By failing in both her relationships and her profession, she becomes much like the unborn children and dead mothers in that her life is stalled and essentially aborted. Her own chances for conceiving and bearing a child of her own are further diminished by her station. It is also clear through flashbacks that Juliet’s previous persona of a curly-haired, smiling and submissive woman is changed forever at the point of Goodwin’s death, she becomes a more domineering, direct woman who straightens her hair and never smiles. This transformation indicates Juliet’s move from the Burkean aesthetic of the tranquil beautiful to the more stormy and terrible construction of the sublime.

Opposed to the sublime, Burke defines the beautiful as a complex feeling of tranquility within a person sparked by the observation of an object of preference. Largely, Burke uses sexual difference to illustrate this objectification:

The object therefore of this mixed passion, which we call love, is the beauty of the sex. Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal beauty. I call beauty a social quality; for where women and men,
and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and
pleasure in beholding them (and there are many that do so), they inspire us
with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like
to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with
them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary. (90)

By transforming her soft appearance into a harsher one and equally toughening her
personality, Juliet rejects both the embodiment of the beautiful and her objectification in
Ben’s eyes. Upon losing Goodwin, Juliet remains physically attractive but augments her
look, dress, and personality to be purposefully more distancing to others. Juliet believes
that drawing people near to her and having them enter willingly into relationships with
her based on her soft beauty has led to their deaths. Thus she changes her identity to
match the sublime and performs in ways that push people away. Instead of drawing
others in like a poisonous flower, Juliet willfully deflects attachment and affection by
intimidating others. She does this to keep herself and those around her safe.

When Juliet takes Sun to the medical facility, another hidden, underground station
speaking to the chthonic, she tells her how her life and her profession were different
before coming to the island in a way that almost sounds like a fantasy fairy tale of a better
time gone by:

Once upon a time, I told women that they were pregnant and their faces, it
was the best news they ever got in their entire life. Then I came here. I’ve
lost, nine, patients in the last three years. I'm helping you because I want
to tell you that you and your husband got pregnant before you came here.
I'm helping you because I want to give good news again. (“D.O.C.”)
While Juliet’s claims sound sincere in this scene, she is also operating on another level. Determined to make it home to her own family, Juliet gathers information on the survivors’ women and relays the information to Ben, telling him which women are actually or potentially pregnant so that the Others can perform a raid to steal the women and continue their attempts to extract the unborn babies to raise them as their own (“One of Us”). Juliet eventually rejects these directives and joins the survivors. However, this decision comes at the pivotal moment in which many of the main characters are rescued and Juliet is left on the island, trapped in the 1970s.

During this time, Juliet engages in a sexual relationship with Sawyer and builds a life for herself among the Dharma Initiative. In a way, her character is reborn when she is finally able to successfully deliver a living child on the island, keeping the mother alive as well (“LaFleur”). Even though Juliet has not become a mother herself, it is clear that this success fulfills Juliet on her nurturing level. Juliet’s happiness reflects the role of motherhood or a domestic as being ultimately fulfilling for females. She does truly seem to be happiest when she is living with Sawyer on the island. She professes to want to go home but it seems that she uses their temporal placement in the 1970s as an excuse that she now has no home to return to. Ironically, Juliet’s later involvement in the incident restores the timeline to the original 2000s but kills her in the process so that she can never seem to be reunited with her family. Likewise, she is not allowed to fulfill her destiny of sharing her medical technology with the world. In this way, LOST again demonstrates that the island works against women to limit their choices to reflect society. It provides a commentary on how women are unable to have family, careers, success, and children without having to sacrifice something in their lives. Juliet must actually sacrifice her life.
The island does not allow Juliet her happy ending of living in domestic bliss with Sawyer and delivering healthy babies to living mothers. Once again, her hopes for the future are dashed when Jack, who has arrived from the future, tells the group that they can fix all of the problems they have via a complex plan. By placing an explosive in the area of the future hatch, the underground source of intense electromagnetic energy, Jack believes they can prevent the release of this energy in the future, the event which caused the plane crash “(The Incident: Part 2”). Jack convinces the others to take part in the plan and Juliet is one of the most resistant to this plan as she has become settled and satisfied in her new life on the island. Juliet has reverted to her softer, more beautiful side. She allows herself to connect with Sawyer who brings her flowers, symbolizing her own beauty. He does not objectify her but respects her wishes and supports her decisions. However, Juliet’s eschewing of the sublime within her personality seems to necessitate an external representation of one on the island. Through the hatch, Juliet must confront the sublime and thus confront the terror of living without Sawyer only to let him live. Once again, Juliet’s plans are ruined when she dies during the incident.

In a particularly chthonic scene also reminiscent of the sublime, Juliet is pulled into the hole containing the electromagnetic source when the energy is partially released and a metal chain wraps around her abdomen. The chasm, a consistent theme of the sublime, evokes nothingness and terror in the magnitude of the metaphysic event. Juliet is nearly torn apart by the force as Sawyer grips her hand and tries to save her. She tells him to let her go to save himself. She screams in pain as the focus is on the chains on her abdomen, symbolizing her inability to ever have what she gave others – children. Likewise, her abdomen is crushed in a way that would likely prevent any childbearing
even if she were to survive. The sublime is evident in her awesome sacrifice for others amidst the terrible destruction of her body. In fact, Juliet does not even die when she makes the considerable fall into the hole. She awakens broken, bleeding, and bloody in an underground pool of mud. She is truly in the womb of the earth, the place where the energy and the timeline begin. In one last effort to put the others before herself, Juliet manually activates the explosive, destroying both the energy source and herself in the process. In this way, Juliet’s act seems like a self-abortive move in which she sacrifices herself for the greater good and the continuation of her people (“The Incident: Part 2”).

While Juliet’s last act does not perfectly create a reestablished timeline, it does create the flashsideways in which the characters get a glimpse of the life that could have been if the plane had indeed not crashed. While the original timeline is restored to the 2000s, the sixth season of LOST begins with flashsideways. On the island, the few remaining survivors struggle to defeat the forces of evil on the island and leave the island on the plane on which they returned to the island once again. In these flashes, the various survivors’ lives intersect in Los Angeles, the destination of their failed flight. In some ways, these characters are the same – Claire, for instance, is still pregnant – but in other ways, their lives and relationships are drastically different. For example, in this alternate timeline, Juliet and Jack are divorced but they have a child together, David. Juliet seems pleased with her life, her same profession, and her son (“The End: Part 2”). Throughout the season, one by one these characters connect with one another, triggering the memories of the timeline on the island. When the survivors all remember their lives on the island and gather together to move on, Juliet is reunited with Sawyer and David is
seemingly forgotten. This reunion combined with David’s dissolution bring Juliet’s narrative full circle back to the chthonic:

[T]he chthonic is the medium through which a Jungian process of individuation is accomplished, despite the marked dichotomy in the process of actuation. This analytic mode also reveals that the process of individuation is essentially an incorporative trait: it enables a merger of both sexes through a unification of the personal psyche. Thus the chthonic, as both a constructive and destructive force, leads male and female characters towards a higher sense of wholeness, as represented by the formation of couples (i.e., marriage) as the final stage of maturation.

(Kılıçarslan 54)

In this way, Juliet has to lose something to gain something, as did Jack when he allowed Juliet’s sacrifice to save the other survivors. Jack is attempting to create while Juliet willingly self-destructs to save the others and her lover. Her union with Sawyer at the end of her life mimics a marriage. This time, she must lose a child to regain her old life in a similarly abortive theme. The series problematizes Juliet’s character in that her oscillations between object and subject, beautiful and sublime, ultimately lead to her death. While her destruction leads to her individuation and identity completion, her identity is presented as being happiest with Sawyer in domesticity. This is emphasized when she happily reunites with Sawyer only seemingly to forget her child David and her success in her chosen career. Like Sun, she seems to willingly choose a relationship over all else but appears to be happy. These similarities underscore the limitations of women
and their ability to perform multiple roles at once and be ultimately happy with their lives and secure in their sense of identity.

Throughout the series, women like Juliet must sacrifice something such as a career, a child, a relationship, or independence to gain something else. This could be a commentary on the belief that women can fill multiple roles while society often limits their choices and pigeonholes them into only one or two prescriptive roles at a time. Once again, all of the female characters must perform within the established gender norms of the island, a direct reflection of society off the island, while attempting to construct new identities. If Juliet’s actions on the island are read metaphorically, it could be interpreted that Juliet’s resetting of the timeline reflects that this is exactly what is needed in society; society must move past current gendered configurations to better understand the complexities of women’s experience in today’s world.
Works Cited


Conclusion: The Beginning of the End

In the previous chapters, this thesis has explored the issues of property, progeny, and procreation in the television series *LOST*, delineating the ways in which such female characters as Kate, Shannon, Claire, Rousseau, Sun, and Juliet have first represented stereotypical female roles while at the same time performing and constructing new, sometimes less traditional identities within their island community. However, this analysis is hardly an exhaustive examination of the many female characters in the series who present recurring yet diverse experiences as the female sex. This conclusion will briefly describe these other women’s main actions, their fates, and the men they leave behind in inaction throughout the series with a particular eye to the last season and the final destinations of both the men and women of *LOST*.

In addition, the final section will trace *LOST*’s gender themes and call for further gender analysis in regard to this television series and the contemporary programming that has followed it. Without a doubt, the series has not only left an impression on audiences because of its complex storylines but also because of its in-depth exploration of women’s varied experiences. The female characters of *LOST* provide audiences with diverse presentations of women’s experience. However, all of these women’s experiences and choices, however limited, usually result in death. Of the six female characters discussed in the previous chapters, only Kate and Claire survive in the main plotline. It can only be assumed that once they are returned from the island, Claire will have to recover from her insanity in order to raise Aaron and assume her role of motherhood to a child who does not know her. Kate most likely has handcuffs waiting for her since she broke her probation to reclaim Claire. She must also adjust to Aaron’s absence from her household
and Jack's death. Her nearly obtained fairy-tale happy ending of living with Jack and raising Aaron as her own has been taken from her forever. On the other hand, Kate and Claire are presented as physically free and mentally stable in the flashsideways. In the final season, these flashsideways present similar yet alternate character experiences. In this way, the complex multi-narrative structure of LOST still explores identity within the same social group of survivors and their various liaisons.

In addition to exploring these other female characters, this final chapter concludes with a brief analysis of the complex narrative of LOST itself. Within the diegesis of LOST, its storytelling structure points to reinventions of cinematic conventions analyzed by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Combined with her theory of the male gaze, Mulvey's views on visual coding in cinema are applied to the televisual medium of LOST. Through an avant-garde type of decoding, LOST manipulates and changes its use of time and structure via flashbacks, flashforwards, and flashsideways which all help to deconstruct the initial stereotypes it strategically implies from the beginning. In this way, the series focuses more on female subjectivity in both form and content than most of its contemporaries.

The Other Lost Women of LOST

As stated above, the chapters of this thesis cannot provide a comprehensive list of all of the important female characters in LOST. However, some of these female characters in the ever-changing and diverse cast of the series are more notable than others. These characters, dealing with their own situations concerning property, parenting, and performance, deserve more than the quick glance that they will receive here. It is my intention to assert important connections between these women in this
conclusion in the hope that future viewers and scholars studying this show will further engage in this dialogue concerning the identity struggles of these other “lost” women of LOST. In doing so, it may be possible to analyze why these women were more marginalized within the series and what these choices reflect in terms of gender representation. Concerning identity, the writers might have interpreted some of these characters as more difficult to identify with than other characters for various reasons involving identity. This lack of identification could have in fact led to some of their deletions from the series.

The untimely deaths of two specific female characters occur in perhaps one of the most shocking scenes of LOST, so much so that it has been, and still is, the subject of much fan speculation and outrage. The series quickly created and established an episodic rhythm of mysteries presented and resolved in spectacular cliffhangers and revelations. This was one of LOST’s strongest selling points; fans reveled in fun plot twists and deepened mythologies. However, the second season presented one episode’s simultaneous cliffhanger and revelation in a stark and despondent way that disturbed many viewers. After consolidating the “Tailies,” the estranged survivors from the rear end of the plane, into the camp of the original survivors, new friendships and relationships blossom between the two and the semblance of normality is established in shared housekeeping duties at the hatch. Ironically, it is one of the original survivors, Michael, who breaks the peace.

After a mysterious disappearance, Michael returns to the camp panicked and desperate to rescue his son Walt from the Others. In fact, Michael has been compromised by the Others, promising to deliver Jack, Sawyer, Kate, and Hurley to them in exchange
for his son. In the final scene of “Two for the Road,” Michael enters the hatch and shoots two female characters, Ana Lucia and Libby, who are performing the domestic duty of laundry. Without the usual dramatic music accompanying new revelations, this scene ends with no music, only the sound of Michael then turning the gun on himself with a single blast. In the next episode “?,” it is then revealed that Michael shot himself in the arm, shot Ana Lucia in cold blood, and shot Libby, who slowly dies over the course of this following episode. The subject of endless ethical debates, Michael’s violent actions toward the women clearly state his view that they are expendable in contrast to the safe return of his own male heir. Furthermore, the only two women from the tail end of the plane to integrate into the main survivors’ camp are killed off within the same season that they are introduced.

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, Kate is the first character to receive a flashback episode after the two-part pilot. Interestingly enough, Ana Lucia, another female, is the first to break the continuity of the flashbacks in the second season; this occurs before Sun and Jin’s split flashes in the fourth season. “Two for the Road” further explores Ana Lucia’s backstory, one grounded in her past life as a police officer. Returning to the focus on women’s injuries to the body, specifically the abdomen, it is revealed that Ana Lucia was actually shot in the line of duty, her unborn child killed by the wound. She in turn tracks down and kills her assailant only to be shot here again by Michael. This time Ana Lucia herself dies from the wound. This event marks the first moment in which a main character dies during the same episode in which she is featured in flashbacks. The cyclical storytelling motif of the gunshots to the abdomen emphasizes Ana Lucia’s status as a woman with the focus on her body and her unborn baby. Libby
dies of a similar gunshot wound to the abdomen in the following episode furthering this cycle. *LOST*’s willingness to break its own established and now predictable patterns by killing Ana Lucia in her own character-centric episode jarred audiences. Viewers no longer trusted the pattern after it had been broken, and the series did kill off other survivors later in their own episodes. By breaking the pattern and jarring audiences, *LOST* further emphasized the importance of this moment: female characters on the show are not safe, no matter how much the series asks viewers to identify and connect with them through narrative.

Another set of women die in a similarly problematic fashion when a group of mercenaries and scientists arrive on the island in the fourth season. Naomi and Charlotte join the cast as a respective mercenary and scientist, the only two females from each group. Naomi arrives late in the third season and immediately enters the series with her life in danger. In “Catch-22,” Desmond finds Naomi, whose abdomen is pierced by a tree limb, after she parachuted onto the island when her helicopter got caught in a storm. The group is able to nurse Naomi back to health, but then she is promptly stabbed in the back, literally, by Locke (“Through the Looking Glass: Part 2”). Similar to Juliet, Naomi’s fatal injuries seem to be focused on her middle, but her injuries are definitely more penetrative than Juliet’s. Since Naomi is a mercenary rather than an obstetrician-gynecologist, her injuries could represent punitive penetration reversed from her own assassinations. Once again, her final death is not swift as she pulls her bleeding body into the jungle to die alone, saving her strength for one last assault on Kate when she tracks her into the foliage. Like for Juliet, the incident that causes her death is in the final episode of one
season, but her subsequent death is prolonged into the first episode of the following season ("The Beginning of the End").

Similar to all of the women above, Charlotte enters the series as a female from an outside group, pointing to a clear potential for her character to be expendable within a short time. Her arrival and survival on the show seem exceedingly precarious as she is introduced in the episode "Confirmed Dead." After the incident, the island itself becomes temporally unstable. Moving through time, each shift causes the remaining survivors, whose group now includes Charlotte, to experience physical discomfort which increases to trauma. Charlotte eventually becomes the only member of the group to actually succumb to the sickness caused by these shifts, perishing in the episode "This Place is Death." Both of these nominal references to death, in both the first and last episodes containing Charlotte’s primary timeline, bookend her life on the series making her a character doomed to fate. This becomes obvious when Charlotte, the object of Daniel Faraday’s gaze, dies in his arms and tells him that she remembers him from childhood. After this, the group continues moving through time until they land in the 1970s wherein Daniel does, indeed, cross paths with Charlotte as a child. Daniel realizes that even with seeing Charlotte as a child, he cannot change her fate to return to the island and die with him. While this is just one example of cyclical storylines in LOST, the next section will describe how this overall theme in the series is emblematic of a specific type of writing, one irrevocably linked to certain feminist frames

As stated above, it seems that all women on the series are in constant danger of death, often violent, often focused on the middle of the body. Oddly enough, the series does not openly explore violence toward women in the actual narrative. There are few
depictions of domestic violence. Kate murders her father who abuses her mother, but the
audience never actually views the abuse or even Kate’s observance of it. Kate also states
that her father looked at her but never touched her, dispelling suspicions of child sexual
abuse. Likewise, rape is presented as barely a threat on the island. Kate briefly distrusts
an Other’s presence while she is showering only to have the Other imply that he is gay
(“A Tale of Two Cities”). The only other mention of this violence toward women is in a
rather comic moment in which Shannon yells, “I am so not moving to the rape caves!”
(“Raised by Another”). This happens to be in response to Claire’s assertions that a
strange man was coming at her with a needle while she slept. This man turns out to be
Ethan. Rather than being motivated by Claire’s body, Ethan is in fact inoculating her
child in utero. All of these crimes committed against the body typically place women in
the roles of victims such as battered wives, molested children, or women undone.
However, LOST seems to strategically avoid directly demonstrating these categories of
women and depictions of sexual violence that exploit them. Instead, the women fill other
stereotypical roles and succumb to violence such as drowning, stabbing, and gunshot
wounds, the latter being the most prolific. In this way, LOST visually emphasizes violent
penetration and exploitation of the female body without directly depicting these crimes.

All of the above ill-fated women are single females without children, possibly
pointing to society’s views of childless women as expendable within a community due to
their lack of motherhood status. It is also important to examine briefly the two maternal
mother figures on the island: Eloise and Rose. While both characters may seem minor in
that they receive even less screen time than the above mentioned female characters, both
women serve as leaders and, arguably, mother figures to the communities on the island.
Eloise plays this role in a more official capacity as the former leader of the Others, while Rose plays this role on a more symbolic level serving as a motherly advisor to many of the survivors after the plane crash. Unlike Rose, Eloise does in fact have a child, Daniel Faraday. This nominal allusion to a physicist, rather than a philosopher, helps move the series from its emphasis on philosophy, which prevailed throughout the first half of its run, to its considerable attention to science, physics, and metaphysics, which surfaces during the latter seasons when such concepts became integral to the series’s temporally-unstable plotline. Amidst these complicated shifts in time, Eloise engineers a method to work within these temporal barriers, resulting in a calculated series of events that enable her future self to allow her younger self to kill her own son (“The Variable”). The fact that the younger Eloise is pregnant with Daniel when she kills his adult self could be a starting point for additional analysis concerning the show’s commentary on female identity in terms of motherhood, or even abortion.

The latter parts of the series move from a focus on philosophy to the physics tropes presented above. While these two disciplines may at first seem antithetical, LOST proves that the timelessness of these ancient philosophies help them to be applied to contemporary societies. The temporally-unstable narrative with its nods to physics underlines the ability to engage with these ideas in different times and situations. The collapse of linear time could also represent the unraveling of the gendered binaries associated with philosophy. It disrupts the dichotomy of men being associated with mind and logic and women being aligned with body and emotion. The two mother figures, Eloise and Rose, help to deconstruct this oversimplification of gender construction by respectively filling the dichotomy within the series. Eloise rules the Others with a
masculine hand; she not only rules over her male partner Widmore but also surpasses him in scientific intellect; he openly challenges her decisions and ultimately resents her due to this. On the other hand, Rose holds no formal status as a leader, but the survivors respect her and she in turn mothers them. She does not appear to be educated or trained in any specific area, but her intuition and faith convince others to follow her lead. This can be seen the most in the fact that her husband, Bernard, makes his own decision to stay with Rose on the island because she believes she can remain free of cancer. Bernard’s decision to remain with Rose where she can live inverts Jin’s choice to stay with Sun and remain with her in death. Since both Eloise and Rose yield similar results despite their separate beliefs, the series, in this instance, presents many gendered attributes as interchangeable since women can fulfill both traditional masculine and feminine roles when their environment demands it.

While Rose does not have any children of her own, she becomes a mother figure to the other survivors through her tough love attitude, forming notable relationships with Jack, Locke, and Boone. Rose has been exposed to both toughness and love herself; she arrived on the island knowing she would die soon after a terminal cancer diagnosis, but the island miraculously cures her of her ailment. When her husband, Bernard, asks her how she knows this, she replies that she just knows, just as she knew that he was not dead when they were separated in the plane crash (“S.O.S.”). In both cases, Rose’s intuition and her assertions to the other survivors hold true; she goes into remission on the island, and after she and Bernard are reunited, they remove themselves from the camp, living out the rest of their days alone on the island (“The End.”). In many ways, Rose’s abandonment of the camp can be compared to Eloise’s decision to kill her own son; they
can both be seen as maternal sacrifices necessary for the good of the island. Her intuition
tells Rose to quit trying so hard and let the island be. When briefly reunited with Jack and
the others, she firmly tells him to quit trying to fix things. Her opposition toward science
–specifically the medical field – that failed to save her from her cancer climaxes in this
moment in which she tells Jack, a doctor himself, to quit trying. In other words, the
clichéd “women’s intuition” becomes the force of determination on the island. She
succeeds in her goals while the other survivors’ calculated and mathematical
manipulations largely fall to fumbling inaction and indecision; most notably, the
forewarned Jack does nothing miraculous and dies alone on the island, comforted only by
the thought that he somehow contributed to the others’ safe return home and the
restoration of the island, while Hurley assumes final leadership among those who remain
on the island. Only Eloise’s stratagems, such as killing her own child and rejoining the
rescued survivors with their friends on the island, result in saving the island. Working
within this dichotomy of science and pure intuition, these two women have not only
become empowered over their past lives off the island, but they also portray an immense
amount of power in that they ascend within the island’s respective communities.

Coming full circle, as many plots and themes of LOST will do, the mother figures
of Eloise and Rose bring us back to Kate and Claire one last time. During the penultimate
episode of the series, Jacob, the enigmatic patron of the island, explains how he chose
candidates for his replacement from the group of survivors:

Jacob: I didn't pluck any of you out of a happy existence. You were all flawed. I
chose you because you were like me. You were all alone. You were all
looking for something that you couldn't find out there. I chose you because
you needed this place as much as it needed you.
Kate: Why did you cross my name off of your wall?
Jacob: Because you became a mother. It's just a line of chalk in a cave. The job is yours if you want it, Kate. (“What They Died For”)

In claiming that all of the characters were somehow “flawed” and “looking for something,” Jacob’s comment to Kate seems to place the station of motherhood above the importance of protecting the island. However, he gives Kate the choice, allowing Kate the same choice that Eloise must make: child versus island. Kate does not take up the mantle of leadership, leaving Jack, the continual fixer, to do so. On the other hand, Jacob could have given Kate this “choice” believing that no woman would choose to abandon her child, no matter what the higher goal might be. Since Kate chooses neither the leadership nor maternal positions, she could be exercising her own feminist agenda by allowing men to attempt to control the island. If control of the island represents a career, which Kate is given the option of choosing over her surrogate child, Kate’s ultimate decision could reveal her post/feminist choice to focus on the controllable issues of Claire and her child rather than the continually unstable issues of the island. Claire’s name has also been conspicuously crossed out on this list although it is implied that her role as mother was not the reason for her dismissal but rather her decreased mental state.

This focus on the importance of personal relationships is emphasized at the end of the series when the mechanics of the flashsideways are explained; the women of the island are almost always the ones who remember the events on the island first, often on their own, but then provide the visual cues for the male characters in turn to remember their own lives. During the final season, the alternate version of reality, the flashsideways in which the survivors did not crash on the island, reveals that the characters would still matter to one another and be the most important people in their lives even if they had not met on the plane or the island. In the flashsideways, Jack’s father tells him that these
relationships were the most important aspects of each individual life; he further explains that the event which killed Juliet did not in fact reset time and events but simply provided a glimpse into an alternate life to validate the importance of fate and friendship ("The End"). Finally, in "The End," Jack perishes, leaving the reluctant Hurley as the island's patron. In this main plotline, Ben remains on the island to assist Hurley in his new role of leadership out of recompense for his past transgressions. Similarly, Ben stays behind in the flashsideways sequence, implying that he is staying behind to be with Danielle and Alex to help ease their transition and make up for the pain and death he caused them in their other lives. This self-instituted stay in purgatory reveals Ben's desire to make up for his actions on the island, primarily to the two women whose deaths he was responsible for and with whom he had the most potential to form intimate relationships with. Once again, a male character is moved to inaction over the loss of a female loved one. On the other hand, Jack's actions on the island and his subsequent death allowed Kate to live and leave the island. In the flashsideways, it is Kate who says that she has waited for Jack for a long time, and her meeting with him begins the spark of Jack remembering his life on the island ("The End"). In this way, the women act as gatekeepers not only to action but also knowledge, either leaving them in despondency and distillation when they die before the men or leading them on to the future in the flashsideways. In similar examples, the following women help their male counterparts to understand and move on: Juliet and Sawyer, Claire and Charlie, Libby and Hurley. Sun and Jin jointly remember their past lives when they learn that Sun is pregnant.

Despite this happy ending of sorts, the abundance of sadness within the narrative is perhaps the most telling in terms of gender critique. Through the continual violence
toward women and the constant suffering of men, *LOST* provides a social commentary on
gender difference. The series critiques the objectification of women by showing women’s
own frustrations as objects rather than subjects. By killing them off and heightening the
suffering of the men, *LOST* shows that women are objectified in life but then idealized in
death. Through the flashbacks of women’s experience and identity construction, *LOST*
allows viewers a glimpse of how women can be strong leaders with solid convictions, but
also shows how society fails them when it limits their choices. Through the
flashsideways, *LOST* provides viewers with an alternative in which women are the
gatekeepers of the future and the saviors of lost men. They enable the men to share their
experience through flashes which thus equalize their roles. In fact, the only character not
to move on is the male Ben who stays to make up for his past sins and be with the two
women with whom he is the most connected. In this way, *LOST* ends with the hope that a
new communal and equal experience is just on the horizon through this newly shared
status based on group memory.

**The End as a New Beginning**

*LOST* ends without the viewers knowing the final destination of the characters; it
can only be assumed that they are moving on into a rewarding afterlife in which they can
all be together. This ending reflects the initial flight in which the characters travel and do
not know where they will end up. The conclusion of the series deviates from the typical
storyline that provides closure, thereby challenging viewers to accept multiple
possibilities, encouraging them to question norms ingrained by society by questioning
norms in television. While *LOST* does not end with the traditional happy ending
grounded in closure, it does end on a hopeful note without revealing everything to
viewers. Given *LOST*’s extremely complicated narrative structure in its use of multiple plotlines, flashbacks, flashforwards, and flashsideways, and its cyclical ending, it seems prudent to briefly examine the series’s form in relation to its content wherein the female characters are concerned.

Returning to “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey goes beyond the scope of the male gaze to delineate how female characters are coded in film. She describes how film traditionally celebrated male subjectivity and women as objects of the male gaze through the act of coding. She states:

Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order. In the highly developed Hollywood cinema it was only through these codes that the alienated subject, torn in his imaginary memory by a sense of loss, by the terror of potential lack in phantasy, came near to finding a glimpse of satisfaction: through its formal beauty and its play on his own formative obsessions. (Mulvey 825)

As a television series, *LOST* seems to embody the avant-garde solution that politically and socially rejects the coding of women in film. By initially and purposefully coding the female characters of *LOST* into stereotypical categories such as desperate housewives, pampered princesses, and single mothers who are all the object of the male gaze, the series swiftly disrupts these conventions by attending to the women’s identities, experiences, and backstories through the flashbacks. In this way, the series itself mirrors the plights of the women in that both are attempting to deconstruct the coding of the male point of view by attending to multiple female experiences. Conversely, the fact that the men fall apart without the women, the objects of their gaze, signals the series’s conscious
attempt to disrupt expectations by equalizing the male and female subjectivity. Further inquiry into the complex narrative structure of *LOST* in relation to its complex thematic material would make an interesting contribution to the literature on this influential television series.

While it will be of utmost interest to me to see if the next wave of feminism will spark a new generation of television concerned with philosophy, complexity, and narrative, it has been the aim of this thesis to examine overlooked themes in scholarship concerning *LOST*. More specifically, this thesis is a direct response to the critique that more gendered analyses of this particular program are necessary:

*Lost* has transformed the science fiction genre by re-inscribing the castaway narrative and its relationship to cultural issues of gender, race, and nationality. For scholars interested in the science fiction genre, ‘a chief obstacle is the lack of current scholarship on the subject’ of gender in these narratives (Ramsey 109). In fact, given the continued proliferation of science fiction television as some of the most successful programming in syndication (McNamara 24), scholars should turn their attention to these narratives as a more serious area of inquiry, comparable to traditional dramatic and comedic television genres. (Meyer and Stern 329)

While *LOST* has been the subject of various criticism during its runtime, it is the purpose of this thesis to attempt to fill this exact gap in the literature by providing a more comprehensive gender analysis of the major female characters post-syndication. Televisual depictions of women’s experience should be examined to determine if they are reinforcing or critiquing current gender conventions.
LOST is a show that changed the televisual landscape of the 21st century, greatly impacting the way that viewers watch programs. Not only did it contribute to the wave of more complex (filmic) television, but it encouraged/sparked the wave of forensic fandom seen today in which viewers sift through the details of the show, close reading episodes through multiple viewings and online discussion. This sort of active viewing and close analysis contributes to the tangential learning or the informal educating of viewers. It is unlikely that LOST set out to inform audiences about the various philosophies touched upon here, but they do encourage the active viewer/fan to seek out information about them. Since these motifs (the references to philosophical namesakes/concepts) do seem to align with various plots concerning female gender/identity struggle, this adds to a richer analysis of gender/identity struggle within the series, as does the fact that this allows viewers to see the relevance these old philosophical debates have for the contemporary moment. Philosophy aside, LOST also focuses heavily on characterization. Viewers not only engaged with the series’s complex plotlines but also immersed themselves in analyses of the characters, attempting to see through characters’ personas, facades, to understand character backstory and hence motivation – all issues deeply involved in identity struggles. Furthermore, that LOST puts women into these almost antiquated identity categories (woman as sexual being, woman as property, woman as mother, etc.), speaks to how little progress has been made (in some ways) even now in the 21st century. The series’s attention to temporality (the fact that the narrative is not grounded in time and flows back and forth within its own wide mythology) and its structure (the cyclical ending and strategic use of repetition) all serve to underscore this gender critique about the recycled debates and struggles concerning gender.
Following the cyclical nature of *LOST*, this thesis could continue on with even more analysis of more minor female characters but I will leave further analysis to other passionate viewers of the series. I do indeed hope that discussion of *LOST* continues and that television provides us with another challengingly complex series to dissect in regard to gender. In ending this project on *LOST*, the following quote seems most appropriate: “Of course, there are many other pieces to the puzzle that is *Lost*. [A written work], however, just like a television series, has to end somewhere. Whether these philosophers are red herrings or crucial pieces in the puzzle, knowing a little about them makes for a richer reading of the show” (Kaye 339). Likewise, I hope that my own contributions to the literature on *LOST* will continue to spark interest and debate in the representations of its female characters.
Works Cited


Afterword: The Lasting Legacy of LOST

My Journey to the Island

For every ending, there is also a beginning, and I wish to share my own personal experience with coming to know LOST as I have. The series has captivated audiences, and certainly my own mind, for a number of years. In the following pages, I will delineate some of the ways in which I interpret LOST’s lasting legacy in more current programming, both in terms of complexity and women’s experience, but first I would like to explain how this groundbreaking television series about a little island left a lasting legacy on my own scholarly interests, my career, and my pedagogy. It might sound overly dramatic but it is no less true that LOST did in fact change my life and my own identity.

When I was twelve years old, I made one of those important “life decisions” that some precocious pre-adolescents tend to make. My life decision was to stop watching television. In junior high school, I was a misfit of sorts in my small town. Infinitely more interesting and valuable to me than media was the pursuit of “classic” literature, the highbrow works of legend. Television, on the other hand, was filth, the lowest form of entertainment. I likened it to the spectacle of the Roman coliseum. Those who viewed it were participants in a mindless mob. I bemoaned every moment in which I had to pass through a room with a live television. Comedy was imbecile. Drama was overdone. News media was false. Commercials were brainwashing. As I was coming into high school and really sinking my teeth into Faulkner, reality programming emerged on the scene. I believed that television had reached the point of no return, and I began to despise the water cooler gossip on both reality and traditional programming alike. Television was the
ultimate opiate of the masses, a new low-art phenomenon that I wanted nothing to do
with. I proudly declared my hatred to the world.

I graduated high school in 2003 and lived with friends in Los Angeles, California
for the summer following graduation. After this, I moved back home and then moved out
for the first time on my own at the beginning of my second year of college in 2004.
Proclaiming that my television would only be used to watch DVDs, I symbolically and
strategically broke the rabbit ears off of my television and then snapped them in two. My
new college friends were shocked. Who was this crazy young woman who enjoyed lively
debate, even livelier partying, but refused to watch television because it would rot her
mind? I kept hearing the constant mantra: “You know, Jenny, you really should watch
some television. It’s changed in the past few years. I think you’d like some of the
programming. Television has become really smart.” I still refused. Then people started to
talk about LOST. Knowing my love of survival narratives and dystopian literature, my
own parents even suggested it to me: “It’s about this group of people who crash their
plane on an island. And weird things happen!” I replied, “I’m not watching some smutty
prime-time soap opera about people hooking up on an island in a premise stolen directly
from the worst of all reality programming!” “But there’s a smoke monster…” “I’m not
watching anything with a ‘smoke monster!’”

After graduating from my junior college in 2006, I came to Eastern Illinois
University in Spring 2007 to complete my Bachelor’s in English with teacher
certification. After one week in my education courses, I decided that teaching high school
English was not for me, went to see my advisor, and dropped those courses with the goal
of getting my Master’s to teach college-level literature. With late registration, I was
pigeonholed into a creative writing poetry course, which I loathed, and an Introduction to Literary Theory course with Dr. Charles Wharram. I began the class late, irritated my professor, and scored a D on my first major assignment. However, this rough start proved to be the beginning of my teaching and research career. I quickly learned that this was where I belonged: literary theory. It was the type of education I had been searching for all along. I critically studied Dracula, Jane Eyre, and... Audioslave? I was amazed that popular culture was included in the course, but I quickly translated my literary criticism to these new forms of media. I was surprised that I enjoyed it so much.

In addition to helping me realize my love of literary theory, Dr. Wharram also introduced me to such philosophers as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, and Edmund Burke, among others. I devoured these writers as readily as literary theorists. What I could not understand, however, was why on earth Dr. Wharram, this intelligent, scholarly professor with such high-brow interests as my own, kept intermingling comments about the television series LOST into his philosophy and literature lectures. When he would mention Lockean contract theory and land appropriation and cultivation in reference to the character of Adèle in Jane Eyre, I would roll my eyes and grimace when he would interject, “You guys really don’t watch LOST? None of you watch LOST? You really need to watch LOST!” I had no idea why he would jump to this silly show every time we were having a scholarly discussion on John Locke. Due to my avid interest in philosophy, Dr. Wharram finally accosted me personally telling me to watch the show. I left the class dubious and did not do so.

In the following summer of 2007, I went on a study abroad trip to South Africa. Before boarding the plane to Cape Town, I got off a plane in Illinois fresh from a
weeklong trip to Hawaii. My then-partner lived there, and I decided to spend the summer travelling. While exploring the island of Oahu, my partner would point and comment, “LOST is being filmed behind that mountain right now. They have had certain areas sectioned off for the past three years. If you want, there are certain places we can go to get a glimpse of the cameras, cast and crew.” I was insulted. I came to experience the natural beauty of the island, not some set for a ludicrous television series. He told me that LOST was “kind of a big deal” and he was surprised at my lack of interest, but he took me back to the Dole pineapple plantation for a second visit because I preferred to feed the koi fish again.

The following year, I completed my Bachelor’s degree with another study abroad trip in England. Upon return home, I had my apartment ready, my diploma in hand, and my letter of acceptance to graduate school, also at Eastern. Having accepted a graduate assistantship in the English department, I could not seek employment in the relatively short time until my graduate studies would begin, but I was, and am, a restless person who craves constant intellectual stimulation. After a few days of organizing my apartment in every way I could possibly conceive, I wandered onto campus and went to the university library. Here, I found myself pulled to the DVD section rather than the books. It must have been some kind of Freudian subconscious pull that led me into this brave new world rather than to my familiar book stacks. Further compelled, I found the first season of LOST among the catalog and held it in my hand. Finally, I decided that renting the discs was free, no one would see me or know me in the library or observe me watch the show at home, and maybe I deserved a little brain rest between my undergraduate and graduate studies.
I do not remember what time I went to bed that night or how many episodes I watched. I only know that I was completely immersed in the land of *LOST* and that I kept telling myself, “Just *one* more…” The series was immediate spectacle with its plane crash and cheesy smoke monster motif, but the characters drew me in. I had experienced their struggles and similarly fought the good fight. I had tried desperately to connect with people only to let them down. I had sought refuge in food, pills, and, yes, books. I was shocked at the intertextuality of the series, its uncanny allusions to my own studies, and low and behold: a living, breathing John Locke! Soon, all of my beloved philosophers materialized before me on my television screen. With my love of classic literature, island landscapes, survival narratives, dystopian fiction, Enlightenment philosophy, and supernatural mythology, this series seemed to have been tailor-made for me. Yet once again, it was the characters who drew me in. I began to crave flashback scenes over the narratives on the island. I longed to see these characters in full, delineating each detail of their personae. They were not lost on an island; they were lost in the world. Most importantly, they could not connect fully with others because they were not connected with themselves. Unlike crash-landing on a mysterious island, this was an experience that I felt everyone, including myself, could relate to.

By the time I began graduate school a few months later, I had watched the first three seasons of *LOST* multiple times. I watched episodes repeatedly on my own, sometimes with a notepad and sometimes with only my joy. I bought the DVDs. I shared the series with my friends and family, and we would pause between episodes for discussion and theory. I watched new episodes on my laptop because I still refused to pay for cable or satellite. However, *LOST* opened doors for me. I did my practice lesson for
my teaching practicum on homosocial behavior in *Seinfeld*. By the end of graduate school, I had a Netflix streaming account and had completed numerous television series in two years. Among my favorites, and topics for my seminar papers, were *Six Feet Under*, *True Blood*, and *Dexter* (this latter one was also recommended by the fabulous Dr. Wharram). Now, it is difficult for my friends and colleagues to find a television show that I am not familiar with. Undoubtedly, there are numerous ones that so thoroughly occupy my mind and passion that it borderlines on obsession. However, my interest in cultural studies, literary theory, and gender analysis have guided nearly all of my efforts, including this thesis.

Currently, I am attempting to trace the manipulations and modernization of gender presentation and difference in Shakespeare’s original *Hamlet* to its current reincarnation, *Sons of Anarchy*. The source of my most profound hatred, television has redeemed itself to me to the point that I do not know what I would do without it. I am always on the lookout for more complex series. What was once missing entirely from my life now takes a central place in my leisure, educational, and professional lives. I hunger for television as a relaxation reward after a long day and then end up taking notes for my next lecture. As a community college English instructor, I teach visual media in my classroom almost daily. I actually have a “Survivor” course which teaches survival narratives in visual texts. Without a doubt, *LOST* is foremost on the syllabus.

Despite the fact that *LOST* aired its final episode, thus ending the groundbreaking series in its entirety, on May 23, 2010, it has managed to instill its televisual narrative form, numerous diverse characters, and complex thematic material in the psyche of American popular culture critics. Even today, devoted viewers of the series who first
experienced it during its airtime still review, rework, and discuss the series via endless theoretical approaches. At the same time, new viewers discover the series for the first time every day, oftentimes resulting in serial viewings via Netflix and/or DVD, as the series has now been available via both of these formats for the last few years. However, while this astonishing enthusiasm on the part of viewers must be considered, it is perhaps the televisual tradition that LOST began that must be examined more critically. As stated above, my own experience with LOST led to my increased viewing and analysis of other television series. For me, the lasting legacy of LOST can be seen in many contemporary televisual texts, all of which exhibit either complex and numerous characters and themes, philosophical and religious concepts, narrative elements such as flashbacks and identification with the “Other,” feminist ideals, allusions to philosophy and literature, or all of the above. While many of these tropes and motifs were present before LOST, still a number of them seem to be further emphasized after the ambitious television series tackled so many in its own time.

**Current Connections in Contemporary Programming**

Whether or not my observations warrant a place on any page, I have decided to include them here in this afterword so that other enthusiastic televisual scholars might pick up where my thesis has left off, or at the very least, just enjoy reading about some of the connections I have made to more contemporary series.

First, LOST’s writers have met consumer demands by creating new television series for the next generation of viewers which is best exemplified in *Once Upon a Time* (ABC, 2011-Present), a prime-time drama that follows two simultaneous storylines, one in modern New England and one in a fairy tale fantasy land called Storybrooke. Here, the
creators more obviously engage in female stereotypes – the damsels in distress, spoiled princesses, and evil queens of traditional fairy tales – in efforts to invert traditional female passivity and maligning. In its construction, this new series obviously builds from the success of *LOST* as it provides multiple plotlines and character flashbacks/backstories, but it has also given consumers the feminist framework and female-centric characters that *LOST* only began to promote in its examinations of female empowerment and equality through its diverse cast of characters and its attention to and identification with othered women. This important transformation in this current program – and in other contemporary programs that followed in *LOST*’s wake, such as FOX’s *Fringe* (2008-2012) – marks a new age of television focused on female subjectivity and narration. This was a conscious decision on the parts of the producers, Adam Horowitz and David Kitsis:

Both producers are *Lost* alums, and they’ve incorporated some tropes from that iconic show into their latest fantasy series, including flashbacks – using new takes on old tales to reveal backstories for the characters. But *Once Upon a Time* is fundamentally a more warmhearted, family-friendly project than *Lost*. ‘From the start, we wanted to write a show about hope,’ says Horowitz, ‘And that quest for wish fulfillment is at the core of every fairy tale we do.’ Kitsis seconds the thought. ‘If *Lost* was about fathers and sons and redemption, this show is about mothers and daughters and hope.’ (Rudolph 15)
In this way, *Once Upon a Time* carries on the torch of *LOST* by not only continuing complex narratives and parallel storylines but by also making the focus on femininity a more positive one.

Concerning themes and tropes, there are also many similarities between *Fringe* and *LOST*. All of the major characters struggle with baggage that augments their current decisions and actions. Olivia, like Kate, came from a broken home with an abusive stepfather. Also similar to Kate, Olivia was experimented on as a child, providing a prisoner motif similar to the first series. There are countless father and son issues between Walter and Peter, not the least of which is the fact, revealed through less systematic yet calculated flashbacks, that Peter is not from Walter’s world. Walter’s true son Peter died of a disease as a young child, and, after discovering an alternate universe and how to use his scientific inventions to get to it, Walter steals the living Peter from an alternate reality double, which he later dubs “Walternate.” Once again, the theme of “baby-stealing” is prominent. In my most recent conference paper, “‘When We Meet Again, It Won’t Be Me’: The Evolution of Doubling in Science Fiction Television,” I have traced how *Fringe* and *LOST* present a more positive system of doubling than older televisual works of science fiction such as *The X-Files* and *Twin Peaks* due a focus on redemption and rebirth in post-9/11 television.

While both *Once Upon a Time* and *Fringe* resulted from the direct and conscious efforts on the part of *LOST* contributors, the current season of *LOST*’s own ABC Studios’ more recent prime-time drama, *Revenge* (ABC, 2011-Present), also displays many characteristics of its predecessor. This series not only contains many similarities to *LOST* in its narrative complexity but also serves as a current example of Steven Johnson’s
theory of complexity as paying homage to the original soap opera which required viewers to remember specific details about character histories and relationships over weeks of time (68). Similar to *Once Upon a Time*, *Revenge* is truly a prime-time soap opera, portraying narrative complexity and flashbacks similar to *LOST* while also emphasizing the infamous trait of tumultuous, quick-change romance characteristic of the original daytime drama soap operas. The plot of *Revenge* spans decades, mimicking *LOST* technically with the employment of episodes devoted almost entirely to flashbacks that also reflect the former series’ thematic material, specifically concerns for true parentage, devotion to dead fathers, obsessive speculation on personal history, and, most obviously, the characters’ resentment for perceived past wrongs that must be presently avenged.

The overarching revenge plot of the series proves to be multilayered, as Emily Thorne, the main character and anti-heroine whose name is just as symbolic as most of the characters’ on *LOST*, stealthily begins her execution of her plan for vengeance against the prominent Hampton family she feels is responsible for her father’s wrongful imprisonment, his ultimate death, and her own tumultuous childhood in foster care and juvenile institutions. This central plot quickly expands to include government conspiracies, terrorist schemes, and mercenary intervention. This complex layering and development mimic *LOST* in that each season of the series gave viewers a closer look into the “bigger picture,” the move from island disharmony among the survivors to skirmishes with the “Others” to the introduction of the Dharama Initiative and Widmore’s agents. Both series boast a host of constituencies who sometimes work together and sometimes against one another through respective identification with and fear of the “Other,” obsession with personal history, narrative, and wrongs, and a widening scope of
interconnection that exhibits conspiracy theory. Both series exist in the televisual era following the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. These premises and plot devices prove that televisual popular culture in the United States is still striving to help Americans deal with the personal loss and sense of violation associated with the terrorist attack through Post-9/11 viewership. While this televisual and theoretical approach has been applied to many series, *Revenge* should not be overlooked in conjunction with *LOST* as a series that has continued to invite this type of criticism in current American popular culture. Furthermore, it deals with all of these complex issues from a female point of view narrated by a conflicted yet systematic woman.

Even more recently, the semi-autobiographical series *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix 2013-Present) aired exclusively on Netflix streaming in 2013. The advent of Netflix original series available only on streaming provides an extension of instant and repeated internet viewing. *Orange is the New Black* tells the story of Piper, a privileged young woman who spends a year in a women’s prison for a crime she committed years ago. While Piper must establish a new identity, learn the new rules and language of prison life, and integrate with her fellow inmates, her male fiancé profits from her imprisonment by writing about her experience as his own due to his separation from her. In this way, the series explicitly comments on the longstanding issue of men re-appropriating female narratives as their own and making them less complicated. Through flashback scenes that illuminate each prisoner’s crime and motive before incarceration, this series mimics *LOST*’s own character identifications, but in this series, only the female prisoners are allotted character-centric flashbacks for each episode.
Also similar to *LOST*, the prison acts in much the same way as the island, not as an external threat and confinement but as a touchstone that forces the characters to confront the truths about themselves. When a group of teenagers is brought into the prison for the Scared Straight program, the inmates ignore and are hesitant to taunt and bully Dina, a juvenile delinquent confined to a wheelchair. The prison guards and fellow inmates leave Dina alone in the bathroom where Piper begins by talking about how she could physically, sexually, and psychologically abuse the young woman if she were truly incarcerated with her. When she senses Dina’s disengagement, Piper tells her:

> I was somebody before I came in here. I was somebody with a life that I chose for myself. And now, now it's just about getting through the day without crying. And I'm scared. I'm still scared. I'm scared that I'm not myself in here, and I'm scared that I am. Other people aren't the scariest part of prison, Dina, it's coming face-to-face with who you really are. Because once you're behind these walls, there's nowhere to run, even if you could run. The truth catches up with you in here, Dina. And it's the truth that's gonna make you her bitch. ("Bora Bora Bora")

In the end, the truth is what all of these characters in all series both yearn for and fear. They long to find and understand themselves but are afraid to do so. Unlike *LOST*, *Orange is the New Black* heightens female subjectivity and identity by explicitly exploring lesbian relationships and power dynamics within the prison. This expanded presentation of female identity diverges from *LOST*, which only briefly acknowledges one male character’s homosexuality. While it cannot be verified that *LOST* directly influenced this series or any of the others listed above, it will be the interest and task of
future scholars to map how televisual complexity, hopefully, continues to present women's and other marginalized gender characterizations in correspondingly complex ways.

Through exciting new media and methods of communal viewership, LOST will continue to engage and captivate new audiences. For me, this project has occupied my mind for the past six years, the same length of LOST's original runtime. Undoubtedly, unsuspecting future viewers will someday click the LOST icon on their Netflix streaming account on a lazy, boring afternoon with few expectations and nothing better to do. Like the plane crash survivors on LOST, they have no idea what is waiting in store for them.
Works Cited


