

## **The Misery of Women: Liminality of Gender Roles in Stephen King's *Misery***

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### **Abstract**

*This paper suggests that the liminal and fluid roles of the characters Paul Sheldon and Annie Wilkes in Stephen King's *Misery* disrupts the binary of man and woman as well as captor and captive. The liminal space in which Paul and Annie exist allows the two to move fluidly between their gendered roles as well as their roles of power. By analysing the role of Annie as both lover of the literary world created by Paul, and the 'maniac' that has captured him in her home, this paper discusses the issue of the female presence in liminality as well as the transformation of the creative process. As liminality is "understood as transition and transgression" it "becomes a valuable tool for the interpretation of literature" (Bergmann, 2017, p. 479). In this context, it demonstrates not only the emotional and mental transition made by those, like Paul, who suffer trauma and horrific events but also Annie's movement from a submissive to a tormented captor.*

*In a feminist understanding, the role of Annie is especially applicable to the concept of liminality and the space of her own home where she continuously transitions between a submissive, avid fan of Paul's writing and sadistic tormentor. She eventually completes the transition into the "crazed female", becoming something Paul fears even after he has killed her. Her matriarchal, female qualities of caring for Paul and adoring his writing become twisted and disturbed as Paul continues to "make mistakes" or upsets her in different ways (Keeseey, 2002, p. 54). She transitions from submissive female, performing in the role of caretaker, to the dominating, powerful role of violent kidnapper. This uncertainty alongside Annie's unpredictable changes are juxtaposed with the creative space that Paul enters as he writes, sometimes producing excellent work but also producing writing of which Annie disapproves. She becomes not only the one who controls his medication and survival but also his writings and creative environment.*

This paper suggests that the liminal and fluid roles of the characters Paul Sheldon and Annie Wilkes in Stephen King's *Misery* disrupt the binary of man and woman as well as captor and captive. The liminal space in which Paul and Annie exist allows the two to move fluidly between their gendered roles as well as their roles of power. Although *Misery* "focuses on an obsessive relationship and the inner and introspective world of Paul and Annie while they are trapped in a web of trauma, violence and survival", there is also an element of liminality and transition present in the disruption of the binary of power between captor and captive (Jaber, 2021, p. 205). By analysing the role of Annie as a lover of the literary world created by Paul

and as the ‘maniac’ who captures him in her home, the issue of the heteronormative gender expectations and its presence in liminality will be discussed. The potential dangers associated with fandom and fan behaviour will be examined as a secondary element to the gender presentations. As Malynda Strother Taylor suggests, “women's experiences can provide a good resource for the study of liminality”, and while this narrative is not told from the perspective of Annie, her role as one half of the captor/captive and male/female binary is one of the focuses of the liminal aspects of this text (Taylor, 1998, p. 12). As the “attributes of liminality” can be described as being “necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications”, this understanding of liminality can be applied to the fluidity of Paul and Annie’s roles in *Misery* and how this disturbs both the gendered binaries within the text, as well as the power binaries (Turner, 1969, p. 95).

The continuous transfer of power between Paul and Annie demonstrates the function of liminality within this text, as well as their disruption of the expected gender performance of their roles. As “the roles of Annie and Paul are not merely that of victim/victimizer”, their roles are constantly in transition alongside their control of the power within the dynamic. The validity of applying the concept of liminality to this text is revealed in the in-between space that Paul and Annie occupy as they transition between roles. While neither Paul nor Annie make a physical journey from one space or culture to another – although Paul arguably transitions from his public world to the private world belonging to Annie and her house – their space of liminality and transition is revealed within the power dynamic of the two. According to Margret A. McLaren in her discussion of Foucault and power dynamics, it is often difficult to “distinguish the difference in power between the dominators and the dominated” (McLaren, 2002, p. 2). This criticism becomes a useful critical analysis for this paper. By applying this understanding of power and the dynamic of being unable to identify the dominated and dominating within a defined binary, the liminal roles of Paul and Annie continue to dismantle the set binary of captor and captive. While Annie may be the one holding Paul as her captive, she is still his ‘number one fan’ and is obsessive in her love of his character Misery Chastain.

*Misery* begins with the rescue of injured author, Paul Sheldon, by a socially reclusive Annie Wilkes. Paul, injured in an automobile accident caused by poor weather conditions, becomes indebted to Annie from the beginning of the text, which should identify him as the weaker element in the power binary. Annie is Paul’s self-proclaimed ‘number one fan’ and is extremely disappointed to learn that Paul has killed the main character of her favourite novel series: Misery Chastain. This hint of obsessive fan behaviour indicates that Annie is somewhat submissive to Paul and his creative talent, despite her being the reason for his survival. From

the beginning of the text, the binary is already shifted and dismantled, demonstrating the liminal roles of Paul and Annie from the onset of the narrative. Although Annie initially acts as a carer for Paul and allows him to remain in a drug-induced stupor for their early time together, Annie soon grows violent with Paul, often having rage-filled outbursts that brutalise his already injured legs. These outbursts act as ‘punishments’ for Paul when he does not act in a way that Annie deems acceptable. She insists that he write a final novel in the series in order to bring Misery Chastain back to life. Paul works under the impression that his imprisonment will be lifted once he does. After realising that Annie has no intentions of releasing Paul once he completes the novel, he plans to free himself and, after a violent attempt that results in Annie’s death, manages to do so.

As liminality is “understood as transition and transgression”, it “becomes a valuable tool for the interpretation of literature” especially within this text, as the binary of captor and captive is continuously threatened and questioned (Bergmann, 2017, p. 479). As Foucault suggests “power is not unilateral [...] and it is not possessed by an individual or group of individuals [...] it is a relationship, not a thing” (McLaren, 2002, p. 4). This proves applicable to this liminal relationship between Paul and Annie. The possession of power continues to switch between them, and, in this context, it demonstrates not only the emotional and mental transition made by those who suffer trauma and horrific events – Paul – but also Annie’s movement from submissive to tormented captor. The heteronormative expectations of gender roles also contribute to the concept of liminality within the text, suggesting that Paul may deter from the expected gender norms just as much as Annie does. By the end of the novel, Paul arguably acts with the same level of violence as Annie has done throughout the novel, ultimately killing his captor.

Although the primary strength of the use of liminality in literature is arguably to represent the concept of migration and hybridity, applying the concept of liminality to horror and this text in particular, the understanding of liminality and transitional spaces adapts to create a space of terror and uncertainty – which “heightens the horror and terror of the text” – as well as aiding the understanding of an unstable binary opposition of power (Conner, 2019, p. 78). The role of Annie is especially applicable to the concept of liminality. Foucault’s analysis of power aids this understanding, as Annie continuously transitions between a submissive, avid fan of Paul’s writing and his sadistic tormentor. She eventually completes the transition into the “crazed female”, becoming something Paul fears even after he kills her (Keeseey, 2002, p. 54). This relationship between Annie and power within the text demonstrates the validity of understanding power through Foucault’s definition; it is a relationship

continuously in transition. Her matriarchal, female qualities of caring for Paul and adoring his writing become twisted and disturbed as Paul continues to ‘make mistakes’ or upsets her in different ways. She transitions from submissive female, performing in the role of caretaker, to the dominating, powerful role of a violent kidnapper. In his creative “hole in the page”, Paul sometimes produces excellent work but also presents writing of which Annie disapproves (p. 205). She controls not only his medication and survival, but also his writings and creative environment. The issue of power and how it transfers from Paul as captive to Annie and her role as captor is intrinsically a part of the text. Paul as the writer and fictional world creator and Annie as the avid fan alongside an anti-social madness within society contrast their power roles within the novel.

Paul begins the story physically debilitated, injured, under the control of Annie and subject to her care. The power structure of Paul as idolised author and dependent patient versus Annie as a star-struck fan and dedicated nurse is one that transitions and transforms into the ultimate roles of Paul as tortured captive and creative author and Annie as disturbed captor and mentally unwell obsessive fan. It is important to note here, however, that since Paul’s injuries are debilitating, lasting throughout the narrative, the aforementioned structure of Paul as the dependent patient is one which remains constant. While Paul remains physically dependant on Annie due to his injuries and his need for pain medication, he still maintains the power in the relationship between himself and Annie as he is the creator of her favourite world.

Though this transformation of the roles is essential for the progression of the psychological terror of the novel, the two characters exist in a liminal space in which they occupy both their respective roles at once as well as moving from one to the other. Annie’s mental illness is linked to her dedication as Paul’s fan, while Paul’s creative world must be called upon to escape from his role as an injured patient. The power is continuously in flux and transition, passing from one end of the binary to the other in a manner which disrupts the binary itself: Paul to Annie, man to woman, author to reader, creator to a fan and captive to the captor. Each binary is questioned and dismantled through the liminal process of power exchange. This power exchange and disruption of roles creates a liminal and transgressive space as both characters are powerful and powerless within the context and move fluidly from one role to the other within this liminal state. Neither truly deviates from their initial roles presented in the text but exist within a space of liminality throughout their journey. The characters of Paul and Annie exist on both sides of the power structure simultaneously, denying a fixed presentation of their characters within a binary. This disrupts both the understanding of power and the binary system, replacing these structures with a liminal space of existence. Annie dies as a vindictive

madwoman, intent on killing Paul but also dearly loving his creation. Paul, by the end of the text, remains haunted by Annie and traumatised by thoughts of her but still exists in his ‘hole’ through which he writes:

He heard a noise behind him and turned from the blank screen to see Annie come out of the kitchen [...] he closed his eyes, opened them, saw the same old nothing, and was suddenly angry. He turned back to the word processor and wrote fast, almost bludgeoning the keys [...] the hole opened (p. 205)

This ‘hole’ is the creative space that Paul inhabits as he writes, staring through the hole in a page as he creates and narrates the literary world over which he has control. The liminal space in which Paul’s character exists throughout the text is dominated by his writing sessions, during which he escapes the reality of his capture and exists within ‘the hole’ in the page. This metaphorical space acts as the key liminal space within the text; he is both creator and spectator, narrator and audience. He inhabits the creative role fully, the world of Misery Chastain interrupting the narrative of the text *Misery*. It is here that he reinvigorates, albeit reluctantly, the world he has created for Misery Chastain and her return from the dead, as demanded by Annie.

Although he does initially begin writing *Fast Cars*, a text that he had previously worked on but decides to complete while in Annie’s care, Annie makes him destroy this text to begin a new novel that will revive Misery. Even within his creative world, there is an issue of power and control – Paul created the world of Misery and now he must unwrite her death. While he invades Annie’s space – although she welcomes and compels it – she, in turn, invades his creative world. *Misery* is “loaded with text and subtext alike about writing and the relationship between creator and audience”, detailing Paul’s creative process and his opportunity to escape through withdrawal from the drugs Annie prescribes him, as well as from her violent attacks although he does not succeed in full escapism (Katsanakis, 2019, p. 2). Paul’s writing and his creative world exist only for Annie within this environment as she demands certain power over his “hole in the page” (p. 205).

After Paul’s escape and Annie’s death, he is continuously tormented by Annie’s ghost. Though he is physically free of her capture and gains freedom through her death, the trauma of the experience continues to affect him beyond the event. He exists in a space of liminality – living with the memories of his torture yet finding freedom in his writing. This space is transformative as he moves through the process of healing from his trauma, haunted by the memories of his experience but trying to embrace his “hole in the page” and continue with his own creative world (p. 205). Although both his writing and his physical character are freed

from Annie, his mind remains captured by her. Similarly, Annie experiences great joy by having Paul in her home and having him write for her while she nurses him. However, she is also tormented by her mental illnesses and often angered by his creative choices with regards to his writing and his responses to their interactions if they clash with her own beliefs:

‘Don’t call it that. I hate it when you call it that.’  
 He looked at her, honestly puzzled. ‘Call what what?’  
 ‘When you pervert the talent God gave you by calling it a business. I hate that.’  
 ‘I’m sorry.’  
 ‘You ought to be,’ she said stonily. ‘You might as well call yourself a whore.’  
 (p. 49)

These interactions and the violence of her reactions increase steadily in their occurrence. Suiting the genre of the text, the increased horror of Annie’s reaction to Paul’s discussions and actions leads to an understanding of the constant state of change in which Annie exists. Although acting as a feature of Annie’s mental stability, the uncertainty of her reactions and outbursts of violence juxtaposes with the gentle nature with which she treats Paul as well as the love she demonstrates for his writing. Even in the above quote, her anger stems from Paul discussing his talent for writing as a business, utilising his talent for monetary gain. Although Annie’s view of writing as a creative talent is not evil or unhinged, her repeated unexpected outbursts create a tension of uncertainty for Paul. Although he “could calculate her rage”, her unexpected assault on his already injured legs – a punishment for requiring different supplies than the ones she buys him – is a violent occurrence that is continuously echoed throughout the text (p. 50). These moments of rage, which often follow a disagreement between the two, act as a catalyst for the exposure of Annie’s liminal character on the precipice of doting carer and violent captor. Despite her “sycophancy” as “easy once you got the hang of it” and Paul developing a certain understanding of Annie and her quick mood changes, she remains an unbalanced character, her mood “tide” wavering throughout the text (p. 11).

It is of interest to note the lack of attractive femininity in Annie, despite her role as a carer and homemaker. She is “a dowdy, unexotic villain” described by Natalie Schroeder as a “phallic” woman (Schroeder, 1996, p. 138). This role as ‘phallic woman’ is key to Annie’s liminal presence within the text. As Maysaa Husam Jaber argues, “in King’s horror, the body, especially the female body, is one of the main ingredients in a complex recipe” as it “involves the depiction of the killer concerning the dynamics of conformity, agency and transgression”, suggesting that Annie’s role as both woman and villain is key in creating the horror within the text (Jaber, 2021, p. 167). By removing any erotic attraction Paul may feel for Annie despite her mental instability, she is seen as a definitive threat and her obsessive fandom is unsettling

rather than pleasing for Paul. As John Katsanakis argues, “*Misery* is a stunningly prophetic novel about the rise and normalization of toxic fandom culture” (Katsanakis, 2019, p. 2). This suggests that obsessive behaviour of fans is somehow accepted within the world of fandoms and popular culture, especially in contemporary literature: “Annie Wilkes [...] a character written in 1987 before social media was even a thought” demonstrates “the power that fandom now claims” with regards to fan culture analysis in contemporary literature (Katsanakis, 2019, p. 3). The structuring of Annie and her obsession with Paul positions Annie as both a lover of his work and a critic who demands that her desires for the *Misery* Chastain franchise are met. Although extremes are reached in the text through the violence of Annie’s actions, this liminal, unstable relationship between fan and creator exists within this gendered power structure.

This discussion of Annie as a fan and Paul as the creator also illustrates the importance of Annie being a ‘phallic woman’ and a character who often defies the expectations of her gender performance. Foucault’s “view that subjectivity is produced within power relations results in a concept of the subject wholly determined by social forces” (McLaren, 2002, p. 2) suggests that Annie and Paul control and are denied control of power in the text through the performance of their gender and the social defiance of this performance. As a woman and a decidedly unattractive, ‘phallic’ one, Annie is framed as somehow threatening Paul’s creative work. As “creativity is solely a masculine prerogative, for the artist is male, and both the reader and the character/antagonist [...] are female”, just by existing within the gender binary, Annie is by default a threat to Paul’s work (Lant, 1997, p. 93). The artist’s power, if it is, in fact, masculine and thus threatened by the feminine role of an avid fan, is not fully threatened by Annie if she is positioned as a somewhat androgynous woman. Annie exists within this liminal space of being a woman, but not performing in a way expected by the society of the text, and thus disrupts the ‘subjectivity’ of power. If Annie did not embody the liminal space with regards to the gendered power within the text, she would not be as dominant as Paul’s captor, physically saving and later hobbling him through her strength and unfeminine manner. It is Annie’s ability to temporarily seize the power within this gendered binary as “a monstrous female, a serial killer and a memorable female representation” which allows her to disrupt the binary of man and woman, situating her in a liminal space of performing beyond her gender expectations and possessing power beyond the social expectancy (Jaber, 2021, p. 172).

*Misery* “is devoid of any supernatural elements; it has no creatures, no fantastical forces and no imaginary setting”, placing Annie as a very human threat and forgoing the familiar female power of the witch or monster (Jaber, 2021, p. 172). She gains the power of inciting terror through her liminal power as a captor; like a woman but not a woman who performs

according to social expectations. Her power is gained in the text through her role as captor, especially through the violent acts she commits towards Paul and the crippling of his body. She gains power by physically disabling him and ensuring he is dependent on her for his survival. By denying her character and most of her 'feminine' indicators, Annie becomes fluid within her role as both fan and tormentor, sometimes existing as both. The revival of Misery Chastain is motivated by Annie's threat, yet it is created to please her as a fan. Although he is inhibited by her and forced to destroy his previous text *Fast Cars*, Paul is still in control of his creative world and this power relationship. This denial of complete control and power in any aspect of the text – physical, creative process – places Paul and Annie in the continuous liminal space in which both are controlled and controlling at the same time. There is no definitive divide between Annie and Paul in terms of power. While Annie's violent actions are often outbursts of rage, they are encouraged by her love of Paul and his writing and her inability to accept that he has killed off the main character Misery Chastain. It is explained in the text that Annie's actions are not a recent phenomenon and that she has always had a tendency for violence, suggesting that her obsessive nature and acts of violence are intrinsically linked. Does she hurt Paul so he will reward her with Misery? Or is it because he has taken Misery from her for a moment that she punishes him? While he controls her obsession, she can control his pain, resulting in a constant switching of roles within the power dynamic, a fact which Paul uses to his advantage to initiate the final confrontation between himself and Annie.

Although Annie holds Paul captive, he holds a sense of power over her as the creator of the world she loves. His choice to destroy the final version of the book in front of Annie, to "do a little trick with it" demonstrates this power that he holds (p. 193). He burns the text, echoing her previous order to destroy *Fast Cars*. It is prompted by his realisation that she will kill him once the book is complete and by the need to escape, even though he might die in the process. This destruction of the text, encouraging Annie to do "exactly what he had almost known she would" and attempt to save the text, switches the power control from Annie to Paul in an instant (p. 194). Although he remains her captor and is bound to a wheelchair due to her violence against his body, he seizes the power within the binary by threatening his creative work and the source of her fandom. Throughout the text, Paul has remained physically submissive to Annie, both as a captor and as her patient, but it is in this moment that Annie submits full power to Paul. This is also the event that enables his escape from the horror.

Even though the trauma of his experience with Annie remains with Paul his escape from the horror within the text is also his escape from the liminality of his relationship with Annie and power. He no longer exists within the continuous shift of power but gains the control within



a newly established binary of survivor and villain. His existence is no longer liminal, existing beyond the horror of the house and his relationship with Annie. This aspect indicates the role of liminality within the process of healing from trauma and surviving in horror texts. It suggests a temporary role of liminality within horror texts as once a character moves beyond the trauma of an event they are removed from this state of liminality. As Xavier Pons writes on liminality:

...it makes it easier to bring out the fluidity of life because it discounts closure – what matters is not how this or that process ends but how it evolves and why it runs in a particular direction. It preserves a sense of indeterminacy or uncertainty which is very much part of how people experience the course of events in their lives. And although liminality inescapably involves the notions of ‘before’ and ‘after,’ by focussing on what at once separates and links them makes for a more complex picture than this binary suggests (Pons, 2014, p. 12)

The memory of the events, of the control, and his captor continues to haunt Paul, even in his “hole in the page” (p. 205). He exists both within the binary as a survivor, and outside of it through his memories and traumatic hauntings. The narrative is simply an experience, of which a liminal existence allows him to occupy a marginal role as both captive and celebrity. While the physical state of existing as Annie’s captor is momentary, the lasting terror of the events is not.

This too suggests that Annie’s kidnapping violence against Paul, and the horror that it inspires within him, are not temporary either– they have lasting power in that the trauma forces him into a liminal experience. He “weeps” even as he enters his “hole in the page” and continues his creative process (p. 205). As Jaber discusses, this text “highlights the trauma of Paul’s experience as told by the writer himself [...] the trauma of witnessing Annie’s brutality [...] the narrative uncovers not only the horror of trauma but also the trauma of horror; it is this two-sided experience of trauma/horror” presenting both horror and trauma as an experience in which one does not exist without the other in the structure of the text (Jaber, 2021, p. 172). There is the experience of each terror – being disabled by Annie, being held captive in her home – and the terror of his experience, including remaining physically injured after the event and being haunted by her ghost once she is dead.

Many of Paul’s experiences within the text take place as a captive in Annie’s home, the “setting of Annie’s house, however, is far from being a representation of domesticity; it is a setting for serial violence” as it is within this private domain where Annie initially cares for Paul, but then tortures and torments him (Jaber, 2021, p. 173). Just as Paul feels trapped by Misery Chastain – having previously written her death to be finished with the series – he is physically trapped within this private environment. He is captive in a manner which stimulates the terror of never being discovered and of eventually dying in Annie’s home, “in an alien

environment far from the reach of the social [...] identities that sustain us” (Sewlall, 2008, p. 110). This idea of a binary between space of the reality of the house and Paul’s “hole in the page” are both infringed upon (p. 205). Annie attempts to control Paul’s writing and Paul explores Annie’s house during moments she is absent. Even the fictional world of Misery Chastain and Paul’s “hole in the page” is a ‘border crossing’ in which the terror of Annie’s home and his reality as captor begins to affect the creative space of Paul’s writing, especially after his first manuscript is destroyed (p. 205). As Claire Valier writes:

The power that operates in and through penalty is hence much more than a matter of what is seen, known, and displayed [...] This power also involves the invocation of horrors and imaginative engagement. (Valier, 2002, p. 320)

As previously discussed, Annie often punishes Paul for his mistakes or for angering her. She amputates his left foot when she discovers he has been escaping his room to explore the house, and she burns his manuscript when she discovers the writing has nothing to do with her beloved Misery Chastain. She often threatens to withdraw his access to pain medication as punishment, and he is left in the basement towards the end of the text as Annie grows increasingly frustrated with his actions. While this element of punishment is essential for the horror in the text as it acts as a threat of violence for both Paul and the reader, is it also fundamental in the idea of ‘border crossing’. While Annie insists that Paul continues to write about Misery Chastain – a side effect of being his number one fan – she accomplishes this by invading his creative world. Paul’s “hole in the page” world begins to transition into a world controlled by Annie (p. 205). His creative space is marginalised in the horror setting of Annie’s home.

Although the use of liminality as a space of migration between two physical spaces has been touched upon, it is the liminal role of gender, its disruption to several binary systems, and the control of power within the text which prompt the most interesting examination. While the text itself was originally published in 1987, the gender binary and liminal nature displayed throughout the text remains relevant to the construction of gender in contemporary society. With the understanding of gender as being “culturally constructed” and one which relies on the expectations of gender within a society (Butler, 1999, p. 9), *Misery* questions these binary positions through the marginal characters of a submissive, helpless man and a powerful, threatening, phallic woman. As Judith Butler writes, if “gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way” (Butler, 1999, p. 10). This situates *Misery* as a text which challenges the heterosexual, normative assumptions of gender through the liminal existence of Paul and Annie as marginal characters within their gender. The constant cycle of possessing and losing the power in a

binary opposition of creator and fan, captive and captor, destabilises the binary itself. If “the category of sex is understood depending on how the field of power is articulated” (Butler, 1999, p. 25) and power is a liminal feature within this text that is in constant flux, then the heteronormative understanding of gender is also in a consistent transition from feminine to masculine attributes, upheaving the binary understanding of the genders. While Annie is a ‘phallic woman’ who embodies many ‘masculine’ attributes commonly associated with heteronormative assumptions such as physical strength, domination, and ability to commit acts of violence, Paul is the revered man who takes on feminine gendered qualities such as dependence and physical weakness. He exists in a state of “ambivalence toward a state of dependency, which he both desires as a relief from the burden of independence and fears as a challenge to his hard-won autonomy” (Keeseey, 2002, p. 54). This also suggests that “Annie may disguise a desire to return to the mother” as she takes on the role of Pauls’ caretaker (Keeseey, 2002, p. 54). This assumption, however, would deny Annie her role as a ‘phallic woman’ and her failure as a nurse, a profession from which Paul learns she was fired after the death of several patients. By allotting Annie her role as tormentor and as a ‘phallic woman’, both Paul and Annie defy the expectations of their genders and dismantle the binary of gender through their liminal roles. Instead of embodying the role of a mother who creates and nourishes life, Annie becomes a killer, one who takes life and torments Paul, as Paul becomes a physically dominated man and contained to the domestic sphere.

As previously mentioned, *Misery* is a text which discusses issues surrounding the creator and the audience which experiences their creations. Although this is justifiable to assume, as King’s relationship with the consumers of his creations has “taken several horrifying turns”, it is this aspect of liminality in gender beyond the “bodied sex” which warrants further discussion with regards to fan behaviour and the relationship between the creator of the text, the text, and the intended audience of the text (Lant, 1997, p. 89). Despite being hailed as a “complex exploration” of the “powers of the artist [...] the pressures of the audience” and “the workings of creativity”, the representation of gender and heteronormative expectations in this text are challenged by the liminal roles of Paul and Annie, and their hold on power (Lant, 1997, p. 82).

In conclusion, while the use of liminal space and characters aid the representation of marginalised individuals in a general understanding, in this context it also provides an understanding of the expectations of gender roles and the disruption liminal characters and spaces cause binary systems. The binary system, in this case, encompasses several pairs: man and woman, captor and captive, creator and consumer, author and reader, celebrity and fan,

dependent and carer, and horror and escape. While each binary places Paul and Annie on either side of the power structure, their positions are never truly fixed and often exist within a liminal space which defies the heteronormative expectations of their identifying gender, deconstructing the binary itself and allowing Paul and Annie to possess power as discussed by Foucault. As mentioned previously, this attribute of *Misery* maintains its relevance in contemporary society as the identification of gender and sexed bodies is a continuous discussion. The shifting power allotted to each gender and their disruption of the gender binary reveals the true liminal space in which Paul and Annie exist throughout the text. This uncertainty and constant flux of power and position aid the horror of the text in a similar manner as the violence and uncertainty Paul experiences. This “uncertainty created by avoiding an absolute explanation heightens the horror and terror of the text” for both the reader and Paul (Conner, 2019, p. 78). There is a stark contrast between the environment of Annie’s physical home – and the site of Paul’s entrapment – and the “hole in the page” which Paul dominates and inhabits (p. 205). This not only act as a representation of the horror of Paul’s reality and the freedom of his creative mode of escape but also demonstrates how fixed environments may also be altered and terrorised by the concept of liminality. Paul is both the creator and the controlled, Annie the lover and the puppet master. With both the spaces and the characters themselves existing in a state of liminal conflict and transformation, *Misery* lends itself to being analysed as not just a text describing the creative process and the horror of overly zealous fans and fandom culture, but as an exploration of the liminal experience of gender and the uncertainty of position and power in horror.

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