

“TRAITOROUS BODIES”: CARTESIAN DUALISM IN ROMANCE NOVELS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTERS	
I. "TRAITOROUS BODIES": AN INTRODUCTION	1
Descartes and Feminism	2
Romantic Scholarship	10
A Sample of Contemporary Romance Criticism	12
Applicable Accounts of Sex and Sex Theory	17
II. THE CARTESIAN 'UNCONSCIOUS' OF POPULAR CULTURE	19
III. CONQUERED BODIES	36
IV. SEIZED BY BODY: CARTESIAN DUALISM IN SUSAN JOHNSON'S <i>SEIZED BY LOVE</i>	51
V. FIFTY SHADES OF ANA: CARTESIAN DUALISM IN E.L. JAMES'S <i>FIFTY SHADES OF GREY</i>	68
VI. A POLEMIC: THE OPIATE OF THE FEMALE	89
WORKS CITED	103

ABSTRACT

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While there have been numerous theoretical approaches to romance novels, a Cartesian analysis is seemingly absent among the current scholarship. Applying René Descartes’s theory of mind/body dualism to the heroines in Susan Johnson’s *Seized by Love* and E.L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey* reveals not only a separation between the heroines’ minds and bodies, but proves that both heroines are depicted as distinctly body. As such, serious complications arise for the female characters, including the acceptance of sexual violence and submission to the patriarchy.

CHAPTER I

“TRAITOROUS BODIES”: AN INTRODUCTION

“‘My compliments to a bewitching, dutiful mistress,’ [Nikki] whispered, kissing [Alisa] tenderly. He fell asleep cradling Alisa in his arms. But she found sleep elusive, mortified by her body’s traitorous desires” (Johnson 159). This pinnacle moment in Susan Johnson’s *Seized by Love* occurs directly after Johnson’s hero, Nikki, forces himself upon Alisa after she refuses to have sex with him; Alisa, sobbing and fighting Nikki’s advances, is shocked after she experiences an orgasm while being essentially raped.

Fast-forward thirty-four years, and it is evident this strange, troubling trend within the romance genre continues: “How he’s making me feel that familiar pull deep in my belly, tightening, quickening. NO...and my traitorous body explodes in an intense, body-shattering orgasm” (James 276). This scene, from E.L. James’ wildly popular *Fifty Shades of Grey*, eerily similar to the one in Johnson’s novel, transpires directly after Christian spans Ana eighteen times as punishment for rolling her eyes at him. Post-beating, Christian immediately engages in sexual intercourse with Ana—who, like Alisa, is astounded when she orgasms.

What is most interesting about these two moments is the blame both heroines place on their “traitorous” bodies for sexually responding to the heroes after experiencing

a form of violence that both women struggled against. As readers, it is logical to conclude that the heroines' struggles are triggered by their rational, thinking selves because throughout both novels it is clear the heroines are against physical abuse; thus, it seems both women have indeed become primarily bodies during these instances.

In my thesis, I illuminate this separation by applying René Descartes's theory of mind/body dualism to both Alisa and Ana. Though Cartesian dualism has been an element of many literary works, explorations of its influence are surprisingly absent from scholarship on the romance genre. Descartes's theory, though currently discredited by scholars in a myriad of fields, serves as an evocative metaphor in popular culture to discuss the post-modern notion of a "split" self. Furthermore, because Cartesian mind/body dualism has been challenged, it is intriguing to see its rebirth in *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, especially since neither novel attempts to subvert what is implied about gender by Descartes's theories. As such, it is necessary to explore the complex feminist interpretations of Descartes, as well as the complicated, scholarly conclusions about the romance genre in order to highlight the dualistic nature of both. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to establish a scholarly foundation for my thesis, defining important works and terms that I will rely upon in subsequent chapters. Though I may not directly quote some of the scholars discussed below, I include their works here because they are important to my investigation, and they provide a framework for my conclusions.

Descartes and Feminism

Following the publication of Descartes's *Discourse on the Method of Highly Conducting Reason*, many educated French women were elated to learn of the mind/body

split: since Descartes failed to mention gender explicitly, they felt empowered for the first time to separate themselves from the body they traditionally had been aligned with.

However, prominent feminist philosopher Susan Bordo emphasizes in *The Flight to Objectivity* the historical associations of the female with the body and the natural world to support her argument that Descartes's separation of the mind and body automatically relegates woman to an inferior position to men, who are traditionally associated with the mind. In order to build a foundation for her feminist reading of Descartes, Bordo cites Western philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle as the primary men who first aligned woman with the natural world. She utilizes this masculinist foundation underlying Western philosophy to support her claims that Descartes's constructed idea of self further complicates the issue of gender:

Through the Cartesian 'rebirth,' a new masculine theory of knowledge is delivered, in which detachment from nature acquires a positive epistemological value. A *new* world is reconstructed, too, one in which all generativity and creativity fall to God, the spiritual father, rather than to the female 'flesh' of the world. With the same masterful stroke—the mutual opposition of the spiritual and the corporeal—the formerly female earth becomes inert matter and the objectivity of science is insured. 'She' becomes 'it'—and 'it' can be understood and controlled. (108)

Because Bordo dedicates a significant portion of her essay to discussing Western philosophers and their association of the female with the earth and the natural world, she clearly indicates that females, partly as a result of the Cartesian reconstruction of self, have also become "it." Additionally, her notion of "otherness" evokes Descartes's belief

that the body is something other than the self, demonstrating not only the separateness of self, but also solidifying the female's role as *body*, which automatically denotes her as "lesser" because, as body, "we are completely reactive and nondiscriminative, unable to make the most basic distinctions between an inner occurrence and external event" (56). As a result of this gender implication, women (as thinking beings) are dismissed—just as Descartes dismisses the body in "The Passions."

This concept is particularly relevant (and quite revealing) for my thesis because both *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* depict a female heroine more motivated and influenced by her body than mind, which results in her submission to the dominant male. Since Alisa and Ana respond to and are governed by their physical needs rather than their mental needs, they too are relegated to the status of mechanical, non-thinking bodies, thus reflecting Bordo's assertions about Cartesian dualism and its influence on gender.

Similar to Bordo, Genevieve Lloyd, in her essay "Reason as Attainment," cites traditional Western philosophers such as Hegel, Plato, and Aristotle to reveal the historical connection of the female to the body: "In western thought, maleness has been seen as itself an achievement, attained by breaking away from the more 'natural' condition of women" (70). However, although Lloyd makes similar connections to those cited by Bordo, she acknowledges the flaw in the implication that Descartes's dualism subjugated women: "Something happened here (Cartesian duality) which proved crucial for the development of stereotypes of maleness and femaleness, and it happened in some ways despite Descartes's explicit intentions" (71). Lloyd argues that, though Descartes does not mention women in *Discourse on the Method*, he did not necessarily *exclude*

them. His omission in fact permits women to gain access to formal knowledge in France. Focusing on Descartes's intentions, Lloyd asserts "Descartes's separation of mind and body yielded a vision of a unitary pure thought, ranging like the common light of the sun over a variety of objects" (77). However, Lloyd notes that, while Descartes may have made no distinction between male and female mind and reason, women were restrained from achieving actual equality due to circumstance—chiefly apparent in the female's social roles of wife and mother and the accompanying duties those roles entailed. As a result, women remained relegated to the role of body—passionate, sensuous, and not to be trusted. She also notes "we owe to Descartes an influential and pervasive theory of mind, which provides support for a powerful version of the sexual division of mental labour. Women have been assigned responsibility for that realm of the sensuous which the Cartesian Man of Reason must transcend, if he is to have true knowledge of things" (79). Furthermore, "Woman's task is to preserve the sphere of the intermingling of mind and body, to which the Man of Reason will repair for solace, warmth, and relaxation" (80).

Lloyd's argument is a pertinent analysis for anyone studying feminist Cartesian thought, and it provides a more optimistic perspective on Descartes. Furthermore, her observation of woman's role as caretaker or nurturer reflect Alisa's struggles in *Seized by Love*; often Alisa wishes for independence, but is forced to recognize her dependence on man due to the social limitations on her sex. Thus, Alisa, like women in Descartes's era, is prohibited from gaining knowledge by her social role, not by her ability. However, it is perhaps most interesting to consider Lloyd's perspective in relation to *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Unlike Alisa, a female living in 1874, Ana is, by all conventional standards, a

modern woman—college educated, working, financially independent, yet she also submits to the male. Ana is a perfect example of Lloyd's assertion that the roles prescribed to women, as well as the implications of Cartesian duality, have lingered throughout history.

The impact of Cartesian dualism and objectivity on learned women in seventeenth-century France is also analyzed by Erica Harth in "Cartesian Women." Harth reveals that women of that era were especially affected by the theory of dualism because, since Descartes's assertions did not describe a gendered mind, it finally by implication separated them from their bodies. Inspired by this opportunity, a group of women dedicated themselves to learning the theories of Descartes; these women are referred to as "Cartesian women." The Cartesian women met in fashionable Parisian salons (distinct from but similar to male-only salons in Paris) to discuss philosophy, science, and all subjects considered academic. However, one concern these women had with dualism is Descartes's claim that the mind is associated with reason and logic only, which left no place for emotions but in the physical body. The applicability of this concern is painfully apparent in the two romances I am analyzing because it is typical that romances often highlight the emotions of the heroine and hero. For instance, in both *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the heroines have an intense dislike for the hero (which originates from rational thought based upon their observation of the male's character and morality); however, Alisa and Ana are not only sexually attracted to Nikki and Christian, but are also emotionally attracted to them. Interestingly, both females struggle to understand why they have an emotional attraction and/or attachment to abusive males, which exemplifies the Cartesian notion that emotions must be of the body because both body and emotions

are more difficult to understand. Consequently, this connection to emotion reinforces the females' alignment with the body.

Furthermore, in this essay Harth provides a detailed analysis of two poems written by two Cartesian women: Catherine Descartes (René Descartes's niece) and Anne de la Vigne. A poem written by Catherine, "Shade of Descartes," is most fascinating because it pairs male and female (in the form of René Descartes and de la Vigne) as leaders of the educated. In this pairing, the two are equal. The poem becomes truly intriguing at its close, where Catherine introduces the idea that René Descartes and de la Vigne are romantically involved. Catherine's text is significant because it portrays the balance of intellectuality and romance, a concept that many of the women in the salons debated. For my thesis, the choice between either love or intellect is of particular interest because it is a prevalent theme in both novels, and one which, arguably, still haunts women. Since neither novel analyzed in this thesis achieves (or even attempts to achieve) the romanticized balance described by Catherine Descartes, I will explore the possible ramifications of the novels' continued message that women may have only one or the other (romance or intellect), while the male is able to comfortably achieve both.

The notion that men and women are allowed (and, subsequently denied) access to certain things based on their sex continues to resonate in modern society. In her groundbreaking work, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Luce Irigaray advocates that the great philosophical problem of the current age¹ is sexual difference. Though her exact concept of sexual difference is never specifically defined, Irigaray often relies upon metaphors to convey its essence:

¹ Though this work was published in 1984, Irigaray's theory is culturally relevant in 2013, the ways of which will be forthcoming.

Think of it as an approach that would allow us to check the many forms that destruction takes in our world, to counteract a nihilism that merely affirms the reversal or the repetitive proliferation of status quo values—whether you call them the consumer society, the circularity of discourse, the more or less cancerous diseases of our age, the unreliability of words, the end of philosophy, religious despair or regression to religiosity, scientific or technical imperialism that fails to consider the living subject.

(5)

Thus, it appears Irigaray's dependence upon metaphor is the result of a lack in language itself. Because there are no specific terms for the paternal/masculine foundations of society and the subsequent ramifications for women, Irigaray must create webs of understanding that allow readers to realize the profundity of the problem. Though Irigaray acknowledges the gains wrought from feminism, she questions the strength of them because of "the failure to lay foundations different from those on which the world of man is constructed" (6). Similarly, she claims that, since such foundations have always been masculine in the West, there is no place for woman to look to find *herself*; therefore, woman has only ever been able to define herself in terms of how she is perceived by the male, which Irigaray asserts are either as mother, or as a "*place* for man" (10).

Additionally, Irigaray proposes that, while it is traditionally the man's role "*to inhabit*," it is the woman's "*to perceive*" (141). She describes this role of perceiver as one that is "always attuned to the outside, to the world. Senses always alert" (141). This assertion coincides with Bordo's and Lloyd's postulations that the female is associated with the physical and natural world. It also supports the association of the female with the body

because it suggests that woman will react more to external influences rather than internal reasoning, which characterizes the pattern explored in my thesis. These observations introduce Irigaray's argument for the necessity of sexual difference, which would finally and completely differentiate woman from man in order to establish a better understanding of what it means to be woman, rather than other. Ideally, this redefinition would provide "a place for both [male and female] to enter and exit the envelope [the place of restriction] (and on the same side, so as not to perforate the envelope or assimilate it into the digestive process); for both, a possibility of unhindered movement, of peaceful immobility without the risk of imprisonment" (12). This ideal is particularly interesting in relation to the two novels considered in my thesis because neither exemplifies the equilibrium Irigaray envisions. Irigaray's "plea" is still relevant (and needed) today because society has shown no progress toward this type of equality; therefore, the emergence of a novel like *Fifty Shades of Grey* in 2011 proves to be particularly disturbing since it violently disrupts the balance Irigaray demands. Consequently, since women are the primary audience for the novel, the message of masculine dominance may further undermine woman's desire for growth and definition because the "norms" of female submission and male dominance are reinforced.

Furthermore, Irigaray's theory of sexual difference is relevant to my research because she applies Descartes's description of 'wonder' from "The Passions" to establish the framework of her own theory. However, a detailed account of this application will be given in Chapter One since it demonstrates the use of Cartesian theory in the modern era.

Romance Scholarship

Motivated by the steady popularity of romance novels and subsequent increasing sales, many scholars in the 1980s studied the genre in an attempt to defend romances from their stigma of being perceived as ‘fluff’ by academics. Many scholars not only found literary quality within the genre, but surprisingly suggested that the novels were empowering female readers. Janice Radway, perhaps the most recognizable name in romance scholarship, published her groundbreaking research on feminism and romance, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, in 1984. Radway describes her purpose for the project in this way: “If reading varied spatially and temporally, and one did wish to use literature in an effort to reconstruct culture, it would be necessary to connect particular texts with the communities that produced and consumed them and to make some effort to specify how the individuals involved actually constructed those texts as meaningful semiotic structures” (4). Accordingly, *Reading the Romance* is equal parts anthropological study, cultural observation, and literary analysis. Since a large portion of this book is dedicated to the discourse that develops between female readers and romance novels, Radway conducts her research through interviews with a group of avid romance readers in the Midwest, known as the Smithton women. From these interviews, Radway discovers that the Smithton women, all of whom are housewives and mothers, read romances to escape their familial duties, meet their emotional needs (which are not met by their husbands), and to educate themselves about history and other countries (in the form of historical romances and travel romances). In this respect, women are empowered and, to some extent, are defying the patriarchy. However, Radway argues that the Smithton women are isolated since reading is a solitary

act; therefore, the women are still submissive to the patriarchy because “they never work in the public world to maintain themselves but rather live symbiotically as the property and responsibility of men” (213). The women, though they may *feel* empowered through reading romances, are solely living in a fantasy world that does not exist in the real world ruled by the patriarchy. In particular, this conclusion reveals the complicated, and often contradictory, feminine discourse that “supplements the avenues traditionally open to women for emotional gratification by supplying them vicariously with the attention and nurturance they do not get enough of in the round of day-to-day existence” (212). While these observations do not necessarily directly pertain to my thesis, they are worth noting because they acknowledge the extremely complicated nature of romances and romance readers, and subsequently of romance scholarship, since these varied conclusions reflect the difficulty scholars have in studying romances due to their mass culture popularity and audience-centric approaches.

However, what is relevant to the advancement of my argument is Radway’s expression of certain patterns present within the genre. Through questionnaires, surveys, and interviews, she discovers what women want and do not want in a romance, as well as what they find acceptable and unacceptable. The most shocking discovery is that most women accepted rape scenes—even if they occurred between the hero and heroine—as long as they were absolutely necessary to the plot. This finding is applicable to my thesis because *Seized by Love* depicts a rape scene between the two major characters that fits into Radway’s category of “acceptable rape.” Nikki’s abuse of Alisa would, perhaps, not be considered rape because it more fulfills Radway’s account of “forceful persuasion,” in which the hero rapes the heroine because her sexuality is too strong, and he simply

cannot control his desire for her. That Radway offers such a distinction – that there are types of rape – is itself intriguing.

Challenging Radway's perception of romance readers as subverting the patriarchy, Tania Modleski's *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* contests Radway's assertion by first pointing out Radway's naïve ethnography, claiming Smithton is "an extreme rarity in the world" because communities do not create female modes of convention as Radway suggests (42). Rather, Modleski argues, these conventions are "for *most* of us, set in place from birth, that in patriarchal society a female child is born into and simultaneously interpellated by a world where many of the conventions of romance hold powerful sway" (42-43). As a result, Modleski ultimately concludes "romances provide women with a common fantasy structure to ensure their continued psychic investment in their oppression" (43). This conclusion is in direct contrast to Radway's more hopeful assessment of the romance genre, and is supportive of a Cartesian analysis of romances because Modleski proposes, similar to Irigaray, that women are always a product of the patriarchy, and thus subjected to the conventions of the patriarchy, since society and its cultural products have deep roots in masculine power.

A Sample of Contemporary Romance Criticism

Since the advent of romance criticism, as well academia's acknowledgment of the genre as worthy of study, romance scholarship has steadily increased over the last three decades. In fact, scholars Sarah Frantz and Eric Selinger founded the peer-reviewed *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* in 2010. Additionally, there are now international academic conferences dedicated solely to the romance genre. In this section, I include a

sampling of what contemporary scholars are concentrating on within the genre, even though these particular analyses do not discuss *Seized by Love* or *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

An Goris's "Loving by the Book: Voice and Romance Authorship" explores the continued success of the romance genre by scrutinizing the criteria for such novels as set by the romance industry. Through her thorough analysis of romance writing guides and handbooks, Goris determines that "aspiring authors are encouraged to take the advice as normative rules rather than merely as descriptive suggestions" (75). This conclusion may be a possible indicator of why certain patterns survive within the genre; in particular, for this thesis, it is possible that this notion may account for the Cartesian trend. Yet, what is still not accounted for is why, although these "normative rules" are standard because they obviously reflect what is popular and marketable within the genre, such a submissive tendency in heroines has been maintained, even after all the challenges to the patriarchy from feminists? Why has this particular pattern survived decades after multiple "waves" of feminism? These are the types of questions I hope to answer in my thesis.

Goris does note that, although set conventions may appear to stagnate the genre, romance guides and handbooks define truly successful romances as those that display "the occurrence of similarity as difference, of familiarity as novelty, of the constant interaction of comfort and surprise" (76). Furthermore, she asserts that romances must "give the reader what she wants and expects, but differently" (76). Though this assertion clearly grants more creativity—and, thus more credibility—to romances, it is interesting (and certainly worth analyzing) that women desire this sort of repetition because it suggests, on some level, that women cannot handle change or are not as receptive to new ideas as men. This indication may be a stretch, but since this analysis will focus on

unintended or unexplored consequences of romance reading, it is a relevant observation to examine.

Accordingly, Goris describes the quintessential romance narrative's structure thusly: "the protagonists' (first) meeting, their mutual attraction, the internal and external conflict between them, the crisis or outburst of the conflict, the black moment in which the relationship seems doomed and finally the happy ending" (76). This plot structure is important to note because *Fifty Shades of Grey* has been categorized variously as romance and erotica; however, if the novel follows this structure, it can be easily read within the romance genre because it displays all the aforementioned criteria.² While Goris acknowledges that it is for this very repetition of patterns that romances are often disregarded in the literary world, she points out that romances follow them because they fulfill the female readers' desires and expectations of "escape, relaxation, and positive emotions" (77).

Similarly, romance scholar Eric Murphy Selinger discusses the importance of reading romances as pleasurable activity in "How to Read a Romance Novel (and Fall in Love with Popular Romance)." However, though Selinger advocates the pleasurable aspects of romance reading, he maintains that they are still worthy of academic study, asserting that the issue with romances is that, because they are categorized as genre fiction, they are not read in the same manner as canonized literature. Thus, according to Selinger, romances are never given the opportunity to prove themselves worthy of academic study. Selinger argues that the techniques of trained readers, specifically close

² There is the possibility for disagreement regarding the required happy ending, since *Fifty Shades of Grey* does not offer a stereotypical "happy ending"; but, if the entire trilogy is studied, one must note that the overall series ends happily.

reading, should also be applied to romances because “to read such a romance closely would not be to resist or dismiss it, but rather to let the mind of love we see at play in the text spark an answering excitement” (36). Selinger demonstrates through his analysis of the romance novel *Flowers from the Storm* that romances may be read critically and pleasurably; in recognizing certain traditional literary devices (i.e., allusions, parallelism, chiasmus, etc.) within romance novels, the overall enjoyment of reading them is increased. In relation to this claim, Selinger is quick to confront one of the biggest tragedies of romance criticism—scholars who focus on the genre as a whole versus individual narratives. While he acknowledges the same formulaic structures Goris analyzes, Selinger steadfastly asserts that the individuality of each romance is far more important than studying similarities. While this article may not directly apply to my thesis, I think it is an important perspective to consider because it demonstrates a very successful analysis of a romance and reveals that these types of novels may be considered ‘art,’ rather than their popular dismissal as trash. Consequently, Selinger’s vigorous approach justifies romance scholarship in academia.

An intriguing analysis by Sarah G. Frantz, “‘How we love *is* our soul’: Joey W. Hill’s BDSM Romance *Holding the Cards*,” discusses the advent of BDSM within the romance genre. Since Frantz’s analysis is centered upon BDSM, her essay is especially relevant and applicable to my analysis of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It is first necessary to include Frantz’s definition of BDSM:

BDSM is a combination of the abbreviations of the main elements of a variety of non-standard sexual practices: Bondage/Discipline (BD), Domination/Submission (DS), and Sadism/Masochism (SM). Bondage can

include any sexual restraint.... Discipline ranges from the practice of ‘punishing’ naughty submissives during encounters that often include role play, to specific fetishes like over the knee (OTK) spanking, and caning. Domination and submission refer to sexual identities and practices in which one partner is submissive to a dominant partner, doing what they are ordered to, usually, but not always, in sexual situations. Sadism and masochism are much more specific sexual paraphilia: sadists receive pleasure and sexual arousal from inflicting pain on their partners, while masochists receive pleasure and sexual arousal from having pain inflicted upon them. (48)

These definitions will be referenced throughout my analysis of James’ novel because these are all practices Ana and Christian experiment with in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The only element that may be lacking is the role of masochist, since Ana does not enjoy the violent aspects of BDSM; however, Christian is a classic sadist—even, perhaps, too much so because he characterizes Frantz’s observation that for some, “BDSM is their primary sexual identity: it becomes who they are” (48). This possibility is particularly interesting since it not only applies to Christian, but it also suggests that, if a woman continually plays the role of submissive in her sexual life (as Ana does), such docility may manifest itself in all aspects of her non-sexual life, whether they be familial, professional, or societal. Since this a plausible outcome of BDSM, as well as an area I will concentrate on in my thesis, it further complicates a positive reading of the BDSM in *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

Applicable Accounts of Sex and Sex Theory

Because my thesis is primarily focused upon the submission of the heroines, which is catalyzed by their ultimate association with their bodies, the accounts of both heroines' physical experiences must be scrutinized. As such, it is important to introduce the two following relevant works because, in my analysis of the heroines' sexual encounters, I'll apply certain ideas and terms discussed by both Janet Shibley Hyde and Breanne Fahs.

In her text, *Half the Human Experience: The Psychology of Women*, Hyde notes that females do not learn about masturbation in the ways males do. She asserts males traditionally learn about masturbation at an earlier age than females and that females learn to masturbate by "accidental discovery" (303). As a result, Hyde finds that females masturbate at much lower rates than males, which prompts her conclusion that an 'erotic dependency' is formed between the female and the male because women who do not masturbate must rely upon a male to fulfill their sexual needs. Hyde's conception of an erotic dependency is crucial to my work in this thesis because it provides a possible reason why Alisa and Ana remain in their abusive situations. Since Alisa and Ana (as bodies) become addicted, in a sense, to sexual pleasure, this type of dependency upon the male is clearly formed. In particular, the notion of an erotic dependency is most interesting in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Christian explicitly forbids Ana from masturbating because he wants all of her sexual pleasure to come from him; thus, Ana—as a newly awakened sexual being—becomes completely dependent upon Christian to receive sexual gratification.

Fahs, too, studies the various ways in which men sexually control women. In *Performing Sex: The Making and Unmaking of Women's Erotic Lives*, Fahs analyzes contemporary accounts of female sexuality under the critical lens of performance. To supplement her theories about sexualized performance, Fahs conducted interviews with forty women from a variety of ethnic, socioeconomic, and political backgrounds. Throughout her work, Fahs provides excerpts of the interviews, which detail the interviewees' sexual experiences (good and bad) and fantasies, to provide a context for women's sexuality, primarily in relation to bisexuality, arousal, fantasy, and pornography. Fahs ultimately concludes that women are " beholden to broader societal contexts that dictate their relationships to their bodies, partners, and institutions" (5). I include Fahs's work primarily in my analysis of Ana and *Fifty Shades of Grey* because Fahs discusses and analyzes the complicated nature of abuse in "loving" relationships; furthermore, Fahs's conclusion that women are actually performing for men through their sexuality, though they may perceive themselves to be sexually "free," is applicable to my own conclusion that romances overtly by and for women are actually products of the patriarchy.

Providing this review of Cartesian and romance criticism, as well as a few psychological accounts of similar themes, not only provides a framework for my thesis, but establishes the dualistic tone that pervades it. Because the criticism surrounding the romance genre and Descartes is complicated, at best, I want to reveal the same complicated nature that inevitably presents itself in *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

CHAPTER II

THE CARTESIAN 'UNCONCIOUS' OF POPULAR CULTURE

Though the notion of a separation between soul and body dates back to ancient Greece, it is Descartes who, in the seventeenth century, clearly delineated the theory as absolute truth and dedicated a philosophic career to meticulously specifying and cataloging the differing natures of mind and body, as well as describing processes by which the body and soul function and interact. The importance of Descartes's work was not only profound during the era it was penned; his ideas on dualism continue to influence attitudes even today. Albert Johnstone aptly considers Descartes's canon as "consequently one of the central supports of the mind/body dichotomy which haunts everyday Western thinking" (16). Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is to detail the specific theories, facets, and characteristics that offer an overview of the fundamental elements of Cartesian mind/body dualism, as well as the elements that serve as philosophical underpinnings for two romance novels, *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Seized by Love*. Furthermore, similar to the manner in which I supplied an overview of feminist Cartesian thought and romance criticism in the Introduction, this chapter will provide a sampling of the ways Descartes's theory underpins a number of attitudes in contemporary popular culture. Because Cartesian mind/body dualism is not accounted for in romance scholarship, to highlight and exemplify the notion that the body can be completely separate from the mind, I will consider *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* in light

of scholars' applications of Descartes's theory to cyborg cinema. However, though I refer to Johnson and James's novels, I do not analyze them fully here (a formal analysis will commence in Chapter Three), but rather demonstrate *how* Descartes's theories are applicable to the literature.

In *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason* (1628), Descartes asserts that

I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this 'me,' that is to say the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body, and is even more easy to know than the latter; and if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is. (101)

With this statement Descartes not only establishes the essence of mind/body duality, but also introduces the body as stranger or 'Other,' further maintaining that the mind (the thinking self) is at the center of what we are. This distinct separation and subsequent opposition determines Descartes's theories in "The Passions," in which he details the myriad characteristics he attributes to mind and body.

Written in 1645, "The Passions of the Soul" is Descartes's last published work. While Descartes explores mind/body dualism in his earlier works, it is within "The Passions" that he attempts to scientifically and logically delineate the mechanistic processes of the body, which consequently allows him to attribute all other qualities to the soul or mind—"all that we experience as being in us, and that to observation may exist in wholly inanimate bodies, must be attributed to our body alone; and, on the other

hand, ...all that which is in us and which we cannot in any way conceive as possibly pertaining to a body, must be attributed to our soul” (332). This methodology was, as Haldane and Ross note, “a completely new departure to state that such matters were completely capable of being interpreted thus, and one that has had a fundamental influence on the psychology and physiology of the present time” (v). While the elements of the mind are more easily explicable, because—according to Descartes—the mind is easier to know and understand, his notions of human physiology and its independence from the soul are often difficult to examine with precision.

One particularly challenging undertaking when considering Descartes’s notion of ‘body’ is defining the body’s independent actions. For instance, one cannot claim “the body thinks” or “the body wants/desires” since “we have no conception of the body as thinking in any way”; furthermore, Descartes claims “all the movements which are in us pertain only to body, inasmuch as they do not depend on thought at all” (332). Thus, the central question arises, how does the body move without thought? Since a large portion of my thesis is dedicated to an understanding of an independent physical self and the ways the physical self bears on individual actions and attitudes, it is imperative to consider Descartes’s “answer” to this problem:

The error which has been committed in making it [the soul] play the part of various personages, usually in opposition one to another, only proceeds from the fact that we have not properly distinguished its functions from those of the body, to which alone we must attribute every thing which can be observed in us that is opposed to our reasons; so that there is here no strife, excepting that the small gland which exists in the middle of the

brain, being capable of being thrust to one side of the soul, and to the other by the animal spirits, which are mere bodies, as I have said above, it often happens that these two impulses are contrary, and that the stronger prevents the other from taking effect. (353)

Descartes's choice of the word "impulses" is very interesting and creates another layer of complication. Because "The Passions" was written in French, it is important to note the original French word Descartes used: *impulsions*, derived from the Medieval Latin word, *impellere*, which translates to "drive." Thus, Descartes describes the actions that are independent of the mind as drives; the body is driven to action on its own accord, a concept very similar to that implied by the popular phrase "animal instinct" often used today. Yet, the notion that the body is driven to do certain things is particularly disturbing in regards to the novels discussed in this thesis. Since Ana and Alisa are victims of their bodies' impulses, these novels suggest that the female body is naturally driven towards sexual violence, even though their minds fight against it. In light of Descartes's assertions concerning physical impulses, *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Seized by Love* exemplify the many misogynistic attitudes that can be fueled by Cartesian mind/body dualism, because—though Descartes never explicitly made this distinction—one is led to assume that Descartes considers the body as female, as Bordo establishes in *The Flight to Objectivity*.

Furthermore, because the opposition between the heroines' minds and bodies is explicit throughout both novels, it is worth noting that Descartes recognizes this potential for conflict with his claim that the mind and body are "contrary" (353). According to Descartes, the body is easily influenced by its many passions, and it is such influence that

the soul has little control over that creates the root of opposition or contrariness between the body and the soul. Consequently, Descartes employs this notion to account for why a person may do something that she or he might not agree with: “the spirits impel the gland in order to cause a desire for something in the soul, and that with which the soul repels it again by the desire which it has to avoid the very same thing” (353). It is this particular internal (and external) conflict that haunts Ana and Alisa; their passions stir their bodies into movement and strive to manipulate their souls into submission.

Although Descartes emphasizes the potential dangers of mind/body opposition, he concludes that every individual has the ability to conquer his/her own passions and reconcile the rift between body and soul. Reconciliation may be achieved once an individual “can discover the strength or weakness of his soul” (354). Descartes in two articles (Article XLVII and Article L) describes those who possess “strong” souls, who are not swayed by their passions; and those with “feeble” souls, who are unable to “bring their strength to the test” (354). There are two important statements Descartes makes that are especially applicable to my analysis of Ana and Alisa. He argues that those with feeble souls lack “proper arms” to battle their passions: “That which I call its proper arms consists of the firm and determinate judgments respecting the knowledge of good and evil, in pursuance of which it has resolved to conduct the actions of its life; and the most feeble souls of all are those whose will does not thus determine itself to follow certain judgments, but allows itself continually to be carried away by present passions” (354). Not only are those who are driven by the body viewed as weaker, but they also have no regard for morality. Applying these theories to a reading of Ana and Alisa leads to intriguing revelations about the heroines’ portrayals. Since their physical selves dominate

both heroines, they are ultimately posited as feeble: weak, ineffective, cowardly, and subdued. Furthermore, because Descartes describes those who cannot control their passions as lacking in the knowledge of good and evil, Ana and Alisa's dualistic natures paint them as diminished human beings under the sway of the body, and their lack of moral judgment casts them as almost childlike. They do not have the inner strength of their rational male counterparts that would lead them from harm and temptation.

Yet, not all hope is lost. Descartes promises "that even those who have the feeblest souls can acquire a very absolute dominion over all their passions if sufficient industry is applied in training and guiding them" (356). This last tenet is perhaps most offensive of all in considering Ana and Alisa through a Cartesian lens, because it supports the idea that women are too weak to control themselves and instead must be taught, presumably by a male, how to do so. In light of Descartes's proclamations, it is painfully evident that Ana and Alisa are not empowered and do not challenge the patriarchy; instead, they are relegated to the stereotypical status of submissive women due to their inability to reconcile their minds and bodies, which renders their souls "enslaved and unhappy" (354).

According to Descartes, this unhappiness is a product of the mind and body's opposition. Throughout "The Passions," it is clear that Descartes is fascinated with the notion of opposition. Certainly opposition frames his separation of the mind and body, but it continues as a motif for the majority of Descartes's theoretical understandings of what he deems as passions. In a letter to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia dated October 6, 1645, Descartes defines passions as "the thoughts which are thus aroused in the soul by cerebral impressions alone, without the concurrence of the will, and therefore without any

action of the soul itself” (178). It is noteworthy that Descartes identifies passions as “cerebral impressions” because he considers the brain to be of the body; therefore, passions are solely feelings of the body that are simply passed on to the soul. If the soul deliberates upon the passion and decides that something must come of it, then the passion becomes an action because it was processed by the soul. Yet, if the soul does not *actively* choose to act upon the passion, then the passion remains nothing more than a feeling of the body, which is not to be fully trusted: “Indeed in general the soul is pleased to feel passions arise in itself, no matter what they are, provided it remains in control of them” (177). It is only when the soul loses control of a passion that one may find himself/herself in a dangerous position, which is exactly what happens to Ana and Alisa. Since both heroines are unable to consciously control the intense sexual cravings of their bodies, they succumb to their passions over and over again, and thus submit to the male figure, the object of their lust. As a result, Ana and Alisa are endangered physically, through sexual violence; and mentally, through the internal struggle between satisfying their conflicting physical and mental selves. Indeed, of the six primary passions Descartes details in “The Passions,” it is desire that most characterizes the experiences of Ana and Alisa.

Desire is an area of intense fascination for Descartes, primarily because it is a passion with no distinct opposite, and it can be either good or bad. For the purpose of this analysis, I focus upon Descartes’s description of harmful desire. This form of desire is dangerous because it stems from the senses, which “[touch the soul] more forcibly than what is presented to it by reason, and that even though these first passions have usually less truth; so that of all the passions it is these which deceive the most, and against which

we should guard ourselves most carefully” (369). Furthermore, Descartes warns that desire “agitates the heart more violently than any of the other passions, and furnishes more spirits to the brain, which, passing from thence into the muscles, render all the senses more acute, and all the parts of the body more mobile” (376). Though Descartes earlier held that the body moves in accord with its impulses, this statement might also account for the body’s independent movements. Desire created by the senses causes the body to move in search of fulfillment, which is precisely what is exemplified in *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Seized by Love*, and may explain why Ana and Alisa orgasm after being beaten (Ana’s situation) or raped (Alisa’s case). Both women are so saturated with physical desire that nothing will stop their bodies from receiving sexual pleasure. While both women cry and struggle against the heroes, their mental turmoil is hushed once the male begins to sexually excite their bodies, and it certainly does not take long for their bodies to respond to the males’ touch.

Another difficulty that arises from desire is that, since it is the root of many other passions, it is possible that desire may become confused with them. For instance, Descartes argues that desire wrought from delight is often confused with love, which seems to be true for Ana and Alisa. Throughout the novels, both women confess love for their respective hero, all the while thinking about how much they dislike him. Moreover, the only “love” that is truly portrayed in both narratives happens solely between bodies, because it is very clear that the bodies of the heroines and the heroes *really* do love one another. Thus, perhaps these “love” stories would best be described as stories of physical desire conquering all, rather than stories asserting that love conquers all. Interestingly,

Descartes, too, realizes the potential this confused love has for narratives: “it is what provides the principal material for the writers of romances and for poets” (371).

The notion that passions may become entangled is another major area of concern for Descartes. Two sets of passions that many confuse are associating pain with sadness, and titillation with joy. Similar to the passion of desire, Descartes identifies the passions of pain and titillation with the senses; therefore, the cause for confusion resides in this association with the physical: “Thus the titillation of the senses is so nearly followed by joy, and pain by sadness, that the greater part of mankind does not distinguish the two. And yet they differ so much that pains may sometimes be suffered with joy, or pleasurable sensations received which cause displeasure” (373). The second confusion Descartes notes may account for the mixed feelings Ana and Alisa have for heroes Christian and Nikki. As noted previously, because both novels are full of “titillation,” the love the heroines feel for the heroes may simply be lust, rather than actual love. This theory is made more plausible due to the heroines’ vacillating attitudes toward the heroes; the dizzying fluctuations of the heroines’ sentiment may be explained by Descartes’s theory of confused emotions. Ana and Alisa do not actually love Christian or Nikki, but their bodies so desire the sexual pleasure derived from the males that they come to believe they love them.

Descartes provides another explanation for this tangled ideal of love in his letter to Chanut dated February 1, 1647. Descartes claims love must first be placed into either the category of rational/intellectual love or passionate love. Love of a rational/intellectual nature is most pure; it is the love that brings joy to the soul, and it has been carefully chosen by the soul as something that will be “fitting for itself” (208). Descartes asserts

this love “could exist in our soul even if it had no body” (209). However, he warns that because the soul is joined to the body, love may simply be a passion, which he argues is a “confused thought” (209). To clarify what he means by confusion, Descartes provides a metaphor: “Just as in thirst the sensation of the dryness of the throat is a confused thought which disposes to the desire for drink, but is not identical with that desire” (209). This “dryness” is similar to desire—it is what the body thinks it needs, not what the soul rationally understands it to need. In this type of love, “a mysterious heat is felt around the heart, and a great abundance of blood in the lungs, which makes us open our arms as if to embrace something, and this makes the soul join to itself in volition the object presented to it” (209). The physical symptoms Descartes describes are synonymous with desire and lust, whereas his descriptions of rational love reflect pure intellect and finding the soul’s true match. The latter is wise, rational, and good (all characteristics of the mind), while the former is emotional, subjective, and dangerous (all associated with the body); it is the “*love of concupiscence*, which is simply a very strong desire, founded on a love which is often weak” (211). This is the type of love experienced by Ana and Alisa, which further strengthens their connection to their bodies. Because both heroines are depicted as very physical beings, it is no surprise that the “love” they experience is merely a physical one; furthermore, the heroines are stripped of reason because, according to Descartes’s logic, rational love only loves that “which it judges to be fitting for itself” (208). Ana and Alisa both know, and state often, that their lovers are not good for them, but they do not leave because they are deceived by the “*love of concupiscence*.”

Descartes continues his exploration of mind/body love and concupiscence in another letter to Chanut, dating June 6, 1647. Having in the previous letter defined the

two types of love, Descartes in this letter warns Chanut about the dangers of a physical love. In proverbial fashion, Descartes mandates “a wise man will not altogether yield to such a passion without having considered the worth of the person to whom he feels thus drawn” (225). Again, this bit of advice illuminates the placement of the mind over the body; the mind is trustworthy, while the body is reckless. Descartes places so much faith in rationality that he advises Chanut “when these secret inclinations [attractions to another person] are caused by something in the mind and not by something in the body, I think they should always be followed” (225). This notion is especially important in relation to *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Seized by Love* because both heroines explicitly ignore the “inclinations” of their minds, which warn them away from the males. Perhaps if Ana and Alisa had taken Descartes’s advice, they would not have experienced sexual and physical abuse; yet, because of their undeniable association with the body, Ana and Alisa are not spared this fate.

While Descartes’s argument about confused passions is rooted in opposition, there is one passion he finds to have no opposition, and thus no confusion: wonder. According to Descartes, wonder is the primary passion because it “causes us to wonder and be surprised; and because that may happen before we in any way know whether this object is agreeable to us or is not so” (“Passions” 358). Therefore, wonder is the first passion because it is simply there, and no preset emotions or passions accompany it. Wonder has no opposite because if it did, it would not cause surprise, and thus, not be wondrous. Irigaray employs Descartes’s wonder as the theoretical framework to establish her explorations of sexual difference. Irigaray advocates that an ethics of sexual difference is mandatory to initiate equality between the sexes, and cites wonder as central

to that ethics because “wonder... beholds what it sees always for the first time, never taking hold of the other as its object. It does not try to seize, possess, or reduce this object, but leaves it subjective, still free” (13). As such, wonder is the only passion that allows both female and male to regard each other as simply *different*—nothing less, nothing more. Many critics, among them Rachel Jones, indicate that Irigaray’s choice of Descartes’s theory is shocking in relation to feminist theory, since the common assumption is that Descartes is inadvertently anti-feminist due to the mind/body split. However, Irigaray’s theories exemplify that applying certain facets of Cartesian philosophy to the modern era can illuminate and create new arguments. Though the exact tenets of Irigaray’s demand for a reinvention of female/male relations is not explicitly discussed in my analysis, I include her argument because it illustrates how Descartes’s theories may be applicable to certain subjects, even though Descartes does not discuss them. This practice serves as a justification for many of the assertions in my thesis, particularly since I accept Bordo’s assumption that the female is associated with the body.

Similarly, Jessica R. Johnston—editor of *The American Body in Context*, a collection of essays about the body—touches upon certain aspects of Cartesian dualism as she discusses a myriad of culturally relevant topics. In the introduction to the collection, Johnston poses questions that epitomize the mind/body duality present in *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Seized by Love*: “Where is the boundary between the ‘outside’ of you and the ‘inside’ of you? What does it mean when something or someone ‘gets inside’ of you? Does your body ever do things your mind doesn’t want it to? At times does your

body have a ‘mind of its own’? Who is that ‘you’ that is held responsible for the actions of your body?” (1).

One of the major body issues Johnston considers relates to Descartes’s concept of impulses. Though Johnston focuses more on the idea that we control what messages our bodies send through our constructed physical appearance (i.e., clothing choices, physique, etc.), her point is also applicable in regards to sex. Johnston asserts that “We are taught to read bodies as symbols displaying and revealing hidden ‘truths’ about the individual and his or her behaviors” (XVII). Though Johnston is discussing the idea that body types may signify certain meanings in society, this same idea is applicable to gender. The simple fact that some humans are female while others are male sends its own “message” to society, especially in these particular romance novels. Simply because the heroine is a woman, she is already perceived as weaker by the dominant male; conversely, simply because the hero is male, he is perceived as stronger than the heroine. Since both novels depict heroines enslaved by physical selves that “speak” for them, Johnston’s interpretation of bodies as “symbols” furthers the notion that Ana and Alisa’s uncontrollable physical responses to Christian and Nikki send messages of submission to them. This suggestion that bodies may “speak” for an individual is particularly important for this analysis because in Ana and Alisa’s situations, Christian and Nikki discredit the women’s actual spoken wishes (reflective of their thoughts/mental selves). Rather, the males only “listen” to the heroine’s physical selves, which further posits women *as* body, and body only.

The understanding of the body as its own entity, with no influence from the mind, is an important one. Regarding the body, Johnston recalls an evocative metaphor of

Descartes's: "Inherent within the mind/body dualism is the body-as-machine metaphor. The body-as-machine metaphor suggests the body is similar to a system of moving parts with an outside energy/power source. The spring in a clock, or the heat of a steam engine, or the combustion of fuel are all familiar metaphors to explain how the body works" (2). This metaphor, paraphrased by Johnston, frames the theoretical argument of Samantha Holland in her essay, "Descartes Goes to Hollywood: Mind, Body, and Gender in Contemporary Cyborg Cinema." Curiously, Holland's critique of the dystopian cyborg genre is very similar in nature to my own critique of *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Seized by Love*.

Holland applies Cartesian mind/body dualism to cyborg cinema to reveal implicit messages in the films that have been previously overlooked, just as I am doing in examining two romance narratives. Though cyborgs and romances are not often discussed in conjunction, there are surprising similarities between the two genres. In her article, Holland asserts that cyborgs, though human in physical appearance, are ultimately stripped of humanity due to their lack of a human mind; thus, Holland concludes these films "ostensibly work to (re)assert the Cartesian superiority of the 'mind' over the body" (13). In addition, Holland's analysis reveals the power those associated with the mind hold over those who are connected to the body. If Holland's theories about Descartes and cyborg cinema are applied to romance novels, the results are most troublesome. Since Ana and Alisa cannot escape their bodily chains, both heroines are stripped not only of power, but of humanity itself. As beings governed by their physical bodies, Ana and Alisa are missing that which, according to Holland, separates cyborgs from humans. Holland's observation is most disturbing and disruptive when one attempts a positive

feminist reading of the two novels. Although Ana and Alisa's humanity is never questioned or doubted explicitly, both women are certainly conquered by the males because of their uncontrollable sexual desire and attraction for the heroes. Thus, the heroines are again relegated to the status of body, and their identities as thinking subjects are eliminated, troubling their path to independence.

Additionally, Holland deconstructs the created gender roles of cyborgs to reveal that traditional feminine and masculine norms are reinforced in the genre. Holland claims, "The films I have looked at certainly try to (re)assert fairly radical forms of dualism, shoring up both humanness and masculinity against the postmodern fears of encroaching technology and femininity" (26). This observation is revealing because it establishes femininity as Other, which is precisely what these particular romance narratives do by pairing the female with body. The machine, the body, the female—all are framed as irrational, emotional, flighty subjects, in direct opposition to the rational, scientific, thinking human, mind, and male. Holland's research is interesting because it maintains the perceived gender implications of Descartes's theories. Even though Descartes never separated male from female, his separation of mind and body and the associations of each has fueled an enduring inequality.

While Holland and Johnston observe that the body is often presented as *thing* and the mind is indicative of self, Albert A. Johnstone champions the body as equally important as the mind. In his essay "The Bodily Nature of the Self or What Descartes Should Have Conceded Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia," Johnstone challenges Descartes's claim (as well as the popular Western belief) that it is the mind that defines a person, while the body is merely a conduit, a corporeal extension of the self. Johnstone

carefully builds his argument that the mind and body are equals working—not separately—but in conjunction, by presenting the inherent flaws in Descartes’s meticulously organized assertions: “The root of the problem is that an allegedly immaterial and incorporeal self nevertheless insists on identifying itself with corporeal affectivity, and that inasmuch as it does so, it cannot be an incorporeal thinking being” (35). One major contention Johnstone has with Descartes is his placement of the will and certain emotions (namely, anger and joy) with the mind; contrary to Descartes’s association of these emotions with the thinking self, Johnstone insists that these strong emotions are *physically* felt by the person expressing them. Regarding love, Johnstone asserts “To be in love is to have feelings of a certain sort, to act on them, to identify with their warmth and energy. If a tactile-kinesthetic body were merely something an incorporeal thinking subject had at its disposition, then the thinking subject would be divorced from the being who was in love. The appropriate description of the situation would be not that one was in love, but that one’s body was” (31). This particular notion—that one’s body could be in love—is very true for Ana and Alisa. Though both heroines do profess love for their respective hero, the love they first identify with is what Johnstone describes as a bodily love. Bodily love is felt so strongly by both women that it causes them to do and accept certain things and actions that they normally would not. Throughout both novels, Ana and Alisa express their hatred for Christian and Nikki, yet it is because of their intense physical desire for the males that they ignore the hatred they feel. As such, neither Ana nor Alisa are able to mentally overcome the emotions their bodies feel. For these women, their bodies are not mere conduits through which their thought finds expression, but their bodies *are* expression. Johnstone concludes, “If a body

was something one has rather than something one is, it would simply happen to be the case that one was conjoined to a body that was surprised, or excited, or uneasy. A pure, unthinking spirit would have at its disposal, as it were, a body charged with feeling, whether rage or terror, delight or despair, like a ship with engines throbbing and an immaterial pilot at the helm” (31). Johnstone’s argument is an interesting one because, though it still emphasizes that Ana and Alisa are bodies, it allows for them to be thinking subjects.

In light of the analyses of Johnston, Holland, and Johnstone, it is obvious that the body, rather than the mind, is a subject of great importance. These analyses suggest that the nature of the body is just as important a subject as that of the mind, and that it should not be discredited. As these scholars demonstrate and as I also detail, the body should no longer be dismissed as object because it is often equal to or more powerful than the mind within it (whether that power be positive or negative). However, though the body may certainly become its own agent, in the next chapter I explore the path of the body’s progression from inactive material to active, impulsive subject. In both novels, the heroes encourage the heroines’ journey down this path because they at first perceive the heroines as body and, in “awakening” their bodies, teach the heroines to accept and embrace their physical roles, while simultaneously encouraging them to silence their rationality.

CHAPTER III

CONQUERED BODIES

“Smile, love.... You’re supposed to bring me pleasure,” Nikki commands of Alisa after he sexually “awakens” her body (Johnson 118). Similarly, Christian promises Ana, “I will train you to please me” (James 221). It is apparent from these pronouncements that, though the heroines may benefit from their sexual experiences with the males, ultimately, it is the *males’* “pleasure” that is most important in the relationships that form between the primary characters. Because this important tenet is crucial for not only the “creation” of a dominant physical self in both Alisa and Ana, but also for insuring their submission to the males, I explore the foundations of the relationships between Nikki and Alisa in Johnson’s *Seized by Love*, and Ana and Christian in James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey*, to emphasize the early establishment of a dominant hero in the novels, as well as, subsequently, a submissive heroine. Additionally, following romance conventions, Alisa and Ana are depicted as primarily physical beings early in the plots through the many descriptions of their beauty, whereas Nikki and Christian are immediately identified with the mind due to their skills in politics and business. As such, the genre’s conventions of female characters, which reinforce Cartesian gender assumptions, hint at the dualism inherent within Alisa and Ana. However, because the heroes act as catalysts for the sexual (and thus, physical) “awakenings” of the heroines, they ultimately conquer the

females' bodies through teaching them about their sexuality; as such, the heroines' bodily impulses are manipulated by or reflective of the heroes' desires.

As most scholars note, the romance genre is founded upon convention: conventions of plots, themes, struggles, and characters. Romance narratives are so steeped in and shaped by tradition that there are lists defining criteria each novel must include in order to qualify as romance, most notably those identified by scholars Janice Radway and Pamela Regis. Since the genre is comprised of conventional norms or "codes" (as Radway names them), the characteristics of both heroes and heroines are often quite similar across the genre. According to Radway, who studied actual readers of romance texts to develop her "codes," romance heroes are powerful, well-respected by the community, successful, and experienced (130). Because of this portrayal, Radway argues, "in a fictional world that accords respect to men in general because of their strength, power, and ability to operate in the public realm, the romantic hero stands out as that world's most able representative and the essence of all that it values" (130). The complete power and dominance afforded male protagonists is responsible for the creation of the genre's ubiquitous alpha male. Romance author Jayne Ann Krentz stresses, "in the romance genre, the alpha male is the one that works best in fantasy. And the reason he works so well is because in a romance the hero must play two roles. He is not only the hero, he is also the villain" (108). Thus, the presence of a dominant male is an absolute necessity in the romance narrative because "the relationship between the hero and the heroine *is* the plot"; from that relationship arises conflict, often created by the heroine's response to the male's attempts at domination, and on this conflict the story progresses (108). Though the conflict I primarily concentrate on in this thesis is the internal struggle

within Alisa and Ana, it is also imperative to examine the external conflict to more fully understand the heroines because the relationship that develops between the hero and the heroine most profoundly affects her development.

The external conflict portrayed in both *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* centers on the alpha males, protagonists Nikki and Christian. In the opening scene of *Seized by Love*, young Russian noblemen, partaking in a two-week binge of alcohol and orgies, bask in an opulent hunting lodge owned by Prince Nikki Kuzan. Everyone present at the lodge—whether they be friend, servant, gypsy woman, or musician—is not only subservient to Nikki’s will, but also is fearful and careful of his “mercurial moods” (Johnson 1). Thus, he is immediately established as “master,” and his dangerous temperament and penchant for dominance are quickly revealed; after Nikki has gone to bed with gypsy “bed warmer” Tanya, he laments, “How can I force a woman as aroused as you?” (1, 5, 6); even so, the author offers a rather graphic episode of sexual violence as Nikki pursues his need for control. This early evidence of Nikki’s power acts as a prelude to the relationship he forms with Alisa. While contemplating his sexual experiences with Alisa, Nikki realizes, “he felt most the need for reaffirmation of his dominant role in their relationship, a role most gratifying when she was pleading for him to grant her release in exquisite pleasure” (96). However, his controlling disposition is not limited to the bedroom. Throughout the novel, Nikki forces Alisa to dress, eat, and drink in the manner he prefers. He ties her up when she struggles against him, and he locks her away in a bedroom for over a month when she threatens to leave him. While this level of control is disturbing, it is “justified” within the genre, scholars argue, because romance codes demand this type of conflict. According to Krentz,

The hero in a romance is the most important challenge the heroine must face and conquer. The hero is her real problem, not whatever trendy issue or daring adventure is also going on in the subplot. In some way, shape, or form, in some manner either real or perceived on the heroine's part, the hero must be a source of emotional and, yes, sometimes physical risk. He must present a genuine threat. (108)

Krentz's assertion that a romance hero must be threatening is an interesting concept because it hints at a necessary power imbalance between hero and heroine. Although Krentz argues that the heroine ultimately "conquers" the hero, thus overcoming the "threat," this is not necessarily true for Alisa. At the end of the novel—once Nikki finally confesses his love for Alisa—she asks him to remain faithful to her, to which he responds "I will forswear one day at a time" (266). Nikki's answer to Alisa's question is proof that she has not fully conquered him. She has, at best, a hope that he will compromise with her. Because Nikki cannot promise loyalty to Alisa, he is still depicted as the dominant force in their relationship.

Similar to Nikki, Christian, the protagonist of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, is controlling, brooding, and powerful. While Nikki is a prince, Christian is a successful business tycoon. Even so, he is also surrounded by people who are subservient to his will. Upon first meeting Ana during an interview she is conducting for her university's newspaper, Christian reveals that "immense power is acquired by assuring yourself in your secret reveries that you were born to control things" (James 10). Though Christian is discussing his business empire when he makes this statement, his attitude foreshadows what is to come in his relationship with Ana. As more of Christian's character is revealed, his

demand for control, specifically of Ana, becomes obsessive. Christian, too, dictates what food, drink, and clothing Ana will have, and quickly establishes her role as the submissive in their very controlled relationship. Ana and Christian's relationship superficially differs from that between Alisa and Nikki because the former is built upon the conventions of BDSM, a lifestyle that plays a central role in the novel. Still, just as Nikki dominates Alisa beyond the bedroom, Christian's role as dominant is not merely left in the "Red Room of Pain" where he explores his sexual desires, but it permeates his entire relationship with Ana, leaving her no role to play but the submissive in all areas of their relationship, thus fulfilling Frantz's assertion that BDSM "becomes who [the participants] are" (48). The resulting imbalance of power between Ana and Christian gives rise to Ana's struggle to reconcile her mind and body. Though Ana is often conflicted about Christian's power over her, justified by the codes of BDSM and delineated in their contractual agreement detailing each aspect of their relationship, she ultimately submits to his will because she sympathizes with him and wants to learn more about his tortured past.

The notion of a tortured past that has created the current disposition of the hero is an interesting thread in both novels. What is truly revealing in both *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* is that it is a dominant, older female who is blamed for each hero's attitudes towards love, women, and sex. In *Seized by Love*, after a tempestuous love affair with a married woman who broke Nikki's heart upon her refusal to leave her husband for him, "women became merely an amusement, a convenient receptacle for his passions when the need came over him, or else a frivolous pursuit to idle away the measured tedium" (Johnson 27). Nikki's misogynistic view of women identifies them as bodies.

Women are not companions or partners; instead, they are “receptacles,” created to receive man’s pleasure. Unfortunately for Alisa, she conforms to this characterization as her body begins to dictate her actions. Similarly, an older female manipulates Christian at a young age. Mrs. Robinson, as Ana refers to her, is responsible for Christian’s foray into the world of BDSM; she seduced him when he was fifteen and coerced him into being her submissive (James 154). Ana accuses Mrs. Robinson of sexually abusing Christian and wonders if he would have become the man he is had he never met her. However, although Ana criticizes Mrs. Robinson’s use of Christian, he credits her for saving him from going “the way of [his] birth mother,” a life filled with drugs and prostitution (432). Though Christian repeatedly stresses this point to Ana, she still hates Mrs. Robinson because she believes Christian would not have developed his sexual tastes for domination had he not suffered from Mrs. Robinson’s influences. Thus, while both Nikki and Christian are portrayed as authoritative creatures incapable of love, blame is not finally settled on them; rather a woman is blamed for the creation of an abusive, powerful male. This thread in both novels not only excuses the heroes, but it evokes sympathy for them from the current victims of their abuse, and from readers.

Ana and Alisa’s ability to sympathize with their abuser is interesting since both women fulfill the usual codes of romantic heroines. Regis observes that “heroines in twentieth century novels are not wispy, ephemeral girls sitting around waiting for the hero so that their lives can begin. They are intelligent and strong” (206). Thus, one might expect that “intelligent and strong” heroines would not become resigned to their abusive situations. However, their submission is not only a submission to the dominant hero, but it is a submission to their own bodies, which force them to stay with the heroes because

of the intense sexual cravings both heroines experience for the heroes. Because the heroines' bodies bind them as submissive, they fulfill Bordo's assertion that women, as bodies, "can be understood and controlled" by the objective male (108). Additionally, the heroes' control is also reinforced through the heroes' positive verbal affirmations of "good girl"; throughout both narratives, Nikki and Christian use this phrase to encourage Alisa and Ana's submission in the bedroom. Commanding Alisa to remove her gown, Nikki states "Now, my dear, acquiesce like a good girl and service me in the way of mistresses" (Johnson 156). Similarly, once Ana acquiesces to Christian's plea that she allow him to tie her up, he tells her "Good girl" (James 138). Not only does this phrase suggest that the heroes are talking to children, but it also stresses to the heroines that their submission to the males is good, suggesting that giving the males control is the right thing to do.

Control is also established through Ana and Alisa's fulfillment of another romance code, virginity, which continues the Cartesian assumption that women are primarily identified as bodies. Within the genre, a virgin heroine is extremely important; Krentz maintains that

[Virginity] has everything to do with creating a metaphor for the qualities of female power, honor, generosity, and courage with which the heroine is imbued. Virginity has been the stuff of legends, of stories of kings and queens, bloody wars and patched-up alliances, territorial feuds and historical consequence since the dawn of time. There is an heroic quality about a woman's virginity that is truly powerful when used to its fullest extent in fiction. (111)

While validating the role of virginity in romance narratives, Krentz also implies that woman's "power" comes from the sexual status of her body; a heroine is only honorable, generous, and brave when virginal, not as an intellectual. Focused under a Cartesian lens, Krentz's assertion indicates that woman's power is derived from controlling that which she cannot really control (her body), which essentially separates woman from herself, since Descartes argues the self is a thinking being entirely independent from the physical. Additionally, Krentz explains that "In a romance novel, the heroines put everything on the line and they win. Virginity is symbolic of the high stakes involved" (112). Yet, how can these heroines "win" simply by having sex with the hero? Again, these claims support the theories of Bordo, Harth, and Lloyd that women cannot escape their inextricable web of body.

The nature of virginity in both novels, though, differs from traditional norms of romance narratives. Alisa, a married woman, is not a virgin when she meets Nikki. However, she has never found satisfaction or happiness in her marital bed because of her debauched husband's cruel sexual perversions. Prior to meeting Nikki, Alisa's experiences with sex include her husband Mr. Forseus's "bizarre aberrations," "sadistic demands," and "religious fanaticism (often complementary to sexual deviation)" (Johnson 72). Therefore, Alisa is a virgin to what are usually understood as "normal" sexual experiences and pleasures; she is also "unschooled and innocent in receiving kindly overtures from a man playing the game of seduction" (21). Indeed, in spite of her literal sexual status, Nikki observes that she is "tight as a virgin," and confides with his friends, "Mrs. Forseus is not a common slut. She is surprisingly, in spite of having married that peasant-merchant Forseus, of gentle birth and upbringing. She's also a

lovely, skitterish young filly unused to the bridle, so I must gentle her slowly before she'll be tame enough to ride” (47, 37). The implications of the latter statement reinforce Nikki's perceptions of woman as a thing to possess. Furthermore, echoing Krentz's assertions about the power of the virginal, Nikki finds he “feel[s] some strange and remarkable attraction to the chit, an attraction removed from his usual lust. Alisa was virtuous, he reflected; a previously unassailable virtue about to be conquered. That was what was giving him such delicious pleasure” (43). Confused by his growing sentiments for Alisa, Nikki blames the unwelcome feeling on her intoxicating virtue, satisfied with the thought that once he “conquers” her, she will be the same as any other woman he has had, suggesting that a woman is only capable of captivating a man because of her sexual innocence, which demands to be manipulated. Alisa is, in other words, virginal if not truly a virgin.

Unlike Alisa, Ana is a virgin in all senses of the word; she has barely even kissed a man. In a genre that celebrates virginity, it is Christian's reaction to Ana's virginity that differs from the traditional romantic plot. After Ana reveals her virginity to Christian, he “closes his eyes and looks to be counting to ten. When he opens them again, he's angry, glaring at me. ‘Why the fuck didn't you tell me?’ he growls” (James 108). Ana's virginity immediately places her as *other* in Christian's world of BDSM, and her admission makes her feel guilty. Though initially angered by Ana's revelation, Christian soon decides to “rectify the situation” (110). Suddenly, Ana's virginity is a problem that must be handled; Christian must conquer her body before he can fully convince her to be a participant in his sexual exploits: “I really want to make love to you. Please, come to bed with me. I want our arrangement to work, but you really need to have some idea what

you're getting yourself into. We can start your training tonight—with the basics. This doesn't mean I've come over all hearts and flowers; it's a means to an end, but one that I want, and hopefully you do, too" (110). Christian's proposal, or "means to an end," reflect his intentions with Ana; their relationship is purely physical, not romantic, and her body must be trained before he can really do what he wants with it: as Christian states, "I will train you to please me" (221). Ana, similar to Alisa, presents a tempting challenge for the alpha male; the inexperience of both heroines also presents an opportunity for the heroes to assert a territorial claim on the women's bodies, as well as a chance to mold the heroines into sexual objects specifically constructed and trained to conform to the males' wishes.

Since the heroines are sexually inexperienced, the males serve as a catalyst for their sexual awakening, teaching them about their own bodies and creating an erotic dependency in the females. Because Ana and Alisa begin to crave sex after their newly discovered sexual pleasure, their physical desires take precedence over all else, including their own safety. Such erotic dependency allows the heroes to seize control of the heroines' sexuality (thus, bodies), which both Nikki and Christian take full advantage of, from birth control to masturbation. For instance, because they have been having sex frequently, Alisa expresses concern to Nikki that perhaps they should be taking "precautions," to which he responds "French letters? Condoms? They spoil the pleasure; I never use them.' He reached out to touch her hair. 'You wouldn't like them, my love'" (Johnson 67). Nikki's abrupt dismissal of Alisa's suggestion silences her because, with very little previous sexual experience, she trusts his answer that she would not like condoms. Later in the novel, when Alisa does indeed become pregnant, Nikki is joyous

because he “intend[s] to keep [Alisa] pregnant, at my side, populating this glorious wilderness” (206). Again, this assertion gives Nikki full control of Alisa’s body, with little to no resistance from her.

Unlike Nikki, Christian is adamant that Ana immediately obtain a prescription for birth control. In fact, it is an item in their contractual agreement: “The Submissive will ensure that she procures oral contraception and ensure that she takes it as and when prescribed to prevent any pregnancy” (James 170). Not only does Christian demand Ana start taking birth control, but he insists upon choosing her gynecologist. Such explicit control of Ana’s body is also evident in Christian’s mandate that Ana not masturbate: “‘And I don’t want you touching yourself, either.’ *What?* Ah yes, the no masturbation clause. ‘Out of curiosity...why?’ ‘Because I want all your pleasure’” (223). Christian’s command strengthens the erotic dependency Ana develops because she is banned from all other sexual outlets; thus, her sexual needs may only be met by Christian, which reinforces his control over her body.

This level of heightened sexual control fuels the mind/body split for both Ana and Alisa, and allows for sexual violence to occur. Both Nikki and Christian enforce their dominance over Alisa and Ana by wielding sex as a punishment, dictating that neither heroine orgasm during certain sexual situations. Enraged because Ana has broken one of his many rules, Christian forcefully tells her “This [sex] will be quick, and it’s for me, not you. Do you understand? Don’t come, or I will spank you” (James 349). Similarly, after Alisa has angered Nikki, he brings her to the brink of orgasm before demanding her to “ask” him for release; yet, not only does he command her to beg, but insists he will only continue if Alisa tells him to “fuck” her (Johnson 158). Before complying, Alisa feels

“empty and alone” after Nikki withdraws from her, echoing Ana’s “ach[e] and hung[er]” once Christian denies her orgasm (Johnson 158, James 350). These situations illuminate an abuse that is just as psychological as it is physical; both women are so controlled by the men that their rational, thinking selves continue to diminish, which forges a reconciliation of and justification for the physical abuse both heroines experience.

Physical abuse and sexual violence is not just a trend in *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but it is present within many romance narratives. Radway observes the pattern of violence within the romance genre through her analysis of several novels, concluding that

[Romance heroes] tend to individuate and define themselves in explicit opposition to anything female. If this does not result in misogyny or in its expression by violence against women, it does end at least in the repression of traits and emotional tendencies typically identified with them. Therefore, even men who are not brutal tend to relate to women on a relatively superficial emotional level just as they define them principally as sexual creatures because their physiological characteristics are the most obvious mark of their difference from men. (140)

Radway’s conclusion is reminiscent of the grounds of sexual difference Irigaray discusses in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. It is interesting that Irigaray’s hopes for sexual difference are so reversed in romance narratives; rather than romance novels relying upon sexual difference to create Descartes’s notion of wonder, and thus respect, Radway accentuates that in the genre it is this difference that encourages the hero to be violent and oppressive. It is such sexual difference that may account for the misogynistic

views of Nikki, and to some extent, Christian. After Alisa expresses her desire to find employment because she is too proud to accept Nikki's offer to make her his permanent mistress, Nikki thinks "Woman's pride? Sweet Jesus! Their pride was between their legs!" (Johnson 73). Yet again, it is painfully obvious that Nikki only views Alisa as a body—not a thinking, rational human being, but merely a physical receptacle, a thing to be "controlled"—simply because she is a woman.

Alisa's estranged husband, who is clearly the villain in *Seized by Love*, undoubtedly shares this sentiment. Mr. Forseus "want[s] Alisa as a collector might want a fine painting, in order to possess it. She was a showpiece, another possession to be flaunted and displayed as further indication of his wealth, but not valued more highly than any other representation of his fortune, no more than his blooded stallion or his antique carpets, or his gun collection" (77). In addition to these very misogynistic views, Forseus is portrayed as a sadistic, malevolent madman who is "astonished to discover that beating her [Alisa] had stimulated him sexually" (77). This attitude, clearly meant to shock and anger readers of Johnson's novel (since the perversion comes from the villain of the novel), is the premise of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, where this very type of sexual violence is celebrated. Across a span of thirty years, it is rather interesting to see this reversal. Throughout the novel, Christian describes the satisfaction he receives in being physically abusive, in an attempt to explain for Ana why he insists upon hitting her: "I like the control it gives me, Anastasia. I want you to behave in a particular way, and if you don't, I shall punish you, and you will learn to behave the way I desire. I enjoy punishing you" (James 287). Christian's desire to punish Ana when she "misbehaves" (easily accomplished since Ana is spanked for rolling her eyes and for not addressing

Christian as ‘Sir’ on separate occasions) is another method by which he manipulates her body to conform to his desires. Christian uses Ana’s body as a tool to “teach” her a lesson, which is also how Forseus uses abuse. After realizing that Alisa has been disappearing during the afternoon, he ties her up in his barn and beats her with a rope (Johnson 78). The perceived differences of this form of physical abuse are interesting, indeed; without the label of BDSM, Forseus’s punishment is abhorrent, but because Christian quickly engages in sex after beating Ana, she accepts his abuse. Christian sexually satisfies Ana in an effort to convince her that her body enjoys being beaten, and with the conflicting physical sensations, Ana begins to trust Christian’s manipulations. Thus, he encourages her to distrust her own hesitations, which is the ultimate form of control.

After observing the males’ conquering of the heroines’ bodies at the expense of their pride, dignity, and mind, it is difficult to understand a positive reading of either novel, and even more difficult to justify the heroes’ horrific actions. It seems that Descartes, too, would agree, for he writes Chanut, “Love, however disordered, has always goodness for its object, and so it seems that it cannot so corrupt our morals as hatred whose only object is evil” (216). Since Nikki and Christian seek pleasure and “good” at the expense of the heroines’ wishes, it seems that these romances are not romantic at all, at least not for Ana and Alisa. The heroes’ casting of the heroines as beings valued only for their bodies introduces and establishes the tone for the entirety of both works: the female is merely a body; she is controlled by it, enslaved by its whims, its dictates, and the perceptions it gives to the conquering hero. It is this enslavement, this

complete separation of mind and body, that leads to the acceptance of sexual violence and “corrupted morals” by the heroines.

CHAPTER IV

SEIZED BY BODY: CARTESIAN DUALISM IN SUSAN JOHNSON'S *SEIZED BY LOVE*

Imagine that you awaken one morning to discover that everything around you—the room, the people, the bed you are lying in—is not real. They are all illusions. Perhaps, too, this realization of an illusive reality is not yours, but arises because someone or something has allowed you this understanding. Your life and your experiences are no longer your own; they are a creation of the ultimate deceiver, an “evil genius” who sets “traps for [your] credulity” (Descartes, *Meditations* 148). According to Descartes, this disturbing version of reality is a real possibility, and it is this fantastic scenario that famously inspired his skepticism. For Descartes, this notion of an “evil genius” is a product of dreams; Descartes’s fascination with dreams and struggle with nightmares led him to question the nature of reality and, as Bordo suggests, fueled his objectification of the mind, as well as his subsequent distrust of nature and the body. However, another reading of this “evil genius” theory, unaccounted for by Descartes or Bordo, is that the entity controlling you is merely another facet of your self. For Johnson’s heroine, Alisa, this is true. The “evil genius” controlling her is not some malevolent outsider, as Descartes posits, but her own body. It is this conflict that leads to Alisa’s awakening, not *from* a nightmare but rather *to* one. Because of the powerful influence her “evil genius”

body has upon her mind, Alisa's nightmarish reality steadily worsens as it causes her to question her identity and her complicity in the abuses meted [out by](#) the hero, Nikki. Subsequently, this dualism will also help her to reconfigure her identity to fulfill the patriarchy's dictates for women, simultaneously allowing for both the acceptance and dismissal of sexual violence.

To successfully illustrate how Alisa's duality negatively affects her, it is necessary to focus first on the separation (and opposition) itself. The presence of a body separate from Alisa's mind is first evident during Alisa and Nikki's initial sexual experience, which I discuss at length because it foreshadows and establishes a framework for what is to happen within Alisa throughout the remainder of the novel. However, the circumstances surrounding this first encounter are a little odd and need explication for the implications of the experience to be fully realized. Previous to this encounter, Nikki's friends convince him to enter into a wager with them, betting that he cannot seduce Alisa. Determined to win the challenge, Nikki "courts" Alisa twice before the seduction, and it is during their third meeting that he succeeds, after lengthy conversation and "the help of food, champagne, and improving weather" (Johnson 45). Alisa is at first "frightened" by the realization of what is about to occur:

'No, no,' she whispered in fright and began to get up. Ignoring her words, he reached out, caught her shoulders, and pulled her toward him. He knew she would now either freeze in his arms or respond to him. She half opened her mouth and bent her head back; her breath came unevenly, her body trembled under the pressure of his hands. As he kissed her lips tenderly, her arms lifted around his shoulders, her fingertips brushed the

soft hair on his neck, lightly, tentatively; she was quivering like a frightened animal. Almost immediately the enormity of her acquiescence washed over her, and she attempted to break away. (45)

What is first striking about this passage is that Nikki “ignores” her words of resistance and determines her submission by her physical response, a perspective that establishes the tone not only for the rest of the scene, but also for the relationship that [will](#) develop between the two characters. From this moment, Nikki [consistently](#) ignores Alisa’s verbal protestations and complaints, instead only “listening” to her physical responses. As such, Alisa’s body is immediately understood by both Nikki and the reader to be more important than her mind.

However, it is not Nikki’s perception of Alisa’s body that reveals the distinction between her mind and body; rather it is perceived, though subtly, in the language of the passage. Johnson does not write that Alisa “lifted” her arms, or that she “moved her fingertips”; they move as if of their own accord. Had Johnson described the movements [with](#) Alisa as the subject, it would [suggest that](#) Alisa consciously chose to do these things. Instead, the passage [portrays](#) that Alisa has no control over these movements, a suggestion reinforced by her “attempt to break away” after she realizes her body’s impulses to submit. Yet, her attempts are feeble because, though she may mentally resist Nikki’s seduction, her body responds, guided by its “wakening desires” (46). Once Alisa’s tentative acquiescence is established, her body continues to distance itself from her mind: “Soon the last vestiges of Alisa’s guilt and fear were swept away before the fury of the untrammelled passion Nikki had adroitly provoked in her newly awakened body, and with a deep, drawn sigh, she lifted her hips to draw him in more deeply” (48).

It is now twice that Alisa's body has been described as "awakened" or "wakening," implying that a new self that has previously lain dormant is emerging. This 'new' self, a bodily self, is fully wakened as "[Alisa] abandon[s] herself to the full glory of desire" (49).

After this abandonment, the separation of and opposition between Alisa's mind and body becomes more explicit. Once Nikki and Alisa 'finish' (twice), their "paradise for the senses" is disrupted by the arrival of Nikki's friends, who have been hiding in order to watch Nikki and Alisa engage physically (52). As soon as they reveal themselves, Nikki, as expected, immediately reacts to their presence. However, Alisa, "caressed almost into insensibility," is too sated to realize two men are looking at her naked body while talking with Nikki (52). Alisa, now completely identifying with (or, even overcome by) her body, is so far removed from her conscious, thinking self that she has temporarily lost the ability to acknowledge, much less process, the scene around her. Once she is aware of Nikki's friends, even the narrator comments that she was "*at last* fully conscious of the scene and its spectators" (emphasis added) (53). This is a crucial moment because it demonstrates, as well as foreshadows, how deeply rooted within her body is Alisa's identity; her connection to body is so powerful that it affects her conscious state, characterizing Bordo's claim that "bodily response obscures objectivity, [and] feeling for nature muddies the clear lake of the mind" (108). However, once Alisa "awakens" to the scene, she responds accordingly by sending Nikki away, and in a very Cartesian internal moment, blames not Nikki and his friends for her humiliation, but herself, or rather her physical self: "She wasn't ashamed of the men seeing her unclothed, she could survive that; she was ashamed for wanting Nikki so, for willingly giving her

body to him; he hadn't had to force her, she had wanted him. And she wept for that capitulation, for her loss of will" (Johnson 55). In crying "for her loss of will," Alisa makes evident the distinction between her mind and body. She realizes that she, as mind, has lost control over some facet of herself, and this realization is frightening.

Furthermore, the narrator notes that Alisa realizes, "Now, the one time she ignored reason, negated logic, passionately made a daring, bold grasp for momentary happiness, she'd been utterly shamed and humiliated" (56). Again, the separation of mind and body is distinct, perhaps even more so, because, in thinking about her lack of "reason" and "logic," Alisa echoes Descartes's justification for dualism. Because the body is unable to rationalize, according to Descartes, it is 'other' than the mind. In this moment, Alisa implies this same notion.

Similarly, on three separate occasions, Alisa's responses to Nikki are revealed as conflicted: "She always succumbed to his consummate skill and experience, her senses betrayed by the exquisite torture of his touch"; "Alisa couldn't help herself as a press of confusing emotions smothered her"; and "confused emotions cours[ed] through her" (148, 248, 63). These three acknowledgments of some type of "confused" or "betrayed" sense or emotions recall Descartes's warning in "The Passions" and in his letters to Chanut about the dangers of misinterpreting a passion. As I noted in Chapter Two, Descartes argues these types of passions are dangerous, a sentiment he also shares in *The Meditations*: "senses are deceptive, and it is wiser not to trust entirely to any thing by which we have once been deceived" (145). Alisa's confusions result from her mind/body duality because, though Nikki has deceived her multiple times, she still claims to love him. However, since it is clear from Alisa's internal conflicts about the abuses she

endures that it is really only her body that loves Nikki, Alisa is most certainly misinterpreting her emotions or passions. Thus, what Alisa believes to be “love” is more likely only desire: “How could she love a man who only used women, who ridiculed and railed against clever women, who spoke of setting up a nursery someday with a compliant young chit. How could she love him? Had she lost all reason?” (202). This is a question Alisa continually asks herself because, when she logically considers Nikki and his actions, she realizes how strongly she dislikes him; it is only when she is physically engaged with him that she thinks she loves him since her body always responds positively to his advances.

As the narrative progresses, so too does Alisa’s growing connection to the body. With an increase in sexual activity, Alisa’s body becomes more and more dominant, and her mind rapidly diminishes. She loves Nikki “incoherently, as again and again he wakened her body for the first time, as if in a rebirth” (96). Alisa is “lost to the world in his arms, oblivious of right or wrong, or duty or conscience” (64). As such, Alisa fulfills Bordo’s assertion that “As body, according to Descartes, we are completely reactive and nondiscriminative. Because the body is after all, *res extensa*, a network of automatic responses to the environment around it and processes occurring within it, as infants ‘swamped’ by the body we are unable to make the most basic distinctions—e.g., between an inner occurrence and an external event” (56). Thus, as body, Alisa no longer cares about Nikki’s wrongdoings or abuse, as long as he is able to produce a powerful and pleasurable physical response from her. She may be angry with him, but as soon as he stimulates her sexually, all is forgiven and all distinctions of right and wrong are lost.

Accordingly, though Alisa ultimately blurs distinction where Nikki is concerned, it is her distinction as body that sets her apart from Nikki. [In a broader sense](#), it is also her status as woman that designates her as body, and conversely, it is Nikki's status as male that associates him with mind. Indeed, Bordo asserts, "The association of cognitive style with gender is in itself nothing new. We find it in ancient mythology, in archetypal psychology, in philosophical and scientific writings, and in a host of enduring popular stereotypes about men and women (for example, that women are more 'intuitive,' men are more 'logical,' etc.)" (113). As I previously discussed in Chapter One, because the female has historically been associated with the natural world and the body, there is no place left for the male but the mind. It is this concept that prompted Bordo's assertion, "By Descartes's brilliant stroke, nature became *defined* by its lack of affiliation with divinity and spirit. All that which is God-like or spiritual—freedom, will, and sentience—belong entirely and exclusively to *res cogitans*. All else—the earth, the heavens, animals, the human body—is merely mechanically interacting matter" (102). As such, it is mind/body dualism that posits the female as 'other'—as, potentially and dangerously, "merely mechanically interacting matter."

While Alisa is associated with the body, and celebrated as body by Nikki, he also disregards her because of it: "Very clever of her; the oldest *female* ploy, when all else fails, use your body" (emphasis added) (Johnson 212). This [misogynism](#) separates Nikki from Alisa because, as mind, Nikki would *certainly* never stoop so low as to use his body for personal gain since true men need only rely upon their logic and wits to succeed. The body is woman's place. It is what marks her as different from man. Rather than positively echoing Irigaray's call for an "ethics of sexual difference," Nikki reinforces Mary

Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth's observation that "scientific accounts of feminine sexuality, even as they emphasize difference, frequently attempt to assimilate femininity to masculinity, making women a subcategory of men, or feminine desire a reflection of masculinity" (8). Accordingly, Nikki views Alisa's sexual difference as something less than himself, and since Alisa is so strongly identified as body (which is the location of her difference from Nikki), this dismissal is easily accepted. Because of Alisa's inextricable connection with her body, strengthened because she is female, she will always be identified as 'other' to Nikki. As Bordo explains,

‘She’ is *Other*. And ‘otherness’ itself becomes dreadful—particularly the otherness of the female, whose powers have always been mysterious to men, and evocative of the mystery of existence itself. Like the infinite universe, which threatens to swallow the individual ‘like a speck,’ the female, with her strange rhythms, long acknowledged to have their chief affinities with the rhythms of the natural (now alien) world, becomes a reminder of how much lies outside the grasp of men. (111)

If, as Bordo suggests, Descartes has moved away from nature to objectivity, then it is only natural to assume that men must take control over that which they have deemed as essentially female, just as they have “conquered” nature through science. This is certainly the situation in *Seized by Love*; Nikki must establish control over Alisa to [dominate](#) that which he cannot understand: femininity. In order to establish this control, Nikki uses sex; therefore, serious problems arise for Alisa, as a body addicted to sexual fulfillment, because she loses the ability to escape Nikki.

There are two major episodes in the narrative during which Nikki physically endangers Alisa. It is worth noting that, because of her identification as body, Alisa ultimately welcomes both of these situations. Nikki understands the reactions Alisa's body has to his touch, and he applies this knowledge to manipulate her. There is one particular moment in the novel that matches the definition of 'rape'; yet, although Alisa is unwilling, she still responds to Nikki's flesh. During this particular scene, Nikki tells Alisa "[you] will serve me, gladly or no" (Johnson 155). She still steadfastly refuses because she knows that Nikki has just been with another woman. He becomes "savage" and forceful; he pins Alisa down to the bed and presses his mouth to hers (156). Regardless of her refusal, Nikki's kisses begin to "destroy thought or opposition" (157). Alisa, as body, becomes a slave to its desires as "a familiar heat insinuated itself deep within her, a slow, steady throbbing desire, and soon she no longer wished to struggle, she ached for him, longed to embrace him" (157). This change is solely attributed to the body; Alisa has consented to Nikki's force physically, not mentally. Her body is unaware that Nikki is overpowering her mental self because it only craves pleasure and does not discern whether that pleasure comes with consent.

Furthermore, what is truly disturbing about this account (beyond the fact that it is essentially rape), is the manner in which Nikki psychologically manipulates Alisa. After Alisa's body begins to succumb to Nikki's advances, he refuses to penetrate her unless she begs him. Alisa's initial plan of withholding sex from Nikki has backfired, and because her body is, at this point, "throbbing" and aching for Nikki, she does beg him (158). Not only does she ask Nikki to "fuck" her (his word choice, not Alisa's, which further humiliates her), but she also, as Nikki "tease[s] her damp, soft crevice," agrees

with him that it does not matter if he sleeps with other women (158). Alisa's body betrays her and forces her (in a sense) to make statements that do not reflect her inner thoughts and wishes. These statements, though they are consciously spoken, are solely of the body, evoking Descartes's notion of the body's 'impulses,' because they are not a reflection of Alisa's mental, thinking self. Alisa's body is now "thinking" for her, and as her body has proved to be the more dominant force, her words must mirror its will. The encounter ends with Alisa sobbing and "mortified by her body's traitorous desires" (159). Surprisingly, Radway discovers situations similar to Alisa's to be a typical feature of the romance genre:

More often than not, she is both bewildered by her reaction [to rape] and appalled that she cannot control her body as successfully as she can control her mind. She continues to hate the hero for his mistreatment of her although it is quite clear to the reader what the heroine takes to be hatred is, in fact, disappointment that the man she has fallen in love in with has not treated her as the precious beloved she would like to be. (143)

It is interesting that a separation between the heroine's mind and body appears to be a common factor in instances of rapes portrayed in romance novels, and is a notion that I will address fully in my conclusion. However, what I want to focus on for this discussion is the idea of hate and disappointment since these feelings may be another case of "confused" passions.

The second situation of Alisa's endangerment is a prime example of Radway's assertion that heroines mistake hatred for disappointment. Angry with Alisa for attempting to defy him, Nikki locks her in a bedroom in order to break her will; in her

“prison,” Alisa is forced to wear only negligees, allowed to eat only if she does exactly as Nikki says, and is granted visiting hours with her young daughter only for good behavior (187-94). As would be expected, Alisa is furious with these living conditions, and adamantly swears she “hates” Nikki (197). Once Nikki realizes that Alisa’s stubbornness cannot be mastered, he finally grants her freedom. However, though this has been Alisa’s wish up until this point, she chooses to stay. Furthermore, she chooses to stay because of Nikki’s “tenderness in making love” (202). Alisa’s body, rather than her rational, thinking self, makes this important decision to stay with the man who has abducted her, raped her, and held her in captivity. However, these violent instances are casually ignored because Alisa “would do anything to lie with him, to have him near her” (205). Even so, after she convinces Nikki that she wants to stay with him (by “chaining him to her with bonds of warm flesh,” of course), she “crie[s] for the loss of her will” (204-205). This phrase should sound familiar because it is the exact sentiment Alisa experiences after her first sexual encounter with Nikki. It is clear, in both scenes, that Alisa understands the enormity of her submission, but she is unable to resist. Furthermore, if as I suggested in the previous chapter Nikki has indeed conquered Alisa’s body, then it is clear her body’s whims and desires favor Nikki. Her physical desires, and subsequent erotic dependency, are too strong for her mind to combat. Descartes, too, realizes the potentially dangerous effects of desire on the body: “I finally notice this peculiarity about desire, that it agitates the heart more violently than any of the other passions, and furnishes more spirits to the brain, which passing from thence into the muscles, render all the senses more acute, and all the parts of the body more mobile” (“Passions” 376). Since Descartes asserts that desire is more likely to influence the body into movement, it is evident that Alisa is solely

performing as body. Because of this decision to stay with Nikki, Alisa's reasoning and objectivity are flawed. She no longer functions as a thinking human being; rather, her decisions and thought-processes are completely subjective because she undermines her own will for bodily pleasure.

Since the Cartesian split inherent within Alisa destroys her will, she is forced to question her identity. Suddenly, her body is "robotic" in its ability to act without thought or consent from her mind; this realization that her body is in control leads to a fragmentation of self. Because of this self doubt and the weakening effect it has, Alisa is ultimately manipulated to accept the roles Nikki accords her: "plaything" and "mother" (Johnson 109). Since the beginning of the novel, Nikki's impressions of women are pejorative: "For Nikki, a woman's dignity, her pride, were at best nebulous, and more aptly much overrated. In his experience women almost universally opted for security rather than independence. Rich or poor, highborn or low, they were all the same to him" (73). Furthermore, after Alisa declines Nikki's offer to become his permanent mistress, he thinks, "Damn inconsiderate slut! He'd offered her a pampered, luxurious life, the considerable influence of his protection, and a damn sight less sadistic treatment than that peasant she was married to gave her. I am not a whore, she had said. Insufferable arrogance—Why, oh, why would none of them ever admit to being what they were?" (74). Nikki is shocked to discover that Alisa does not reflect any of his preconceived notions of what women are 'naturally' like. Simply because Alisa is of the female sex, he approaches her with predetermined ideas of who she is; this cultural phenomenon is described by feminist philosopher Alison Stone: "social ideals of gender get absorbed into and shape bodies as well as minds. So it can be rightly said that bodies are or become

‘gendered.’ But then it also becomes intelligible to say that social norms that have been absorbed into a body are its ‘sex,’ since these norms have actually become part of that body’s physical character” (78). Stone’s assertion is most troubling for women because if the perceptions of woman, as Nikki dictates, are as plaything and mother, she is still primarily cast as body since both roles are physical.

Alisa initially rejects Nikki’s role of plaything, wishing instead to divorce Forseus and find employment. She advocates, “You wouldn’t understand, Nikki. There’s such a thing as a woman’s dignity and pride. I’m not a whore to be acquired for the price of a house and a governess and a nanny” (Johnson 73). Alisa’s strength in this passage is astounding given her acceptance of this very role later in the novel. Furthermore, it is revealing that the last two items Alisa mentions directly relate to her status as a mother because she also accepts this role when Nikki impregnates her, just as she accepts the role of plaything: “But the growing child, now kicking in her womb, the need for security in a thoroughly male-dominated world, required that she accept the grudgingly offered hand” (246). Lost is the thinking woman who dreamt of gaining financial independence and a divorce from her abusive husband; Alisa, because of her submission to body, has succumbed to Nikki’s, as well as society’s, dictates of a “woman’s place.” After Alisa’s painful awareness of the reality that “Once the seed is planted, a man can ignore, or circumvent, or disavow; paternity is an elusive state, but the receiver of his ‘gift’ has no such option,” she is forced to dejectedly accept the role dictated her because of the constraints of her sex (246). However, she “decided to make the best of this imperfect world. She would not retire from life, but chose instead to devote herself to [her daughter] Katelina and, in the future, to the new child as well. Her second child would

have a name too” (246). Even so, there is no acknowledgment of Alisa’s name; her absence in this new life is distinct. Since she no longer possesses the ability to please Nikki with her body (after he rejects her as wife), she dedicates [her future](#) to her children. Alisa is no longer living for herself, but only for others, thus fulfilling Nikki’s perception that woman is “‘primarily a pretty plaything for a man’s pleasure and then inexorably as night follows day—a mother’” (109).

As such, the Cartesian split within Alisa not only leads her to question her own identity, but it also provides [an](#) answer, and it is the answer that Nikki has championed since the beginning of the novel, and the role Alisa repeatedly rejects. However, once the split is established and her role as body is solidified, Alisa’s dreams of achieving financial independence are ruined since she resigns herself to being Nikki’s wife and mother to his children—primarily a physical creature. Bordo asserts, “the body is not only the organ of deceptive senses, and the site of disruption and ‘commotion’ in the heart, blood, and animal spirits. It is also the most brute, pressing and ubiquitous reminder of how *located* and perspectival our experience and thought is, how bounded in time and space” (95). As such, there is no room for transcendence, no room for growth or agency; as bodies, women are literally trapped within the confines of themselves.

Alisa cannot escape the demands of her body; her lived experience *is* physical. She is [a](#) “plaything” for Nikki, mother to Katelina, and [nearly dies](#) while giving birth to her and Nikki’s son. It is significant that it is this particular childbirth of a male, rather than Alisa’s previous experience of giving birth to her daughter, that nearly kills her. The child’s large size, a masculine quality Alisa is so attracted to in Nikki, is responsible for her difficult and dangerous labor. While Nikki’s overt masculinity and subsequent

dominance “kill” Alisa’s independent mind, it is this same trait passed onto his son that threatens her physically. During the labor scene (spanning a mere six pages), Alisa is described as “weak” six times, as not having “strength” twice, and as “limp” and “frail” another two times each; whereas the boy she gives birth to is “fat, healthy, and vigorously bawling” (Johnson 258-63). This juxtaposition dramatizes and symbolizes the inequity of male and female present throughout the novel. Furthermore, though it is Alisa’s “duty” to give birth, she is literally too “weak” to fulfill [her](#) role. Because Alisa cannot naturally contract, Nikki must act in place of her body to manually simulate contractions by “exerting pressure on Alisa’s swollen abdomen” (261). By performing a role that is essentially female, Nikki has completely taken over Alisa’s body and has left Alisa with no other role but that of sexual pleasure. This final suggestion removes one remaining sliver of power that Alisa has over Nikki; through physically helping Alisa give birth, Nikki conquers childbirth, too.

Moreover, Alisa’s difficult labor and inability to “perform” are significant because they symbolize her struggles to survive in the patriarchy. First, because of her female sex, she inherits predetermined suppositions that dictate and place her in society; and second, her inability to adequately fulfill these placements further weaken her since the male must enter to help her achieve her societal and biological role. [This](#) transfer of power is not easy for Alisa, which is evident in the intense physical pain Alisa [endures](#) during labor:

Why, she moaned, had she ever lain with Nikki in that spring meadow and wanted him to make love to her? She had forgotten how painful, how devastatingly wicked, how agonizing the contractions of labor were. The

pain crept over her slowly and then sank in like fangs of a crazed animal, ripping and tearing her apart until she screamed in frenzy. She would cling to the sheets, pulling until her arms ached with the effort, twisting, turning, trying to elude the monstrous, ruthless, unceasing beast. (260)

In this moment, near the end of the narrative, as Alisa recalls her first sexual encounter with Nikki, the novel truly comes full circle. On one level, Alisa is now physically paying for her sexual desires, and on another, through the mirroring comparisons of Alisa and her experiences to that of an animal (recall, “she was quivering like a frightened animal” during her first encounter), she is fully established with the world of nature, not of man.

Furthermore, it is this excruciating labor, “this wrenching, brutal, unnatural pain—this unbearable agony,” that serves to initiate Nikki’s enlightenment (260). Before Alisa’s near deadly experience, Nikki rarely comes home, much less to her bed, their only site for true connection. As such, prior to this scene, they are at their most distant levels of separation. Yet, once Nikki discovers that Alisa is near death, he realizes that he does, in fact, love her. Even though Nikki has been the catalyst for the destruction of her spirit, her free will, her “reason” and “logic,” he must also attempt to destroy her body in order to complete his journey to transcendence. And, it is this final transcendence, this admission of love, that allows Alisa to forgive all that Nikki has done. Her near self-sacrifice is welcomed because it brought Nikki back to her.

Interestingly, 16 years after the novel’s publication, Johnson addressed these issues of a sacrificial woman and a domineering man. Of her novel, Johnson asserts

Seized by Love is a book I couldn’t write today. So much has changed.

Women’s and men’s roles in our culture have substantially altered in the

years since *Seized by Love* was first published: steps toward equality in the workplace, in the family; legislation to insure civil liberties; new options for career choices have all contributed to the perception and reality of today's woman and man. And those transformations—radical, subtle, or mood permutations—are reflected in current romances. (“Dear Reader”)

Though Johnson's recognition of the dated “themes” in her novel is reassuring, her assertion that romances no longer depict similar issues is, unfortunately, not quite true.

While Johnson contends that she could no longer write such a novel, E.L. James certainly can. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, published 17 years after Johnson's statement, does not reflect the “transformations” of equality mentioned by Johnson. On the contrary, James's novel reintroduces not only the same Cartesian duality found within *Seized by Love*, but also the same results for the heroine (identification as body, acceptance of abuse, and establishment submission).

CHAPTER V

FIFTY SHADES OF ANA: CARTESIAN DUALISM IN E.L. JAMES'S *FIFTY SHADES OF GREY*

There is no denying it. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a groundbreaking work, not only because of its nontraditional path to publication and remarkable international success, but because it catapulted BDSM sub-culture into the mainstream world of romance. To stress how popular BDSM has become upon the back of the novel's success, here are a list of books E.L. James's book inspired that have been published to date: *50 Ways to Play: BDSM for Nice People*, *Fifty Shades of Pleasure: A Bedside Companion*, *Fifty Shades of Ecstasy*, *Fifty Shades of Passion: An Erotic Guide To Exploring Fifty Shades With Your Lover*, *A User's Guide for Fifty Shades of Grey: Hot Tips For Couples to Spice Things Up*, and *Married Sex: Fifty Shades of Grey for Couples*. And these guides are not just marketed to women. Two have been published specifically for males: *Fifty Shades of Grey Decoded: A Man's Playbook* and *A Guy's Secret Guide to Fifty Shades of Grey*. These last two titles may be the most revealing additions to the collection, since Christian's treatment of Ana is blatantly abusive; thus, writing guides encouraging men to engage in this sort of behavior is certainly disturbing. However, while *Fifty Shades of Grey* is superficially about the Dominant/Submissive BDSM relationship that develops between protagonists Ana Steele and Christian Grey, it is also the story of a Dominant/Submissive relationship that forms within Ana herself. Because of the

Cartesian mind/body dualism evident in Ana, the opposition within her echoes the oppositional relationship between the two main characters. Ana's mind is at first independent and strong, just as Ana is when she first meets Christian; however, once her body is awakened, Ana's mind is weakened and becomes submissive to the desires of her body, just as she is weakened and controlled by Christian. Additionally, similar to the manner in which Ana tries to fight Christian's control, her mind struggles against her body, creating a confusing web of physical desire and mental agency. Although *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a contemporary romance novel (published in 2011), the heroine's Cartesian nightmare continues a theme explored some thirty years ago in Johnson's *Seized by Love*: Ana, a modern woman, is plagued by the same divisive self portrayed in Alisa, a woman of nineteenth-century Russia. Because it is intriguing that such a disturbing narrative thread should continue in a fluctuating genre, I focus on the same characteristics I examined in the previous chapter: the heroine's acceptance of sexual violence and the hero's aid in teaching the heroine her social role within the patriarchy. Ana, just like Alisa does in coming to terms with Nikki's violence and control, rationalizes Christian's need to abuse her, succumbing to his casting of her as submissive in a male-dominated culture because of the Cartesian dualism that threatens her identity and agency.

Ana is first introduced to Christian when she interviews him, in place of her roommate Kate, for her university's newspaper. With no previous interviewing experience, Ana is, understandably, nervous and "shaky" upon meeting Christian (James 7). However, Ana's nervousness and shakiness increase throughout the interview as she experiences strange, never-before felt physical reactions to Christian that reveal to her the

separation of her mind and body. Upon shaking his hand, Ana feels “an odd exhilarating shiver run through [her]” (8). As the interview progresses, Ana frequently experiences similar physical sensations in response to Christian: “His gaze is intense, all humor gone, and strange muscles deep in my belly clench suddenly. I tear my eyes away from his scrutiny and stare blindly down at my knotted fingers. *What’s going on?* I have to go—now” (15). Through her description of her muscles as “strange,” Ana indicates that these feelings are something new, and suggest elements of her identity that she before did not know existed. This awakening is accompanied by Ana’s understanding that she is quickly losing control of her body, and it frightens her. Anxious to leave Christian because she does not know how to mentally reassert control over herself, she wonders “Why does he have such an unnerving effect on me”; “Why does he make me so uncomfortable?” (10, 11). Even after a few days have passed, Ana remains confused by her reaction to him: “No man has ever affected me the way Christian Grey has, and I cannot fathom why. Is it his looks? His civility? Wealth? Power? I don’t understand my irrational reaction” (17). Christian has such a profound effect upon her physically that it disrupts her mental self.

This confusion increases as she spends more time with Christian, and Ana begins to recognize just how powerfully her body responds to him. During their second encounter, Ana’s physical reactions are the same as before; however, this time the effects on her mind are included in the descriptions: “Our fingers brush very briefly, and the current is there again, zapping through me like I’ve touched an exposed wire. I gasp involuntarily as I feel it all the way down to somewhere dark and unexplored, deep in my belly. Desperately, I scrabble around for my equilibrium” (27). Ana references “dark” and “deep” places that are manifesting themselves, hinting at her inevitable sexual

awakening. Yet, it is the “scrabble for [her] equilibrium” that is most illuminating in this passage. In this context, it is most likely that Ana’s reference to her equilibrium is in relation to her state of mind; however, from a Cartesian perspective, it may also pertain to her efforts to reestablish a balance between mind and body. Regardless of the interpretation, the implication is clear: Ana, to a certain degree, has lost her rational, thinking self because her body’s reaction to Christian takes the foreground. After gazing at Christian, “the epitome of male beauty,” Ana observes, “Finally my cognitive functions are restored and reconnected with the rest of my body” (25). Even so, Ana’s awareness of her faceted self becomes more pronounced as it progressively takes longer for her “cognitive functions” to “reconnect” with her body, because her body eventually dominates her thinking self.

Ana’s transformation from rational, thinking subject to physical object is achieved once she is sexually involved with Christian. After her first sexual experience (recall, she is a traditional virginal heroine), Ana muses, “I had no idea what my body was capable of, could be wound so tightly and released so violently, so gratifyingly” (118). As a result of this physical enlightenment, Ana is hooked; her “body *hungers* for him” (emphasis added) (488). She now needs sexual fulfillment in order to survive because sex is now instinctual for her: “My body bows instinctively, pushing my breasts into his hands” (134-35). It is revealing that Ana’s body should “instinctively” respond to Christian’s touch because the word “instinct” is derived from the same root word, *impellere*—meaning “drive”—as *impulsions*, the French word for “impulse.” As discussed in Chapter Two, Descartes uses the term *impulsions* to refer to the body’s actions that are not accounted for by the mind; thus, Ana’s drive toward sexual gratification further posits

her as primarily a physical being because her body is acting of its own accord, echoing similar realizations in Alisa about her body in *Seized by Love*. Furthermore, this drive endangers her, not only physically (which I detail later in this analysis), but also mentally. The more involved Ana and Christian become, as well as the greater the physical pleasure Ana receives (which further connects her to body), her ability to assert herself mentally in Christian's presence lessens. Even Christian recognizes his role in Ana's weakness: "You have no problem being honest with me in print. Your e-mails always tell me exactly how you feel. Why can't you do that in conversation? Do I intimidate you that much?" (288). Ana can only assert herself when Christian is not physically present; once Ana is removed from him, her thinking self awakens and she logically perceives Christian as abusive and controlling. However, because Christian affects her physical self so profoundly, she is unable to overcome her body's reaction to him, and her rationality disappears.

Once Ana's physical self is dominant, the references to her conflict become more overtly Cartesian. For instance, Ana thinks, "As much as my body craves his touch, my mind is rebelling" (225). However, this is merely a thought, not an action; her mind may rebel, but her body does not. This distinct separation evoked in the language is furthered due to James's interjection of scientific jargon interspersed throughout the novel: "My heartbeat has picked up, and my medulla oblongata has neglected to fire any synapses to make me breathe" (68). In employing such terminology in characterizing Ana's reactions, James creates a distinct, independent body for her heroine because these physical parts of Ana are doing the acting, not her mental self. This sort of jargon is also present during one of Ana's first encounters with Christian: "And from a very tiny, underused part of my

brain—probably located at the base of my medulla oblongata”; and again “*And you might see him again tomorrow*, that dark place at the base of my brain whispers seductively at me” (26, 29). This latter usage is perhaps most revealing because it immediately acknowledges a division within Ana—her “medulla oblongata” speaks to her, intimating its power. James creates an ‘other,’ responsible for its own actions, which removes blame from rational, thinking Ana.

Similarly, Ana’s body is depicted as independent through James’s description of Ana’s blood. While Ana eagerly anticipates sex with Christian, “[her] blood pounds through [her] body, thick and heavy with salacious hunger” (485). According to Descartes, when one experiences love (whether it be benevolence or concupiscence), it causes the “animal spirits” (which are responsible for the body’s movement) to create new blood “to pass quickly towards the heart without stopping in the liver; and that being driven thither with more strength than any that is in other parts of the body, it enters in greater abundance and excites there a stronger heat because it is coarser than that which has already been several times rarified in passing and repassing through the heart” (“Passions” 376). This “heated” blood then “sends a greater quantity of spirits towards the brain,” so that “all the muscles [...] may be employed in obtaining that which we desire” (378). Because this is Descartes’s explanation for how the body may move on its own, Ana’s dualism is fortified because her lustful blood is “pounding” through her body and is responsible for her body’s subsequent movements—a curious resurfacing of a dated explanation for the blood’s nature and functions. Through exemplifying Descartes’s account for the body’s independent movement, James demonstrates how Ana’s body, overcome with concupiscence, can move autonomously.

Moreover, Ana's connection to her body serves to define her as traditionally female. The novel suggests that Ana, too, identifies the female as connected to the body: "He smiles, then strides with renewed purpose out of the store, slinging the plastic over his shoulder, leaving me a quivering mass of raging *female* hormones" (emphasis added) (31). Ana's identification of her hormones as female suggests that she blames her female body for responding the way it does to Christian, especially since she observes that Christian is not physically affected by her (at least not in the extremes that she experiences). Because Christian is a male, and thus not plagued by female hormones and therefore capable of controlling his body, he is not left a "quivering mass," but instead is able to walk away cool, calm, and collected. This juxtaposition of Ana and Christian's reaction to the same encounter reinforces Bordo's assertion that the male is identified with reason, while the female is associated with the body.

Because of her inability to assert herself in Christian's presence, Ana recognizes that she is no longer in control of her own actions; her body's influence is too powerful. Descartes stresses in "The Passions" that

the will is so free in its nature that it can never be constrained; and of the two sorts of thoughts which I have distinguished in the soul (of which the first are its actions, i.e., its desires, the others its passions, taking this word in its most general significance, which comprises all kinds of perceptions), the former are absolutely in its power, and can only be indirectly changed by the body, while on the other hand the latter depend absolutely on the actions which govern and direct them, and they can only indirectly be altered by the soul. (350)

Unfortunately, Ana is a victim of her body's passions. Christian's influence upon her body—the "action which govern[s]"—is much too strong, and her soul or mind is too weak to "alter" the situation. Ana herself evokes this Cartesian notion: "Truly I am a marionette and he is the master puppeteer" (James 429). Ana's recognition of herself as a marionette is eerily similar to Descartes's comparison of the body to a "watch or automaton [...], when it is wound up and contains in itself the corporeal principle of those movements for which it is designed along with all that is requisite for its action" ("Passions" 333). Ana, who is now completely body, acts only for that which she was designed: sexual pleasure. Furthermore, because her designer is her puppeteer, Christian, Ana is fully in his control. Christian "winds" her up with sexual desire, and—because her sexual cravings are so intense—Ana performs the role of Submissive in order to please her designer so that he will continue his relationship with her.

Though Christian is Ana's primary sexual instigator, Ana is also haunted by an internal one: her "inner goddess." While Christian and Ana may be the protagonists in the novel, Ana's "inner goddess" and her oft-referenced "subconscious" are arguably just as important and relevant to the events that unfold. These two "characters" are extremely intriguing for a number of reasons. First, they explicitly express the split within Ana—it is there on the pages, rather than contained only within the more subtle aspects of Ana's character; and secondly, they provide a voice for the very dualism of which Ana is already a victim.

Though Ana's "inner goddess" is not directly linked to her body by James, the association is undeniably there. Ana's "inner goddess" does not appear in the novel until Ana begins a physical relationship with Christian. Ana and Christian's first sexual

contact occurs during an elevator ride in which Christian pins her against the wall and kisses her: “Oh, he’s affected all right—and my very small inner goddess sways in a gentle victorious samba” (James 78). It is revealing that Ana’s “inner goddess” should manifest itself during her first intimately physical encounter because, as the novel progresses, Ana’s “inner goddess” encourages all her sexual activities with Christian, even if they potentially endanger her. Once Ana decides to accept Christian and all that accompanies his sexual lifestyle, she thinks, “My inner goddess sighs with relief. I reach the conclusion that she rarely uses her brain to think, but another vital part of her anatomy, and at the moment, it’s a rather exposed part” (335). Strangely, even Ana’s “inner goddess” experiences mind/body dualism, though her “inner goddess” clearly provides a voice for Ana’s body.

While Ana’s “inner goddess” is an interesting, humorous element of the novel, it is the nature of her “subconscious” that is most intriguing and baffling. Ana’s acknowledgment of her subconscious first appears after she meets Christian and she struggles to understand her confusing emotions towards him: “Perhaps I’ve spent too long in the company of my literary romantic heroes, and consequently my ideals and expectations are far too high. But in reality, nobody’s ever made me feel like that. *Until very recently*, the unwelcome, still-small voice of my subconscious whispers” (24). Because this is the first appearance of the “subconscious,” its function is not yet entirely clear; however, as the novel progresses, Ana’s “subconscious” plays a more defined role: “My subconscious has woken. She’s staring at me with pursed lips, tapping her foot. *So you’ve just slept with him, given him your virginity, a man who doesn’t love you. In fact, he has very odd ideas about you, wants to make you some sort of kinky sex slave. ARE*

YOU CRAZY? She's shouting at me" (126). Ana's "subconscious" is equal parts angry matriarch, guilt, and bully; she judges Ana when she makes mistakes, chastises Ana when she does not take care of herself, and attacks Ana when she is feeling low. James refers to Ana's subconscious every few pages after it first appears: "It's such a turn-on knowing that it's my body making him feel this way. *Ha...not your mind*, my subconscious sneers. I shake off the unwelcome thought"; "My subconscious is figuratively tutting and glaring at me over her half moon specs"; "*Up and down like whores' drawers*, my subconscious remarks bitterly. In my head, I tell her where to go"; and "How can I not think? *You can pretend to be a car, like his other possessions*. My subconscious makes an unwelcome vitriolic return" (135, 63, 277, 251). Because Ana's "subconscious" reflects an extreme, moralizing version of her mental self, it is better understood as a "conscience," which, because of the author's misuse of the term, affects James's credibility as an author. Since the subconscious, according to Freud, is the location of repressed material, it would seem more accurate that Ana's "inner goddess" would be identified as her "subconscious" since it embraces Ana's exploration of her sexuality and sexual desires—especially the desire to be dominated, which Freud asserts is the repressed desire of all females. Although this thesis does not undertake a psychoanalytic analysis of the texts, the notion of the conscious and the subconscious are another form of dualism that may be discussed conjunctively with Descartes's mind/body dualism, simply because both concepts embody an opposition of self. However, in this novel, Ana's "subconscious" is equivalent to her rational, thinking self, while her "inner goddess" is understood as her physical self, the one she listens to most often, which aids in her rationalization of Christian's BDSM punishments.

Although the nature of Ana and Christian's relationship is difficult to narrowly define—mainly because of the elements of BDSM that provide a context for the violence in the text—recognition of her identification with the body is imperative in order to consider effectively the true extent of Ana's physical and psychological abuse. *Fifty Shades of Grey* introduces a tricky question: is Ana a victim of sexual violence, even though she reluctantly agrees to be Christian's Submissive? The application of Cartesian mind/body dualism provides an answer: Ana is indeed a victim because she cannot control herself while in Christian's presence. Though Ana is participating in an established, normative lifestyle, she is still a victim of abuse because, as body, she is not acting of her own accord; rather, her body, which craves and demands the sexual pleasure promised after each spanking, is acting for her. Breanne Fahs, in her important work *Performing Sex*, asserts that “women's *performance of providing men with sexual access to them*—whether via normalizing coercive practices, prioritizing male desire, eroticizing domination, having sex without being fully emotionally present, or a host of other behaviors—is one of the primary manifestations of the culture of violence” (187). Since Ana experiences the “normalizing of coercive practices,” and “eroticizing domination,” it is safe to label her experiences as violent and abusive.

Furthermore, Ana perceives Christian's punishments as physical abuse, proving that BDSM is not a lifestyle she willingly chooses. On separate occasions, Ana acknowledges Christian as an abuser: “*He likes to hurt women*. The thought depresses me”; “I don't want him to beat me, is that so unreasonable?”; “he actually hit me. I've never been hit in my life. What have I gotten myself into?”; and “*What was I thinking?* Why did I let him do that to me? I wanted the dark, to explore how bad it could be—but

it's too dark for me. I cannot do this. Yet, this is what he does; this is how he gets his kicks" (100, 286, 284, 507). Because Ana has these doubts throughout the novel, it is difficult to understand *why* she chooses to stay with him. However, the following passage, which graphically depicts Christian as abusive (imagine reading a similar scene without the BDSM context), also supplies a reason for why Ana accepts the abuse:

He places his hand on my naked behind, softly fondling me, stroking around and around with his flat palm. And then his hand is no longer there...and he hits me—hard. *Ow!* My eyes spring open in response to the pain, and I try to rise, but his hand moves my shoulder blades, keeping me down. He caresses me again where he's hit me, and his breathing's changed—it's louder, harsher. He hits me again and again, quickly in succession. *Holy fuck it hurts.* I make no sound, my face screwed up against the pain. I try to wriggle away from the blows—spurred on by adrenaline spiking and coursing through my body. (274)

Christian's spankings are not playful; they are meant to cause pain because they are given as punishment to teach Ana a lesson. Additionally, though Ana may have given Christian permission to spank her, her attempts to escape are evident, yet he "keeps her down."

Furthermore, during this violent outburst, Ana's "mind empties as [she] endeavor[s] to absorb the grueling sensation," and she describes the experience as "mind-numbing" (274-75). Ana's mind shuts down during moments of abuse, further showcasing that Ana is completely body during these encounters; her rational, thinking self is gone, suggesting that if it had remained, Ana would not tolerate this form of violence. Yet, though the abuse is physically painful (which would supposedly push Ana

away from Christian), she is not able to resist until the end of the novel because, immediately after beating her, Christian engages sexually with Ana. After hitting her eighteen times, Christian orders, ““Enough [...] Well done, Anastasia. Now I’m going to fuck you”” (275). Because Christian sexually pleases Ana directly after abuse, she becomes confused about how she truly feels physically, as well as how she feels about Christian. After Christian’s punishment, he tells Ana “See how much your body likes this, Anastasia. You’re soaking just for me” (275). By showing Ana how aroused she is, Christian succeeds in normalizing sexual violence and teaching her to accept it. Ana is surprised by her arousal and when she orgasms she thinks, “How he’s making me feel that familiar pull deep in my belly, tightening, quickening, NO...and my traitorous body explodes in an intense, body-shattering orgasm” (276). After this pleasurable moment, Ana finds, “That wasn’t so bad. I’m more stoic than I thought” (276). This resignation is a stark contrast to Ana’s thoughts during the beating, but because her pain is accompanied by pleasure, Ana justifies the violence, though she is still “so confused by [her] reaction” (277). Ana’s justification of her abuse validates Fahs’s assertion that “Those who aggress against women may influence the way women interpret and define the violence” (200). Ana, who is erotically dependent upon Christian, accepts his abuse because he satisfies her physical needs.

As did Alisa’s submission to Nikki, Ana’s acceptance of Christian’s abuse leads her to question her identity: “I feel lonely and uncomfortable here, unhappy with my own company. Have I strayed so far from who I am?” (278). Ana no longer knows who she is since her physical self has overwhelmed her mental self. Fahs documents a case in which interviewee Mitra expresses the same sentiment: “I had one sexual relationship where he

was into this whole S&M thing, and I think it just never felt natural for me, so I was trying to act like something I wasn't [...] I really loved this person, and so I wanted to be into it so desperately that I tried to be someone I wasn't" (212). According to Fahs, this is sexual violence because it is coercion, even though Mitra, like Ana, was not necessarily physically *forced* to participate in S&M. She did so because the male desired her to, and she feared his loss if she did not comply. Because Mitra and Ana both claim to love their dominant male, they thereby justify and validate the coercion, perceiving it merely as a different sexual taste rather than violence, evoking Fahs's declaration that "ambiguous experiences of coercion [...] reveal coercion as widespread and as inducing complicated emotional responses for women" (206). Ana is coerced into performing as Christian's Submissive since she does it in order to keep him, thus placing his happiness above hers at the expense of her own: "I do it [whipping] for you, Christian, because you need it. I don't" (James 503). April Alliston and Susan Celia Greenfield argue that "Whenever power relations are unequal, the novel implies, sexual consent is never black and white: It is always fifty shades of gray" (1). Their observation is absolutely correct because the varying "gray" degrees of abuse, coercion, acceptance, emotional entanglements, and physical desire plague Ana and cloud her rationality.

Throughout the novel, Ana accepts Christian's punishments and BDSM lifestyle because she wants to be with him regardless of the consequences. However, at the end of the novel, Ana finally recognizes Christian's punishments for what they actually are: abuse. Ana's "escape" from Christian is worthy of scrutiny because it is haunted by the same mind/body dualism that permeates the entirety of the novel. After Christian confesses that he "need[s]" to hurt Ana, she asks Christian to spank her so she can

“know, once and for all, if [she] can do this” (James 504). Christian agrees to Ana’s request: “I’ll show you how bad it can be, and you can make your own mind up” (504). Ana is so consumed by her body that she is incapable of making a rational decision to leave someone who willingly admits that he wants to harm her, without the consent of her body. It is only after Christian beats her with a leather strap six times that her body finally rejects him because the pain is too intense to bear. Earlier in the novel, Ana’s body compels her to stay with him; in the end, it liberates her. The cycle of “pleasure and pain, reward and punishment” is finally broken when, immediately after the beating, Christian “pull[s] [Ana] into his arms, all breathless and compassionate...and [she] want[s] none of him” (504, 506). Christian’s method of fulfilling Ana after abusing her no longer works because she truly understands, for the first time, how horrible he really is: ““you [Christian] are one fucked-up son of a bitch”” (506). Because of her body’s reaction to the pain, Ana recognizes that Christian “is not normal. He has needs that I cannot fulfill. I realize that now. I don’t want him to hit me like that again, ever” (507). Ana’s body now also experiences the trepidation her mind has had towards Christian throughout the novel; yet, though her mind and body are at last aligned, her decision to leave Christian is because of the way he treated her physically. While Christian begs Ana to stay, he tries to hold her, but Ana refuses: “There’s no way I can tolerate his touch now, it will slay me” (513). Ana realizes that if she gives into Christian’s physical advances she will stay, yet even this realization is a physical one: “He steps forward, and *instinctively* I step back” (emphasis added) (513). Ana’s impulse, or drive, now leads her away from Christian, whereas before it led her to him, because she physically realizes the abuse of which he is capable.

Ana's transcendent moment is a great relief considering the absolute control Christian asserts over her throughout the novel. Yet, it takes over five hundred pages to build up to this point—five hundred pages of stalking, control in a variety of forms, abuse, and many moments of self-doubt. However, Ana's self-doubt does not derive solely from her experiences with Christian; rather, it is more a product of her own split self. Because Christian has conquered Ana's body, she—acting as body—mirrors his will. Ana is not only acting as a being independent of her rational, thinking self, but she is also acting as a body controlled by a male. Furthermore, Ana internally begins to adopt this notion, forcing herself to participate in BDSM because Christian “needs” it. Ana displays Fahs's assertion that “Women spend an enormous amount of time being *attentive* to others' needs—often at their own expense—as part of their prescribed roles within a patriarchal society” (182). As such, Ana is not only fulfilling her role as Submissive in her relationship with Christian, but in society as well. She is becoming increasingly similar to Christian in that “for some, BDSM goes much deeper than what they *do*. For them, BDSM is their primary sexual identity: it becomes who they *are*” (Frantz 48). While this is definitely true for Christian, who does not just dominate in the bedroom, but also in the business world (he is a self-made multi-billionaire in his twenties, after all), it is also somewhat true for Ana; as she agrees to more BDSM encounters, she experiences more difficulty making her own decisions, and becomes more confused by her conflicting emotions, more accepting of Christian's abusive norms.

By introducing Ana to the world of BDSM, Christian teaches her how to be controlled by a male, and not only in the bedroom. Lisa Downing asserts “Anastasia's mild, sometimes faked, form of submission is in keeping with (non-erotic)

understandings of the feminine as compliant” (97). Yet, not only does he teach her how to be “compliant,” he forces her to learn to enjoy it, which he achieves by bringing her constant sexual pleasure. Christian shapes his “lesson” through teaching Ana to negate her intellect, troubling indeed for a woman who is already struggling to control her physical self. In an attempt to convince Ana to contractually agree to be his Submissive, Christian stresses, “If you were my sub, you wouldn’t have to think about this. It would be easy.’ His voice is soft, seductive. ‘All those decisions—all the wearying thought processes behind them. The ‘is this the right thing to do? Should this happen here? Can it happen now?’ You wouldn’t have to worry about any of that detail. That’s what I’d do as your Dom. And right now, I know you want me, Anastasia” (James 224). Christian’s insistence upon simplifying Ana’s life by making choices for her is but another form of violence. By imploring Ana to give up her agency, Christian is guilty of psychological rape because he is *taking* something away from her without her full consent.

Furthermore, without her intellect, Ana would become fully body, with no room for her rational, thinking self to appear in her rare moments alone. However, this is what Christian desires. He wants Ana to become solely body. In an email he tells her, “Don’t waste your energy on guilt, feelings of wrongdoing, etc. We are consenting adults and what we do behind closed doors is between ourselves. You need to free your mind and listen to your body” (294). The likely reason Christian begs Ana to “free her mind” is because he wants her to accept that “most of [her] fear is in [her] mind” (488). This is Christian’s constant reprise, and—though this refrain may serve to placate Ana—it only continues to negate her mind. Because pain and fear are solely products of her mental

self, according to Christian, her mind is presented as untrustworthy; as such, her body is to be trusted and listened to exclusively.

By encouraging Ana to forego her thinking self, Christian objectifies her as body, most prominently depicted in Christian's "Red Room of Pain." The Red Room of Pain is Christian's playground, and it is there where he truly becomes the Dominant, and Ana, the Submissive. During her first experience in the room, Christian devotes a fair amount of time to simply educating Ana about her physical position in the room: "'When I tell you to come in here, I expect you to kneel over there.' He points to a spot beside the door. 'Do it now'" (320). Once Ana kneels, he instructs, "Place your hands and forearms flat on your thighs. Good. Now part your knees. Wider. Wider. Perfect. Look down at the floor" (320). In this position, Ana is only able to see Christian's feet, while he, of course, has a very *full* view of her. Ana is an object, a possession that belongs to Christian, who may do with her whatever he wants. After surveying Ana, he tells her, "Good girl, Anastasia. You look lovely like that. Well done. Stand up" (321). As commanded, she stands, but "keep[s] [her] face down" until Christian says "You may look at me" (321). Interestingly, Descartes discusses this type of "affection" in "The Passions," asserting that "a brutal man for a woman whom he desires to violate" does not display a "pure" love; rather, it is one in which there is only "love for the possession of the objects to which their passion relates, and do not have any [love] for the objects themselves, for which they only have desire mingled with other particular passions" (367). According to Descartes, this form of love is merely objectification, something the beholder may possess to please himself, and this is certainly the relationship Christian has with Ana. As noted in Chapter Two, it is because of this that the love Ana and Christian share is one of

concupiscence—a love that is formed “in some manner other than through the will” (367). For Ana, her love is formed through the powerlessness her physical self has in Christian’s presence.

Furthermore, although Ana is already established as body by this point in the narrative, Christian tells Ana how her body *should* feel, further disempowering her. During this same visit to “The Red Room of Pain,” Christian whips her with a riding crop. Before beginning, he states, “This is not going to hurt. Do you understand?” (James 321). Though Christian has spanked Ana prior to this incident, which was very painful for her, he has never used anything but his hand. On another occasion, he commands, “I will use this [flogger]. It will not hurt, but it will bring your blood to the surface of your skin and make you very sensitive” (488). These declarations suggest that Christian is not fully satisfied in simply objectifying Ana’s body, but he wants to manipulate it to conform to his desires because, if he succeeds in convincing Ana that she does not feel pain, then she will be more likely to sign his contract. Christian’s logic is in accordance with Fahs’s assertion that “These performances [sexual accessibility of women to men] indicate that they not only participate in cultural fantasies of women’s subservience and submission but also perpetuate and normalize, in language and in practice, the imbalanced power relationships between men and women” (224). By submitting to Christian’s demands for her body, and in believing Christian that her body responds positively to pain, Ana normalizes her role as Submissive because she thinks that it is what her body desires.

While kneeling in position in the Red Room of Pain, waiting for Christian, Ana realizes

Anticipation runs bubbling like soda down my veins. What will he do? I take a deep, steadying breath, but I cannot deny it, I'm excited, aroused, wet already. This is so...I want to think *wrong*, but somehow it's not. It's right for Christian. It's what he wants—and after the last few days...all he's done, I have to man up and take whatever he decides he wants, whatever he thinks he needs. (484)

Though Ana no longer views her abuse as wrong, she is now completely absent; BDSM is no longer wrong for her since it is right for Christian. Ana “adapts herself to be the reflection of his desire” (Downing 97). She is only allowed Christian on his terms; therefore, she “will do anything he asks” (James 485). Yet, the only way Ana arrived in this predicament is due to her body. As she and Christian continuously reject her mind, her body becomes the dominant force. This realization is particularly strange since Ana believes she needs to “man up”; Ana must become more like a male, more like Christian, in order to will herself through the pain, suggesting that she, as female, is too weak to properly perform the role Christian creates for her. Rather, perhaps, as a stronger male, she can handle the abuse both mentally and physically.

This notion certainly complicates the female space because the female is essentially removed from the patriarchy, Furthermore, not only is she removed, but she is replaced by a male replica. In the previous chapter, I noted that Nikki conquered childbirth (a female space) through simulating Alisa's contractions; similarly, Christian conquers the female identity when Ana concludes she must “man up” to successfully be a fit partner for him. In both novels, Sonnet's assertion that “Narratives of power and enslavement, initiator and novice, entrapment and consensual ‘coercion’ inevitably

conclude with the female protagonist's better 'knowledge' of a 'real' self kept from view by sexual innocence and prudery" (180). Ana and Alisa both discover their "real" selves through their sexual awakenings, and both reflect the dictatorial structure of the patriarchy as revealed through the lens of Cartesian dualism.

CHAPTER VI

A POLEMIC: THE OPIATE OF THE FEMALE

“The second target of those who attempted to change romance novels was another familiar convention in the books: the aggressive seduction of the heroine by the hero. Most of the time this seduction is portrayed as intense and unrelentingly sensual; occasionally it has been mislabeled rape by critics”—Jayne Ann Krentz, *Romance Writer*, 1992.

“If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down”—Todd Akin, *Politician*, 2012.

~~“[Pursuant to RSA 594:10, an arrest for abuse may be made without a warrant upon probable cause, whether or not the abuse is committed in the presence of the peace officer.]~~ When the peace officer has probable cause to believe that the persons are committing or have committed abuse against each other, the officer need not arrest both persons, but ~~[should]~~ **may** arrest the person the officer believes to be the primary physical aggressor”—HB 1581, New Hampshire, 2012³.

“Sensationalism, titillation, and ridicule, all reminding girls and women that they will always be defined by and reduced to their sexual attractiveness (or lack thereof) and their

³ Material removed from current law is denoted by ~~{}],~~ while revisions to legislation appear in ***bold italics***.

sexual behaviors—now that’s an effective form of social control. Enlightened sexism rests on that ever-quaking and shifting fault line about female sexuality: it should be exploited and stoked (especially to sell products) but it should be policed and punished (to keep girls and women in their place)”—Susan J. Douglas, Scholar, 2010.

“Some girls rape easy”—Roger Rivard, Politician, 2011.

“Romance is a safety valve, a way of letting off steam without boiling any water”—Diana Palmer, Romance Writer, 1992.

The patriarchy is not merely alive in 2012; rather, it is *thriving*. During the U.S. elections of 2012, a new term was added to the vernacular: the “War on Women,” which arose out of many of the political remarks and acts noted above. Women’s issues and concerns that previously had been addressed through legislation—particularly birth control, abortion, and rape (notice that each of these pertains to body)—were suddenly forced back into broad public debate, the morality of the governing legislation questioned. A “War on Women,” indeed, especially considering that the focus of the debate was the female body—what to do with it, if and when to protect it, etc. During these moments of verbal “confusion” (the politicians’ followed up their statements with oft-heard expressions of “remorse” or “clarification”), women’s minds seemed of no concern. And it is this same absence of mind and focus on the body that is present within *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Because my analyses of these novels revealed two distinct patterns that shaped females identities in these narratives—that, as a result of the heroines’ identity crisis and their subsequent identification as body, the males taught the heroines their social roles and the heroines more readily dismissed sexual violence—it is interesting to see that these very patterns are reinforced on a much larger scale, both

within the romance genre and contemporary society. As such, this chapter follows a similar construction to the previous two chapters. Just as sexual violence is often dismissed within the romance genre by readers and scholars, we find the same dismissal of such issues in current society by politicians and members of the public; additionally, this dismissal is sold to women (the primary audience for romances) as women's "fantasy"—a fantasy that, in all likelihood, is not a female fantasy at all, but rather the fantasy of the patriarchy. While this discussion may not seem overtly Cartesian, the concepts of dualism are still there, echoed and reinforced in the notions of female objectification. If, as much of this research displays, today's woman is a product of sexualized objectification, let it be understood it is her *body* that is the root cause for this trend. It is not the woman's intellect that is being marketed.

Within the romance genre, sexual violence, commonly taking the form of rape—there's no "mislabeling" it—is often validated, justified, and rationalized by scholars and reviewers through a number of methods. The most popular apology for its inclusion and acceptance is the notion that the heroine is just so wonderful/beautiful/alluring that the hero *must* have her, right then and there, acquiescence be damned! Of her ethnography of the Smithton women, Radway asserts

I suspect their willingness to see male force interpreted as passion is the product of a wish to be seen as so desirable to the 'right' man that he will not take 'no' for an answer. Because he finds her irresistible, the heroine need not take any responsibility for her own sexual feelings. She avoids the difficulty of choosing whether to act on them or not. Although female sexuality is thus approvingly incorporated into the romantic fantasy, the

individual ultimately held responsible for it is not the woman herself, but, once again, a man. (76)

Radway's suspicion also implies that it is not the female's thinking self responsible for her actions, but it is her body, which is, of course, also responsible for the "sexual feelings" she experiences. In this sense, the male—as the catalyst for female sexual desire—aids the female's body in choosing for her; she is now, without the "difficulty" of making decisions, a product of the male (due to his sway over her body). Furthermore, Radway's conclusion suggests that the focus of romance narratives is actually on what the male is *doing*, and how the female is *responding*, which reinforces the Cartesian assumption (as well as the Western tradition) that males are active while females are passive, both biologically and socially. Both *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, though narrated from the females' perspective, center upon how the male *affects* the female; thus, they become the males' stories, rather than the females'.

Additionally, not only does Radway's assertion illustrate that romance novels shift attention to the male by romanticizing rape, it also introduces another common rape justification within the genre: aggressive male behavior is depicted in order to teach women—through the ubiquitous happy ending—that their submission to the patriarchy is not so terrible. Radway proposes "To them [writers and readers of romances], such [violent] behavior may seem so natural, permanent, and unassailable that they hunger even more for a fantasy that will contradict their suspicions and convince them that it can lead to female contentment and happiness" (169). Thus, by finding a happy ending, even in romances that depict many scenes of male violence, women readers are reassured that, though they live in a male-dominated world, the promise of happiness remains. Indeed,

one could assert persuasively that such narratives imply women are too weak to overcome the patriarchy, and thus, should instead seek some form of happiness within their inevitable oppression. Though Radway strives to place a positive light on the inclusion of such scenes by stressing the realities of the patriarchy “in order to display possible strategies for coping with it,” this conclusion is arguably more offensive to women than the previous: it dictates that women do nothing to change their role, but should instead seek various methods of “coping” (75).

This form of pacification is not discussed only by Radway. Romance writer Mary Jo Putney defends her “dark romances” by arguing that “What makes dark romances feasible is the safety net; no matter how threatening the situation is or how wounded the body and spirit, the reader of a genre romance knows that all of the issues will be satisfactorily dealt with by the end” (104). In other words, readers accept the violence in Putney’s novels because they know everything will be resolved satisfactorily. This justification is applicable to Johnson and James’s novels as well, because both heroines endure considerable abuse but turn out just fine by the close of the narrative (granted, Ana’s situation differs from Alisa and her traditional happy ending, but I interpret the ending as “happy” because Ana finally achieves agency and escapes Christian). What is most revealing for this particular discussion are two reader responses to *Fifty Shades of Grey*. One Amazon reviewer, Jennifer Anne Sherman, writes, “[*Fifty Shades of Grey*] has helped me to look at the world through different eyes”; while another, Ellen, notes that James’s novel is “A dark and twisted story with so many lessons to learn.” Both comments reinforce the assertions of Radway and Putney, showing that these readers believe they have been “taught” something through reading the novel. Sherman’s

comment that she now sees the world with “different eyes” may reflect her new insights about her role as submissive within the patriarchy; the novel has, perhaps, provided her with a titillating, fun coping mechanism. Ellen, too, may have learned new lessons in submission at the hand of James’s Christian Grey.

Of course, one of the many “lessons” of submission must be the acceptance of sexual violence. Radway explains that,

When romances are understood as the experimental projection of the consequences of masculine behavior and patriarchal control, it seems possible that certain writers do not depict extreme violence out of a masochistic desire to experience it vicariously. Rather, their preoccupation with misogyny may be the mark of a desperate need to know that exaggerated masculinity is not life-threatening to women. They may also want to know that this trait need not be deplored actively because such a response would undoubtedly prompt its even more vicious expression and jeopardize the all-important protection that is its positive consequence.
(168-69)

The same attempt at rationalization we’ve seen previously is evoked in this passage. However, though Radway’s “positive consequence” refers explicitly to the happy endings of romance novels, it is worthwhile to apply this notion to Johnson and James’s novels, as well, but by interpreting the “positive consequence” of violence as the sexual gratification both Alisa and Ana receive after and/or during abuse. Because both heroines experience orgasms during such moments, they have difficulty labeling their experiences as truly abusive, justifying their pain with the ultimate pleasure it brings. According to

Fahs, this is a common phenomenon for women: “within the same relationships, women often experienced both loving, positive interactions and coercive, negative interactions, making it increasingly difficult to label their partner as *either* a perpetrator of sexual coercion *or* as loving and affectionate. In such dynamics, coercion may seem normal or even like a form of love and care” (200). By reinforcing this notion, James and Johnson’s novels not only “teach” a justification for violence. They also blur important distinctions between force and consent.

Without the ability to precisely define their abuse—especially for those in Ana’s situation, since their abuse technically comes with consent—problems inevitably arise for women. Fahs asserts, “Without a label for these coercive experiences [BDSM included], society may not recognize the frequency and consequences of sexual assault” (200). Since situations such as Ana’s are virtually unlabeled by society—because, let’s face it, the fact that BDSM is codified and comes with “consent” does not mean that it is any less abusive than any other controlling relationship—there is more room for its acceptance and validation. Fahs finds that

Women express both willingness and reluctance to label sexual assault as ‘rape,’ which informs their relationships and sexual health. While this ambivalence may reflect a resistance toward labels (particularly labels that blame victims for the aggression) and an effort to desexualize or destigmatize violent sexual experiences, these performances also normalize and mainstream sexual assault in relevant ways (i.e., first denying its existence and later minimizing its significance, downplaying

the violent implications of coercion and refusing to acknowledge survivors). (186)

Just as Fahs's ideas predict, *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* both normalize sexual abuse through the heroines' acceptance of it. Furthermore, because Alisa and Ana are characterized by their "defiance" and stubbornness, there is an implication that both would abhor the label "victim;" thus, they accept and deny their abuse, as long as they are still receiving sexual pleasure. Radway, too, observes the same occurrence among the Smithton women she studied: "This curious and artificial distinction that they draw between 'forceful persuasion' and 'true rape' is a function of the very pressing need to know how to deal with the realities of male power and force in day-to-day existence" (76). When Radway notes readers' perception that there is a difference between "forceful persuasion" and rape, she may remind current readers of Akin's notion of "legitimate rape" quoted at the beginning of this chapter. It is troubling to see the parallels between these two thoughts because both imply that a woman may not be able to ascertain the difference between "actual" rape and "forceful persuasion." Furthermore, Akin's comment is additionally troubling because he reinforces the notion that the body is separate from the mind. According to Akin, the body is the only facet of a woman capable of recognizing "true" rape and will act of its own accord to ensure that its eggs are not fertilized, suggesting that if a woman's eggs are fertilized and a pregnancy does occur from rape, then perhaps the woman was instead subject to "forceful persuasion," which *clearly* is not "legitimate" rape.

Akin's implication that a woman's body is its own entity, able to perform without the mind, is not just present in the depictions of Alisa and Ana, but is also, to a certain

extent, a perception in contemporary society. I say this is true “to a certain extent” because it is the male’s objectification of the female’s body and her acceptance of this objectification that weakens and diminishes the celebration of the female’s intellect; thus, while for people today the female body may not be acting of its own accord, as it does for Alisa and Ana, the mind is still negated by many modern males, which establishes the female mind as ‘other’ than the female body. Furthermore, the female is *still* undeniably associated with the body, which leaves no other place for the male but the mind. In the conclusion of her feminist analysis of Descartes, Bordo hopefully envisions that

The ideal of absolute intellectual purity and the belief in a clear and distinct universe are passing, though not without protest, out of the discipline [of philosophy]. It is too soon to tell what sort of impact feminist and other reconstructions will have on the future development of philosophy, not to mention on the general intellectual and political life of our culture. But what does seem clear is that coherent alternatives to Cartesianism are emerging out of Cartesianism’s ‘shadow’ of itself. (117-18)

Unfortunately, Bordo’s optimistic projection of the future (recall her work was published in 1987) has not yet come to fruition; rather, it seems that Cartesianism, at least in regards to mind/body dualism and the male/female associations comprising each, instead is reasserting itself. Thus, rather than moving forward, the gains of feminism have been partly lost in the last decade, more than likely due to the objectification (and its normalization) of women that rose concurrently with sexual liberation.

This particular result of sexual liberation is the focus of Fahs, Sonnet, and Susan J. Douglas. Fahs asserts “In this age, when sexual liberation feels ephemeral to women, performance may have transitioned from a potentially liberatory action to a mere survival strategy, where women embrace discourses of disempowerment as a condition of ‘being women’” (10). Likewise, Sonnet argues, “the last two decades have seen a shift of liberal feminist assumptions around ‘entitlement’ to the domain of relationships, sexuality and to personal fulfillment through sexual pleasure” (175). As such, it is clear that women have shifted from bodies to minds (Second Wave Feminism), and then back to bodies. Furthermore, Sonnet’s assertion reintroduces women as bodies, suggesting that in contemporary society women are no longer fulfilled by equal rights, but by what they accomplish in the bedroom. Douglas, too, describes this shift in *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism: How Pop Culture Took Us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild*. Of enlightened sexism, which Douglas defines as the recognition that feminism is now imbedded within society, Douglas claims

But while true and total sexual equality between men and women is still too threatening, it has nonetheless proved lucrative to flatter women that they have it. So the media began to highlight this message: it’s through sex and sexual display that women really have the power to get what they want. And because the true path to power comes from being an object of desire, girls and women should now actively choose—even celebrate and embrace—being sex objects. (156)

Thus, women are only powerful, are empowered, because of their bodies. Additionally, this attitude serves as a valid explanation for the mass-market appeal of romances

because this form of empowerment is the message, at least in *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Though Alisa and Ana never achieve “true and total sexual equality” with Nikki or Christian, the only moments when they come close to attaining any form of equality is through the mutual pleasure the heroines and the heroes receive during sex, thus confirming Douglas’s observation that women must use sex to gain access to the patriarchy.

Furthermore, Douglas postulates that the widespread sexualization and objectification of women in the last two decades is actually a product of a distinct choice to embrace the irony of antifeminism. She argues that “antifeminism has become cool, even hip. Rejecting feminism and buying into enlightened sexism allows young women in particular to be ‘one of the guys.’ Indeed, enlightened sexism is meant to make patriarchy pleasurable for women” (12). This last notion is reminiscent of Radway’s finding about readers’ and writers’ justifications for sexual violence in romance novels. Thus, it is logical to conclude that certain romance narratives, especially *Fifty Shades of Grey*, are products of “enlightened” feminism because of their disregard for traditional feminist goals and because they promote the message that, rather than fight the patriarchy, women should seek to find happiness within it. In *Seized by Love* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, then, we have the “before and after” of the impact of traditional feminism.

Because both novels suggest that there has been virtually no change in the females’ roles within the patriarchy over a span of 33 years, and since the novels are written for women by women, it is imperative to carefully scrutinize the notion of “female fantasy.” Fahs, who studies female fantasy extensively in her work *Performing*

Sex, finds, after dozens of interviews with women, that their fantasies (the most cited of which was a depiction of a forceful sexual encounter) did not mirror their recollections of their best sexual experiences. Instead, she found that the two were in opposition:

Rarely did women describe intense and dramatic power imbalances as their best sexual experiences; rarely did women describe being ‘over-powered,’ or ‘taken,’ or ‘done to,’ themselves images and stories repeated again and again in pornography, as a sexual high. Rarely did women describe bodice-ripping clichés as their most memorable sexual moments.
(182)

This realization leads Fahs to wonder about the origins of the women’s force fantasies, which she posits were in fact rendered by the male. Fahs’s assertion is certainly not a new one, but one that has been repeated by various scholars. Tania Modleski, a respected scholar of the romance genre, also shares this belief: “we exist inside ideology, that we are all victims, down to the very depths of our psyches, of political and cultural domination” (45). Christine Delphy, too, notes the power and presence of the patriarchy within women, arguing that “it certainly serves men’s interests to apply ideological thought to women” (156). Because women have been interpellated into a culture of oppression, then it is no surprise their “innermost” desires would mirror that same oppression. Similarly, Fahs’s asserts, “If men’s fantasies dominate the landscape of sexuality, and men’s fantasies become normative and widespread, women may more often internalize men’s fantasies in order to feel accepted, loved, and perhaps, objectified and sexualized” (111).

Fahs's notion evokes Irigaray's claim that, due to the masculinist foundations of the Western world, woman has only ever been able to define herself in relation to man. In this vision of reality, themes of sexual violence and female submission exist and continue to exist within a genre written by women, for women because, just as the females' stories actually become the males' stories, so, too, does romance writing and reading follow a male script. While some reader responses mandate that "Susan Johnson knows every women's fantasies" (LuvGirl), or that "Anyone who has ever had fantasy's [sic] about love and life should read this book [*Fifty Shades of Grey*]" (Cheryl Salerno), it is reviewer E.L. Kemp (who, by the way, insists that that is his/her real name) who truly understands that these novels, at least in the case of *Fifty*, are not female fantasies: "James puts on paper what men dream about and usually never live in reality. Thumbs up, Mr James. Keep it up." According to Kemp, James could not possibly be a woman because her novel is purely a male's fantasy. Kemp's portrayal of James as a male author is telling because it solidifies the notion that "oppressed people *cannot escape* the systems of power" (Fahs 261). Women are so imbedded within their oppression that they can only express themselves as a "place for man" (Irigaray 10). And, as these novels suggest, this "place" is body. Accordingly, Douglas aptly concludes that "What so much of this [contemporary] media (especially advertising) emphasizes is that women are defined by our bodies, our identities are located *in* our bodies, and those must be sexually alluring" (16). Cartesianism still exists. The question now is, what happens when women *become* their bodies (as happened to Alisa and Ana)? What happens when women lose their rational, thinking selves and become purely mechanical, responding only to that which stimulates them?

It is easy to sit back and agree with romance writer Kathleen Gilles Seidel that romances are not “self-help books. They are fantasies. They are entertainment. They are pleasure,” but doesn’t this sound awfully familiar to Nikki and Christian’s numerous demands for Alisa and Ana to relax, stop worrying, and “listen to and enjoy [their] bodies”? In light of the steadfast defense of sexual violence (because it always ends happily!), as well the current trends of enlightened feminism, Nikki and Christian’s behavior toward Alisa and Ana seems to mirror the same behavior these authors advocate for their readers. In both situations, fictional and nonfictional, the attitude towards women is the same: placating the mind’s trepidations about abuse and prejudice. If you accept your role as body, or as submissive reader, then things do not seem quite as bad; they may even be helpful. Remember, your body likes it; and so, too, do you enjoy those “happy endings,” dear readers. Karl Marx once proclaimed, “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opiate of the people.” In this polemic, I offer an alternate version: Romance is the sigh of the oppressed woman, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opiate of the female. So, here you are. Drink up. “Good girl.”

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