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Setting Fires: Literary Women Blazing Trails for Contemporary Women

Laura Salinas

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Literature consistently provides an unapologetic and relentless commentary on society and societal standards. Authors bring to life relatable characters that become symbols and icons for readers because they embody the fierce prowess, determination and strength of a hero, in a time when society lacks individuals with the energetic force of a hero. Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander is a non-hetero-normative empowered female character that breaks the gender roles and stereotypes that are generally placed upon female characters and women in society. As a heroine, Lisbeth Salander is a complex character with traits that are distinctive and divergent from those of the other females in her respective society; she forces society to react to her instead of conducting her actions to societal standards and expectations. She refuses to be defined or labeled by any other person or governing body; she has her own agency and forges her own path in adverse, violent and tragic circumstances. Lisbeth Salander is a remarkable character and an inspiration to women of all ages because Lisbeth does not submit to those in power; she continually fights and challenges the world around her. Her resistance to gender roles and hetero-normative standards further complicates her respective fights. Lisbeth creates a new model for women in literature and women in society to emulate and to aspire to through her rebellious agency, striking power and unyielding desire to fight for herself.

Gender Theory

Gender and sex have an immense influence on who individuals are and who they become; however these ideas are extremely complex and complicated by the numerous theories concerning sex and gender. "Gender roles and identities are among the most basic orienting constructs by which we guide self and communicate with others; the attributes, traits of temperament, expectations, rights, and obligations which we consider

appropriate to ourselves in any situation, we consider appropriate to ourselves as women or men” (Aidala 288); however when these gender bias’ are challenged they can create “gender role ‘crisis’—finding oneself without adequate guides to ascribe meaning, articulate and order values, designate goals, and carve paths of actions as a (male or female) human being” (Aidala 288). Hetero-normativity is the “privileging of biologically determined gender roles and heterosexuality” (OED Online). It is based on the idea that gender roles are fixed to biological sex and heterosexuality as the preferred sexuality, by which many contemporary societies and cultures are formed around. These theories effect how individuals act in almost every aspect of life including socially, culturally, politically, religiously and economically because they are ‘simple’ ideas that individuals can easily use to form judgments and perceptions about those around them.

In her novel *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir argues against the patriarchal and old world views that “humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being” (de Beauvoir 5). De Beauvoir’s feminist writings challenge the construct that women are secondary to males and whose sole purpose is to be defined by and serve as an object to please her male counterpart. From a religious perspective and the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, woman is quite literally the second sex in that woman was created from man. De Beauvoir hopes for a society in which “the myth of woman will be phased out one day: the more women assert themselves as human beings” (de Beauvoir 162). Strides have been made in the name of eliminating the second sex in exchange for equality in society, but the underlying patriarchal and hetero-normative ideals are still prevalent. In one of her most famous statements, de Beauvoir claims, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir 283); in essence she is acknowledging and bringing forward the

idea that women are not intrinsically slated to be feminine and act, think and portray womanhood as society deems appropriate. Sex is biological but gender and identity are acquired throughout one's life and are shaped not only by the external societal and cultural forces, but also by the internal forces within each person. Furthermore in relation to de Beauvoir's ideas, Hélène Cixous writes that "woman must write her self...woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (Cixous), in which she is literally speaking about writing; however it can be interpreted along similar lines as Simone de Beauvoir and other feminist and gender theorists in that women have their own autonomy and are able to break free from social constructs placed upon them. Women have an immense power that has been oppressed in both literature and society for centuries. These scholars, along with various others, aim to depict, portray and inspire women to write and be women in the ways that they see themselves instead of defining themselves in relation to men or patriarchal ideals. Writers have created a call for cultural transformation regarding women and the expectations of women in society through their explicit, dynamic theories and characters that have imprinted themselves in societies across the globe.

Historical Context

The oppression of women is not solely linked to the stereotypical ideas of housework and over sexualization, but the exploitation of women constitutes a "widespread, deeply rooted social disease" (Dunbar); however enormous strides have been made since the early beliefs on the value of women.

The 1600's were filled with misogyny, in that women were valued and seen as lesser than their male counterparts. The literature of the time, specifically that of William

Shakespeare, shows the 'natural order' of society: "thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, thy head, thy sovereign...such duty as the subject owes the prince, even such a women oweth to her husband" (Wojtczak). Women were left in the home to care for the family and were not educated because there was no need for a woman to be able to read or write. A woman owes everything to her father or her husband; her chastity is key to maintaining the social and religious order of the time. In his play *Hamlet*, one of Shakespeare's most memorable characters, Ophelia perfectly represents women in the 1600's. Ophelia obeys her father and brother without question and regards them with such respect that when Laertes offers her advice she not only abides, but his words are "in my memory locked, and you yourself shall keep the key of it" (Shakespeare 24). Aside from completely circumscribing in a way "as you [they] did demand" (Shakespeare 42), Ophelia does not confront or challenge Laertes, Polonius or Hamlet when they speak above her regarding her as a foolish girl or a sexual object. Even when Hamlet calls her a whore and tells her to "get thee to a nunnery" (Shakespeare 114), Ophelia cries and prays for "heavenly powers, restore him" (Shakespeare 114). Ophelia is so stricken by her love for Hamlet, her brother and father that she can scarcely think for herself and she is ultimately driven mad and killed by the men in her life. Although Ophelia's "identity appears externally defined, socially constructed" (Dane), we can interpret and argue that in Ophelia's madness, she is finally able to obtain some type of autonomous agency in which she is finally in control of her thoughts, actions and emotions; thus enabling her to achieve the freedom that she would never be granted in her society.

Fast-forward 200 years to the 1800's; women are still struggling to gain significant value in society. Women were second-class citizens and expected to maintain interest only within the home and family. They were not educated except for a few skills

that were deemed necessary by social standards, such as playing a musical instrument. “After marriage, women did not have the right to own their own property, keep their own wages, or sign a contract” (National Women’s History Museum), which is evidenced in literature of the time, namely by the turmoil illustrated by the Bennet family having to settle their “estate away from a family of five daughters, in favor of a man” (Austen 63) in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Aside from the internal familial issues plaguing the Bennet family, Elizabeth creates a social stir because she often speaks her mind and does not adhere to the strict social behaviors of the “elegant female” (Austen 108); instead she speaks her beliefs “as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart” (Austen 108). Elizabeth desires love and romance in a marriage; not just the knowledge that she will be well taken care of. She is expected to comply to the standard that the “loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable, that one false step involves her in endless ruin that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful, and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behavior towards the undeserving of the other sex” (Austen 280). After an amateurish start to their relationship, which does not adhere to social expectations, Elizabeth and Darcy ultimately marry for love and are able to sustain a respectful place in the social order. Even though Elizabeth submits to certain societal expectations of a woman, she does so in her own way and on her own terms, enabling her to become an icon for women’s changing place in society.

“Women have not just recently begun to struggle against their suppression and exploitation, women have fought in a million ways in their daily, private lives to survive and to overcome existing conditions” (Dunbar). There have been numerous characters, authors and individuals who have challenged hetero-normative behavior, gender roles and the complexities surrounding sexuality. This fight is evidenced in literature leading

up to the present in which women are still not completely equal to their male counterparts.

Contemporary Heroine: Lisbeth Salander

Though society has made immense strides since the times of Ophelia and Elizabeth Bennet, women are still considered secondary to men, even if it is more of a subconscious idea rather than an outright statement or blatant societal ideal; “gender inequality continues to exist in advanced industrial societies, such as the US, despite a plethora of changes that work against gender discrimination” (Fisk). Ophelia and Elizabeth were held back by certain aspects of their time period, but they were able to break free to some extent of their respective molds and create a commentary on women in society. The dynamic female character in modern literature is continuing the same battles as her previous counterparts; she is not only fighting for her right to choose who and how to love, but she also is fighting for herself. The contemporary female character faces more subtle battles concerning gender roles, stereotypes, and hetero-normativity because even though society has evolved to be ‘more open’ and ‘more accepting’, due to the prevalent undertones of these themes the modern female character must still resist and refuse to define herself or to be defined in these terms.

Who is Lisbeth Salander and why is she an important modern literary heroine? Most people will recognize her name from the best selling Millennium book trilogy or from the motion picture adaptations of the trilogy beginning with *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* (the Swedish adaptation includes all three novels, whereas the American adaptation only includes the first novel). We think of Rooney Mara or Noomi Rapace as Lisbeth Salander in the American and Swedish films respectively. Ignoring the

Hollywood angle and the superstar status related to the actresses, we are left with the individual character; a character that has inspired young girls and women and has sparked a revolution for what it means to be a woman. Empowered female characters are becoming more important as “88% of Americans under 30 read a book in the past year, compared with 79% of those age 30 and older” (Quinn) suggesting that young Americans are reading more than their older counterparts. Lisbeth is forced into impossible, tragic and deadly circumstances in which she rises to fight for herself in a society where she has little to no power or influence. She resists the prescribed gender roles and hetero-normative expectations of society by embracing her distinctive traits and attitude in order to combat the labels and brands that are placed upon her by those in power. Lisbeth Salander is the modern literary heroine that refuses to submit to the constructs that embody life in Sweden; that every woman can look to for inspiration and motivation to be whoever she wants to be regardless of any predetermined standards or expectations.

Character Impression, Attitude and Description

Lisbeth Salander’s Astonishing Image:

When the reader is first introduced to Lisbeth Salander, she is everything but ‘your average 24 year old woman’. Lisbeth is a “pale, anorexic young woman who has hair as short as a fuse, and a pierced nose and eyebrows. She had a wasp tattoo about an inch long on her neck, a tattooed loop around the biceps of her left arm and another around her left ankle... she had a dragon tattoo on her left shoulder blade. She was a natural redhead, but she dyed her hair raven black. She looked as though she had just emerged from a week long orgy with a gang of hard rockers” (Larsson 2009, 38). Beneath her tattoos, dyed hair and dark makeup and clothing, Lisbeth “had simply been

born thin, with slender bones that made her look girlish and fine-limbed with small hands, narrow wrists, and childlike breasts” (Larsson 2009, 38), which are extenuated by her small stature at a height of 4’ 11 and weighing less than 90 pounds. Her physical appearance paired with her stylistic choices that resemble Goth culture make Lisbeth stand out due to the negative stereotypes associated with Goth culture; however “the secret Larsson uses to make Lisbeth compelling is to have her conform to these mainstream stereotypes about Goths while at the same time allowing us into her world, where we come to understand and respect her choices” (Young 25). It is the reader’s acknowledgement, understanding and respect for Lisbeth’s choices that help to create such a powerful character, when in reality most readers would stray far from Lisbeth if they saw her on the street. “Her movements were quick and spidery” (Larsson 2009, 38-39), thus furthering her almost frightening image by comparing her to a spider, an insect which most people avoid or are immensely afraid of. In an almost inexplicable way, her drastic physical appearance and stylistic choices accentuate her attractiveness and establishes a perplexing yet enticing aura.

Lisbeth knows her image and understands how others view her because her choices are divergent from most females in her society. Society has a certain expectation for what a woman should look like and striving to attain this image is a central habit for many women across the cultures. The general expectation of appearance for both men and women is one of an aesthetically pleasing appearance. The idea that life is easier when one is attractive and that females should go to any length to attain that beauty is presented to girls at very young ages. These viewpoints are based on the notion of beauty, but what is beauty and how do we define it? “To understand what it takes to be beautiful, we need to be very clear about what being beautiful means—being sexually

appealing to men. And then, instead of snarling that male sexuality is evil, we need to accept that it's just different—far more visually-driven than female sexuality” (Alkon). The hetero-normative ideal beauty or physical appearance for a woman is “to be sexy yet fragile, and is embodied by a woman with a tall, very slender yet busty figure with shiny hair, wide eyes, and high heels” (Rodgers 31), categories in which Lisbeth obviously does not fall into, but yet others are often entranced and mystified by her. An argument could be made that when Lisbeth undergoes breast augmentation surgery she is submitting to the hetero-normative view about what a woman’s breasts should look like; however the surgery was not to attain a certain standard of attractiveness, it was because “she always felt uncomfortable showing herself naked” (Larsson 2010, 19). The surgery was solely to boost her self-confidence; “she could not walk past a mirror with her top off without stopping and feeling glad that she has improved her quality of life” (Larsson 2010, 19). She was always on the outskirts of society and her lack of traditional ‘feminine’ features further segregated her from other individuals, namely other women, in society and contributed to her body insecurities. The breast augmentation surgery allows Lisbeth to feel more sexy and confident because she no longer feels that her body resembles that of a teenage boy. She always believed that her body was more reminiscent of a child rather than a grown woman, which lead to her development of body insecurities. After the breast augmentation she feels confident, sexy and at 26 years old, she could now wear “a bra with a certain amount of satisfaction” (Larsson 2010, 20); satisfaction that she no longer had a negative self-image, she now felt comfortable and confident in her own body. One of Lisbeth’s most intriguing aspects is that she is completely individual and original; she determines everything about herself and does not submit to the views or expectations of others. Then, Larsson exposes Lisbeth to breast

augmentation surgery, an idea that is often related to the hetero-normative expectation that women should have large breasts. Lisbeth states that “she always felt uncomfortable showing herself naked” (Larsson 2010, 19), which can then be interpreted that the use of the word “showing” implies that another person is involved; therefore she is uncomfortable with another person seeing her naked because she feels that she does not meet the expected female standard. The connotations of the specific word choice in this instance and the overall idea of Lisbeth’s breast augmentation surgery tend to lean toward compliance with hetero-normative behavior, even though Lisbeth maintains that the surgery “has improved her quality of life” (Larsson 2010, 19). Larsson’s point here could be representative of the idea that though an individual can strive to resist and challenge gender roles and hetero-normative behavior, it is impossible to completely ignore and negate the pervasive effect that they have on a person and on society as a whole.

Her appearance and style are what makes Lisbeth so intriguing; she fully understands the message that she gives off and is completely uncaring about what others think of her image. “She tried instead to accentuate her own individuality” (Larsson 2012, 539) as compared with surrendering her originality to succumb to society’s idea of what a woman’s appearance should be. She is clever enough to go unnoticed in circumstances when she needs to blend in for her safety, but during her trial, “in district court she had exaggerated her style to the point of parody...she was not pretending to be someone she was not” (Larsson 2012, 539) in order to make the statement that if this is the image that society has of her, then she will give them exactly what they want. In all situations, she comes “as herself and no-one else” (Larsson 2012, 539) so as to always maintain her individuality and originality. She realizes that her appearance is drastically different than the ‘average’ blouse and jean-wearing woman, but she never compares

herself to these women; instead she acknowledges their style and simply chooses to ignore it because how she looks is her choice and no one else's. Lisbeth's style with her "nine tattoos and six body piercings...tell a story: her story" (Rodgers 31). Even though she is the main character in the trilogy, Lisbeth rarely speaks, she is a silent character only speaking when absolutely necessary, and thus she communicates through her appearance and actions. She manipulates her image in a variety of ways in order to best suit the situation or the point that she is trying to express. She has no voice in society, so she uses her appearance to speak for her; her voice is her image. "Salander's appearance is also a mirror of her interior self, quite accurately reflecting her mood as well as less transient personal traits. As she evolves, her appearance does, too, so that it can continue to accurately express who she is" (Rodgers 44) as evidenced by her "progressive abandonment of her body modifications and provocative style" (Rodgers 44). Lisbeth Salander is *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*: a fiercely original woman with a dark yet stunning presence.

How Lisbeth Conducts Herself:

Lisbeth is extremely logical in every aspect of her life, in that she is constantly conducting a cost and benefit analysis before acting. This analysis is a safety measure that she learned from her original guardian Holger Palmgren. She was "the very quintessence of difficult" (Larsson 2009, 39) with a "dry-as-dust tone" (Larsson 2009, 37) that never hid her lack of emotional involvement. Palmgren had taken an interest in her case and believed that he could help Lisbeth; he gave her the basic tools to create her own moral and ethical code to live by. He recognized that Lisbeth was very different from most people and that society would not understand her, thus he made sure that she knew

“that impulsive actions led to trouble, and trouble could have unpleasant consequences” (Larsson 2009, 220-221). Lisbeth took this lesson to heart and began at a young age to weigh the consequences of her actions before acting; which would serve her well in the trying situations she would eventually become involved in. Palmgren’s lesson becomes a creed that she lives by due to the infringement on her civil liberties and physical self; it allows her to stay composed because she has previously considered what will most likely happen based on her actions.

Weighing the consequences before acting, serves Lisbeth well because she has no qualms accepting the consequences for her actions; however the only issue presented in her code is that she develops an intense sense of guilt when her actions lead to consequences for others. Her problems had “always been about her, and she could handle them” (Larsson 2010, 561), but when her problems affected those around her “she cursed herself. She was riddled with feelings of guilt” (Larsson 2010, 561) for causing pain to those whose “only crime was that she [he] knew Salander” (Larsson 2010, 561). Her guilt greatly affects her, but Lisbeth does not let the guilt overtake her; she uses her guilt to fuel her determination and will to fight. She prides herself in being able to survive through the “many more punches to both body and soul than anyone should ever have to endure” (Larsson 2010, 625) because “she had been able to rebel” (Larsson 2010, 625) and bounce back from every retreat, injustice and guilty conscious. She was able to fuel her own fire to make herself anything but easy to handle.

Lisbeth’s code is all her own, she “makes her own rules, to the point that she sometimes has to take the law into her own hands” (Yingling 195). Lisbeth’s code enables her to live outside societal expectations by resisting institutional authority and creating her own set of laws to live by. For example, when Bjurman raped her, he took

something from her; therefore she felt she must avenge herself in such a way as to effectively take away the weapons that were used against her or against other people. She does this by branding him "A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST" (Larsson 2009, 263) by tattooing this phrase on his chest so that he is no longer able to engage in any sexual activity. She is not maintaining a social or moral order that society recognizes because society does not recognize her; it is her own order in which she is included and in which she has a voice. In a world where she believes and has experienced that all "people are capable of great evil" (Yingling 2009), Salander, at a young age, resolves to take her life into her own hands. She is a polarizing woman who "was anything but defenseless. She was the girl who at the age of twelve had gone to war with a hit man who had defected from the GRU, and she had crippled him for life" (Larsson 2010, 580). The moral and ethical code that Salander lives by is heavily based in feminist ideas, but she does not necessarily rebel in order to make a feminist statement. Lisbeth Salander is simply "the woman who hated men who hate women" (Larsson 2010, 580). "She distrusts established institutions, recognizing that they are for the most part still run by men for men" (Lorber) because these very institutions, that are meant to protect her, the government, the police and medical institutions, are the institutions run by men who have heavily infringed on her rights. Salander was constantly provoked beginning with her mother's abuse and the continual provocation from the men in her life, but there was little she could do to prevent this, until she was able to develop her own set of laws that enabled her to deal with the "common or garden bastard who hates women" (Larsson 382) in such a way as to prevent them from furthering hurting or abusing any woman.

Lisbeth's Isolation and Privacy:

Lisbeth's desire for privacy is taken to extreme measures, but her need for privacy is ironic considering that she "enjoyed digging into the lives of other people and exposing the secrets they were trying to hide. She has been doing it, in one form or another, for as long as she could remember" (Larsson 2009, 332), but the idea of somebody coming into her life uninvited was absurd. She looked into the lives of people "for the sheer fun of it. It gave her a kick. It was like a complicated computer game, except that it dealt with real live people" (Larsson 2009 332). Her need for isolation is most likely driven by her need to control and have power over all aspects of her life. She does not believe that her life is the concern of any other person, except herself. She ignores society unless it infringes on her, therefore society should simply ignore and leave her alone. Her inclination towards privacy is most likely due to her personhood which "was consistently ignored even before the incarceration, at which time it was obliterated" (Gourguechon 88) and she would spend the better part of her life fighting for the privacy that was stolen from her. "Salander did not have the remotest wish to talk about her feelings or actions. Her life was her own business" (Larsson 2012, 195), but yet "she would be forced to explain herself and to beg for forgiveness because she had defended herself" (Larsson 2012, 195) on multiple occasions in order to appease society.

At the core of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is the need of belonging, but Lisbeth feels she does not belong and society confirms this by placing no value on her from the time she was twelve. She was forced into a life where she had no say and in order to survive she isolated herself because she knew that from then on, she was the only person she could count on. She was wrongfully declared "non compos mentis" (Larsson 2009, 223), thus her thoughts and beliefs mean nothing to society; "generally in her experience

the words of other people weighed more heavily than hers” (Larsson 2009, 227). Since the age of twelve, Lisbeth’s experiences with her stating her opinion or voice have been denied and ignored by those around her, as evidenced by the police ignoring her pleas for help regarding her mother’s abuse. Her voice held no power or influence, thus she stopped using her words and began to rely on her actions to speak for her. Her experience with other people’s words weighing more heavily than her own is key to her need for privacy and isolation. If her words mean nothing in society, then what is the point of attempting to assimilate into that society? Her status or lack-there-of allows her opinion, thoughts and emotions to be discounted because she is labeled as an insane person who cannot take care of herself. She is an individual that needs help, an individual who cannot function in society properly, thus why should her opinion matter? If society is willing to neglect her and fail to protect her, then she has no need to be a part of that society; by isolating herself she is able to provide herself with the best form of protection possible, as well as obtaining some sense of peace of mind. Ultimately, Lisbeth wants “to be left in peace” (Larsson 2012, 604) because it is the one aspect of life that she has been consistently deprived of.

Generally the idea of an isolated bachelor lifestyle is more closely associated to males than females. Males are seen as more isolated figures than females are, in that they relate to the bachelor lifestyle and females relate more to the idea of marrying and starting a family or if females are isolated they are often viewed as broken or crazy; they are not accepted by society like the typical male bachelor is. By being so isolated, she more so embodies the male bachelor lifestyle than anything else. Lisbeth resists her prescribed female gender role, by relating and embodying a more male centric gender role in regards to her privacy and isolation. Her isolation embodies the “bachelor

experience that was part of the larger social construction of maleness and masculinity” (Hilkey 1320) in that much like the young men who want to create a life away from the “constraints that married domestic life had come to represent” (Hilkey 1320), Lisbeth wants to create a life away from the constraints that society has placed upon her. Furthermore, living the bachelor lifestyle allows Lisbeth more control because she answers to nobody but herself and is able to live exactly how she wants, which is directly connected to the code she lives by. This fits into her sexuality because she chooses with whom she has sex with and when she has sex; she initiates all of her sexual encounters. It is unclear if Lisbeth would have chosen to be so isolated if her privacy rights had not been infringed upon; however it is clear that her isolation and desire for privacy allowed Lisbeth to flourish and become empowered and striking in all aspects.

Lisbeth Salander’s Unbreakable Façade:

Aside from her dragon tattoo, what makes Lisbeth Salander stand out so much is her completely unapologetic and no-nonsense attitude. She is unwavering in her beliefs and willing to express them when she deems it fit to. Considering that Lisbeth is not a very vocal character, her attitude more than makes up for her lack of speech by speaking volumes for her. In expressing her views to Harriet Vanger about Martin, Salander spoke with “not an ounce of sympathy” (Larsson 2009, 473) in stating that an individual’s upbringing, no matter how tragic and traumatic “doesn’t give him the right to murder women. He made that choice himself” (Larsson 2009, 473). She cannot understand why or how people often blame their circumstances for their choices and that “it’s pathetic that creeps always have to have someone else to blame” (Larsson 2009, 473) instead of taking responsibility for their own actions. Lisbeth makes no effort to

hide her distaste and opposition to Harriet's point of view concerning this touchy subject even though Harriet is also a rape and torture victim. Salander does not bother to be gentle in her delivery of her beliefs because she is proof that excuses are pointless and irrelevant. Every person has their own will and therefore they cannot "become whatever they've been brought up to be" (Larsson 2009, 472) because there is always a choice to be made and it is that choice that defines a person. Lisbeth truly lives and embodies the idea of existentialism; she "concentrates on the existence of the individual, who, being free and responsible, is held to be what he [she] makes himself [herself] by the self-development of his [her] essence through acts of the will" (OED Online).

Lisbeth's unapologetic attitude perfectly corresponds to her unemotional perspective on life. This is not to say that Lisbeth has no emotions, instead she keeps her feelings to herself and keeps her emotional side 'in-check' to adhere to her private style of living. She acknowledges her lack of emotion after Bjurman rapes her in that "she was so abnormal that even rape could evoke no adequate emotional response" (Larsson 2009, 227). Her response to the rape was not an emotional one, but it was a logical response in that "there was no question of Advokat Bjurman going unpunished. Salander never forgot an injustice, and by nature she was anything but forgiving" (Larsson 2009, 228); exacting her revenge is her way to dealing with her emotions in an analytical and safe way. She is simply more disconnected from her emotions than the 'normal' person but she has "an intellectual sense of what 'normal' people are like, she is often remote from their emotional experiences and puzzled by them" (Yingling 2006). She is constantly dealing with her own list of troubles including her mother, sister, Mimmi, Palmgren, Armansky and Blomkvist, which are directly linked to her emotional state. If anything Lisbeth Salander is almost overtaken by her emotions in that "every single fucking detail

that she couldn't forget even if she tried" (Larsson 2009, 557) was seared into her photographic memory; there was no forgetting and no letting go of these attachments which overwhelm her at times and have a significant impact on her mental state.

Lisbeth's unapologetic manner and seemingly unemotional attachment to most aspects of life exemplify a divergent course from the typical feminine stereotype and female gender role. "Men are said to be aggressive, rational, etc., while women are said to be emotional, talkative, etc." (Williams), thus according to this stereotypical definition, Lisbeth should be a male character. From a young age, children are exposed to the female stereotype based on hetero-normative beliefs, which suggests "girls and women are shown in the home, performing domestic functions and pursuing limited interests...no mothers are pictured as head of households. The illustrations of women are pristine and outdated. Girls and women are characterized by weakness, passivity, silliness, and bitchiness" (Oliver 259). Lisbeth adheres to none of these female descriptions; instead she completely resists and defies them in every possible instance because she is distinctively tough. She is aggressive, rational, powerful, forceful and dominant; all attributes that are commonly associated with males that carry significant influence and prestige in their communities. Lisbeth created an unbreakable façade around her, which is strengthened by her unsympathetic attitude and intense emotional control, which enables her to defy the expected gender role that society holds for her.

Lisbeth's Social Status:

Not only is Lisbeth Salander stripped of her voice in society, but "as a girl she was legal prey, especially if she was dressed in a worn black leather jacket and had pierced eyebrows, tattoos, and zero social status" (Larsson 2009, 228) and in her opinion

there was no sense in wallowing about it. She understands where she stands in society and why she stands there. Though she does not complain or mope about her standing she makes sure that she always gets revenge on those who perpetually infringe on her rights; it is her way to maintain a social order in which she is actually included. The vital part of Lisbeth's recognition of her status in society is that she understands it, but unlike society she does not view herself as prey or a victim. "She had never regarded herself as a victim. Consequently, her only remaining option was to do what she had always done—take matters in her own hands and solve her problems on her own" (Larsson 2009, 237). Zero social status is when an individual has no power and no consideration in society; the individual is rarely thought of and has no ability to make any lasting change or impression. Having zero social status means that Lisbeth is at the bottom of the social hierarchy and is consequently overlooked and ignored as if she does not exist; she is merely a pawn that is moved whenever Zalachenko, Säpo and those in power see fit.

Even though Lisbeth has zero social status, she has an exceptional gender and non-hetero-normative status. In a paradoxical way, by having no social status, Lisbeth is able to evade all expectations because society does not care, thus giving her the ability to create her own status without labels. For an individual that society cares nothing about, society spends an incredible amount of time attempting to label and define Lisbeth. She is labeled a victim, a lesbian, a satanic cult member, a threat to society and countless other brandings so as to allow society to 'understand' her, but there is no label for Lisbeth Salander because she is a societal and gender outlaw who defies hetero-normative standards and expectations. Society cannot "rigidly lock" (Hook 49) Lisbeth into a feminine gender role or a masculine gender role because she embodies characteristics of both; she is as aggressive and emotionally unconnected much like the stereotypical male,

but she is caring, protective and nurturing towards those she cares about in an almost motherly way like the stereotypical feminine gender role. Lisbeth's sexuality is one of the best examples of her outlaw status; she has a "freewheeling sexuality" (Hook 53) in that she "decides with whom, in what situation, and for what purposes she has sex and does not let the dictates of gender influence her in any way" (Hook 53). The media and police label Salander as a lesbian and even Mimmi states that "Lisbeth has sex with me, but that isn't the same thing as being a dyke. I don't think she knows herself what sort of sexual identity she has. I'd guess she's bisexual" (Larsson 2010, 359). Lisbeth "had never brooded over whether she was straight, gay, or even bisexual. She did not give a damn about labels, did not see that it was anyone else's business whom she spent her nights with" (Larsson 2009, 327). This is the ultimate defiance and resistance to gender roles and hetero-normative behavior because there is no determining factor of what her identity is, thus she cannot be put into a specific category; she muddles the conventional ideas surrounding sex and gender. As a social outlaw, Lisbeth Salander is able to transcend the various definitions and expectations placed upon her, while reshaping "gendered culture" (Hook 64) to create her own social order in which she was free to be herself.

How Others View/What Others Think About the Character

Acceptance Without Understanding:

Due to her abnormal appearance and callous attitude, Lisbeth is segregated from most people in society, which she accepts; however a few individuals are able to see past the drastic accessories and "I am annoyed" t-shirts: Paolo Roberto, Miriam 'Mimmi' Wu and Annika Giannini. Roberto and Mimmi are engaged in reciprocal relationships

with Lisbeth, mentorship or training and sexual, respectively; whereas Giannini's relationship with Lisbeth is constantly forced. In all three instances, the characters recognize that Lisbeth is different and accept her for who she is without fully understanding why she acts and thinks the way she does.

At first Roberto was just as dismissive as most people towards Lisbeth when she came into the gym to learn to box. He remarked that "little chicks were only allowed to box on Thursdays" (Larsson 2010, 420), until he realized that "she never gave up" (Larsson 2010, 421) and that she came willing to fight until they "had to sort of stop and carry her into the locker room" (Larsson 2010, 421). After this initial misconception, Roberto made no further judgments and worked intently on helping and mentoring Salander. He recognized her susceptibility to fall into 'Terminator Mode' in which she would "try to nail her opponent, and it didn't matter if it was just a warm-up or friendly sparring" (Larsson 2010, 421), so he attempted to help her control her moves, build muscle and strengthen her overall skills. It was his admiration for Lisbeth's fearlessness and intensity that allowed Roberto to accept Lisbeth; he could not understand why "she hardly ever talked to anyone" (Larsson 2010, 421), but since it was good training, he was not bothered by it. Roberto assumed that Lisbeth complied with the female stereotypes of being weak, fragile and complaisant and treated her as such when they first met; however her non-conformity to these expectations is what allowed their boxing relationship to flourish into one of trust and respect. Whether Lisbeth fully trusted him is debatable, but she trusted and respected him in the ring, which created a real relationship with someone.

Mimmi's relationship with Lisbeth is slightly more complicated, because they had a sexual relationship, but their relationship was mainly about sex; there was no deep,

emotional connection. Mimmi is the only person with whom Lisbeth actively maintains contact with and with whom Lisbeth feels comfortable enough to trust, but it is only to the extent to which Lisbeth needs in that moment; the two are by no means ‘best friends’, but it is as close to ‘best friends’ as Lisbeth gets. Mimmi profusely defends Lisbeth when she is accused of murder stating, “Lisbeth is probably smarter than anyone I know...Lisbeth reads and writes a whole lot better than I do. Sometimes she sits and scribbles mathematical formulas. Pure algebra” (Larsson 2010, 359). Furthermore, when the police attempt to solidify their belief that Lisbeth is a whore and sexual deviant, Mimmi quickly defends her, calling the police and media’s representations of Lisbeth “bullshit” (Larsson 2010, 359). She is defensive towards Lisbeth, much like other characters because she realizes that Lisbeth is wildly different and therefore society will not give her the same chances as it would give ‘normal’ people. She defends Lisbeth because she knows Lisbeth well enough to know that she is not guilty of the alleged crimes against her. Mimmi has more social capital than Lisbeth because she is a ‘functioning member’ that society recognizes but she does not have any real capital to have a substantial effect or influence on the investigation because she is also slandered by the media and police as part of a lesbian satanic cult. Lisbeth’s relationship with Mimmi is outside of hetero-normative standard because the two are females engaged in an open sexual relationship that involves some type of bondage games. It is a relationship that is completely out of line with the ‘typical’ male-female relationship; everything about their relationship is a taboo, which makes the entire police force, media and general society uneasy and weary.

Annika Giannini reluctantly accepts Lisbeth as a client, but she does not understand Lisbeth and is thus intensely hesitant around her. Giannini’s uncertainty

around Lisbeth is because she, like most people, feels uncomfortable around Lisbeth and does not understand much about Lisbeth. She mainly struggles with Lisbeth's lackluster attitude about her own trial; however Giannini recognizes Salander's incredible strength and perseverance. In her cross examination of Dr. Peter Teleborian, Giannini declares, "I admire Lisbeth Salander. She's tougher than I am. If I had been strapped down for a year when I was thirteen I would probably have broken down altogether. She fought back with the only weapon she had available—her contempt for you" (Larsson 2010, 585). It is this revelation that gives Giannini the control that she felt she was lacking in court; she was able to truly see Lisbeth for who she is, stripped of the hardcore clothing and apathetic manner.

Lisbeth's relationship with each of these characters is somewhat strained, but they are each willing to come her defense when she most needs it, in the midst of a murder trial, a kidnapping and government conspiracies. Considering the remarkable amount of trauma that Lisbeth has lived through, her loss of trust in individuals is completely understandable, but yet Lisbeth is able to trust Roberto, Mimmi and Giannini to protect her "from the unthinkable" (Gourguechon 91) even though she never asked them to. She consistently finds "ways to build constructive" (Gourguechon 92) relationships while still maintaining her own sense of privacy and security. The most important aspect of their respective relationships with Lisbeth is that they "all treat her need for distance with respect, and try their best to not 'impinge' on her" (Gourguechon 91). This defies the female gender stereotype of women being "more communal (selfless and concerned with others)" (Eagly 735) because Lisbeth makes no effort to maintain any kind of real connection with Roberto, Mimmi (except for sex) and Giannini. This lack of social friendship is vital because it illustrates the idea that women do not only have to be

concerned with “selflessness, concern with others, and a desire to be at one with others” (Eagly 736); instead women can be self-assertive, self-motivated and more concerned with their own welfare rather than the welfare of everyone else.

The Men Who Hate Women:

Lisbeth Salander’s entire life was determined and is immeasurably influenced by men who hate women. These men destroyed her childhood, her mother, incarcerated her, tortured her, raped her, shot her and buried her alive (just to name a few of her torments). Her relationships with these men are largely due to a government conspiracy that she unknowingly discovered when she was twelve; however she challenges their expectations of her and fights back with unfathomable force.

The media, along with two protective bodies, the police force and medical professionals, created the perfect scapegoat in Lisbeth Salander based on biased and forged documents, to create the image of a girl who “is crazy as hell and obviously on a killing spree” (Larsson 2010, 260) with only circumstantial evidence. According to the reports from Dr. Peter Teleborian, the police, media and government have developed and branded Lisbeth Salander as all or any number of the following:

- The Medical Community’s Labels
 - Lisbeth Salander is at “grave risk of alcohol and drug abuse, and that she lacked self-awareness...socially introverted, socially inhibited, lacking in empathy, ego-fixated psychopathic and asocial behavior, difficulty in cooperating, and incapable of assimilating learning” (Larsson 2009, 160).

- “She was psychotic, showed obsessive behavior, and was obviously suffering from paranoia...She had exhibited exceedingly violent behavior towards her schoolmates, teachers, and acquaintances...She suffers from schizophrenia and is continually balancing on the brink of psychosis. She lacks empathy and in many respects can be defined as a sociopath...She’s more of an egomaniacal psychopath. It’s all about her. Everyone else around her is unimportant” (Larsson 2010, 319-320).
- “She has obvious delusions with distinct paranoid schizophrenic characteristics. Her clinical status also includes periods of manic depression, and she lacks empathy...a clearly defined sociopath...She is extremely manipulative, she acts the way she thinks you would expect her to act...her violent outburst and unreasoning hatred” (Larsson 2012, 200).
- The Police and Government’s Labels
 - Lisbeth Salander is to be placed under guardianship.

“Guardianship is a stricter form of control, in which the client is relieved of the authority to handle his or her own money or to make decisions regarding various matters...the most common reason for guardianship is mental illness or mental illness in conjunction with heavy abuse of alcohol or drugs” (Larsson 2009, 225).

- “Salander is, to put it in colloquial terms, stark raving mad. No doubt about that. The decision to commit her to an institution was absolutely correct” (Larsson 2012, 232).
- “In all, sixteen charges had been filed against Lisbeth Salander...and employed terms such as psychopathy, pathological narcissism, and paranoid schizophrenia” (Larsson 2012, 536).
- The Media’s Labels
 - Article titles in newspapers relating to Salander include: “Arrested for assault in Gamla Stan” (Larsson 2010, 388), “‘We were scared of her’ she threatened to kill us, say teacher and schoolmates” (Larsson 2010, 390) and “‘She’s bisexual,’ says childhood friend” (Larsson 2010, 396).

These labels, definitions and descriptions followed Lisbeth throughout her life; however her fighting them was useless. “She had tried to explain her version to police officers, social workers, hospital personnel, nurses, doctors, psychiatrists, and even a pastor” (Larsson 2010, 394), but nobody listened and she “began to sense that nothing would ever work out” (Larsson 2010, 394). Salander resisted these labels by completely defying them and by sometimes succumbing to them in order to survive. As a female with zero social status and an immense amount of negative labels attributed to her, she is expected to sit back and let these men and governing bodies run her life, as they had been doing for years. Lisbeth does not allow any of the aforementioned labels to affect her moral code nor does she allow herself to become a victim. She demonstrates “emotional toughness, courage, self-reliance rationality and agency” (Meek), which are all

characteristics of the male gender role, in order to fight a seemingly impossible battle against men who hate women.

In addition to the aforementioned men, Advokat Bjurman expected Lisbeth to act in a specific way; he expected her to play the role of the helpless victim because she was the perfect victim and seemingly under his complete control. Simply put, he does not see Lisbeth Salander as a person. In his eyes, she is a sick individual who is fully dependent on him because of his standing as her guardian, which in his mind, gives him the power and ability to take full advantage of her in any way that he can. After his brutal attack, rape and torture, Lisbeth “did not cry” (Larsson 2009, 252), instead she researched sadism and found “the sadist chose his ‘relationships’ with almost intuitive precision; the sadist’s best victim was the one who voluntarily went to him because she did not think she had any choice. The sadist specialized in people who were in a position of dependence” (Larsson 2009, 253). Lisbeth uses her rape to learn “something about the way she was viewed by other people” (Larsson 2009, 253)...she is the perfect victim. She vigorously combats the view that women are sexual objects to be used by men whenever they please, through her moral code that “when a man hurts a woman, she believes he deserves to die or to be punished so that he cant repeat his crimes” (Mullins-Sweatt 149). She enacts this code with such force and such bravado because socially expected actions or laws do not hinder her. Lisbeth Salander defied all gender roles and hetero-normative standards and expectations by becoming the woman who defeated the men who hate women.

True... ‘Friends’:

Lisbeth Salander struggles with maintaining relationships with others, especially men, but she is able to consistently come back and call on three men for help, Dragan Armansky, Holger Palmgren and Mikael Blomkvist, even when she cannot bear to ask for their help. They are able to maintain a relationship because they respect Lisbeth's choices, make no attempt to change her and they make no effort to infringe on her in the sense that they give her control of their relationship.

Armansky is, at first, uneasy with Lisbeth because of her "astonishing lack of emotional involvement" (Larsson 2009, 38), yet he fully understands Lisbeth in terms of her being "the most able investigator" (Larsson 2009, 36) that he had ever hired. He always received excellent reports from her and notes that her imagination and work are "sheer magic" (Larsson 2009, 36). He is somewhat entranced by the mystery that surrounds Lisbeth and challenges her in her work reports. Ultimately it is her work ethic that persuades Armansky to be more accepting of Lisbeth, which leads to him developing a desire to protect her. "He recognized Lisbeth Salander as a person in need of resolute help" (Larsson 2009, 42) and from "the day he had first met Salander he had had a strong presentiment that her life was on a trajectory towards catastrophe" (Larsson 2010, 251). Lisbeth defies Armansky's expectations in that she is incredibly intelligent and utilizes her superior hacking and computer skills to prepare and give exceptional reports. He makes assumptions about her based on her appearance and his limited knowledge about her; however he realizes that he cannot "force his way into her shell and win her friendship, or at least her respect" (Larsson 2009, 44). It is in his realization and acceptance of her distaste for authority and her desire to be secluded, that he is finally able to gather a mutually respectful 'friendship' from a woman who sees no benefit in friendship.

Holger Palmgren gives Lisbeth her first chance at a 'normal' life by initiating a relationship of complete trust with her. She believes that because he is a man, that he wants something from her, most likely sexual, and she waits for him to act, but he never does. He trusts and believes in Lisbeth from the beginning and by showing her his complete trust; she is able to trust him. The two develop a mutually protective relationship and become almost like pseudo-family for one another. Palmgren acknowledges that Lisbeth "was unquestionably the most difficult he had ever had to deal with" (Larsson 2009, 162), but he deeply cared for her and her well-being, as evidenced when he goes to court to defend her whilst being in a wheelchair and extremely ill.

The most complicated relationship in the Millennium trilogy is that between Lisbeth Salander and Mikael Blomkvist. Blomkvist is bewildered and yet completely entranced by her and their awkward friendship, relationship and the lack-there-of. Much like with her relationship with Palmgren, her relationship with Blomkvist is one of mutual protection. He has mixed feelings about her in that he deeply cares for her and her well being, but he acknowledges and realizes that she is purposely difficult, which causes her frequent issues in society. For this reason, he does not feel sorry for her; "she has herself to blame for a lot of the crap that's happened to her. But I do feel enormous sympathy for and solidarity with her" (Larsson 2012, 491). More so than other characters that attempt to help Lisbeth, he does not believe that she is helpless or a victim in need of help; he sees her just as she sees herself, if not in a better light. Even though he knows hardly anything about her, he is highly protective of her and is unwilling to disclose details of her life that he knows she would want to be kept secret. He passed no judgments on her because he knew "she could be viciously violent. He owed his life to that" (Larsson 2010, 292). Lisbeth's relationship with Blomkvist defies her prescribed

gender role because she is in complete control of every aspect of their relationship; in many instances she heroically saves his life in both literal and figurative terms.

Lisbeth is so successful as a gender outlaw and in challenging hetero-normative standards because she is an extremely resilient character that is able to maintain a relationship with a number of characters “despite the distance she enforces between herself and those who care about her” (Rutledge 223). They provide her with the knowledge that she should have a “sense of strength and safety” (Rutledge 223) and that if she ever needs their support that they would be there for her, on her terms. Her relationship with Blomkvist, Palmgren and Armansky is so vital to her survival and success because they accept her for who she is and have faith in her; they do not require or expect her to submit to any social or gender standard.

Intelligence and Control as a Means for Survival

Exemplary Intelligence

Lisbeth is seen as a character with little to no mental abilities; an impression based solely on her appearance and social status. Although this is a completely inaccurate impression of Lisbeth, it seemingly works to her advantage because she is able to be a step ahead of everyone who underestimates her abilities. Her aptitude is further increased because of her photographic memory. A photographic memory enables an individual “to remember visual perceptions with the accuracy of a photograph” (OED Online) and to recall facts exceptionally well compared to that of the average individual. This degree of intelligence is remarkable and considered a trait that any person would be lucky to have; however Lisbeth is extremely uncomfortable with her memory. When Blomkvist figures out that she has a photographic memory, he remarks

that he would “be overjoyed if my memory was what yours is” (Larsson 2009, 423), yet Lisbeth reacts in an “explosive” (Larsson, 2009, 423) manner with intense “fury” (Larsson 2009, 423) because she does not believe that her memory is a remarkable trait. For Lisbeth, her memory is as much a curse as it is a blessing; she is able to rapidly read and recall an incredible amount of information, but it further segregates her from ‘normal’ people, thus it cannot be a ‘gift’. Lisbeth has “no idea of how it works. It’s not only computers and telephone networks, but the motor in my bike and TV sets and vacuum cleaners and chemical processes and formulae in astrophysics. I’m a nut case, I admit it: a freak” (Larsson 2009, 506).

Lisbeth utilizes her intelligence as a means to survive, especially when it comes to her appearance. She realizes that she sticks out in public because of her stylistic choices, thus she often manipulates her image in ways that allows her to blend in and become invisible when she needs to. While doing investigative work, Salander needed to blend in with society so she “put on black jeans, heavy winter boots, a warm polo shirt, a dark pea jacket, and matching knitted gloves, cap and scarf. She took the rings out of her eyebrows and nostril, put on a pale pink lipstick” (Larsson 2009, 10), which enabled her to fit into the expected feminine hetero-normative mold for appearance. She successfully changed from her traditional gothic style to looking “like any other woman out for a weekend stroll” (Larsson 2009, 104). This manipulation is illustrative of her intelligence because she needed “appropriate camouflage for an expedition behind enemy lines” (Larsson 2009, 104) and there is nothing as perfect as completely assimilating and immersing oneself with those around. Masquerading around in typical feminine style complies with the hetero-normative behavior and expectation that a woman should dress in a way so that “everybody would know that I [she] was a woman” (Reigel 398).

Lisbeth's manipulation of her image also works in the opposite way to make her appear more frightening and intimidating than she truly is. In her search for information regarding Zalachenko, Salander questions Björk "dressed in all black—jeans, midlength cotton jacket, T-shirt, gloves" (Larsson 2010, 451) with "black lipstick, eyeliner, and dramatically prominent greenish-black eye shadow. The rest of her face was covered in white makeup. She had painted a red stripe from the left side of her forehead across her nose and down to the right side of her chin" (Larsson 2010, 451). This "grotesque mask" (Larsson 2010, 451) played into the insanity label that was placed upon her and allowed her to create a great sense of fear in Björk because she "looked out of her fucking mind" (Larsson 2010, 451) in a way that the media and police could never have depicted. She manipulated her image to fit the image that society had created of her...she became "completely insane" (Larsson 2010, 453) as a way to further her own goals. This is highly divergent from the female gender role in that she exaggerates this maniacal look to torment her victim. She has resisted her role as the feminine victim by dressing and acting in a way that rejects the "criteria of...a trampled, passive person" (Mui). The fact that Lisbeth's extreme analytical care in manipulating her image illustrates her intelligence because she ensures that she remains "as anonymous as possible" (Larsson 2009, 127) or that she leaves a memorable impact depending on her goals for each individual circumstance.

Lisbeth's intelligence is most evident in her analytical view and risk assessment of everything and every person around her, most notably with Bjurman. She is extremely intuitive about their meetings and though "she was not afraid of Bjurman—Salander was rarely afraid of anyone or anything. On the other hand, she felt uncomfortable with this new guardian" (Larsson 2009, 157). Upon their second meeting, Lisbeth felt that

something was ‘off’ with new guardian, but she was not sure exactly what this meant for her. She stood outside his office contemplating and analyzing the situation before ringing the bell, even though “she had a bad feeling about it” (Larsson 2009, 157). After her initial impressions and feelings about Bjurman were confirmed in her brutal attack and rape, she did not lash out or act in a rash manner, instead she “devoted a week to planning Nils Bjurman’s demise” (Larsson 2009, 241). She understands where she stands compared to him: she has zero social status and he is a lawyer, she is legally insane and he is completely competent, she is under guardianship with no control of her assets and he is her guardian with control of all her assets. Before acting on anything she “considered—and rejected—various methods until she had narrowed it down to a few realistic scenarios from which to choose. No acting on impulse. Only one condition had to be fulfilled. Bjurman had to die in such a way that she herself could never be linked to the crime” (Larsson 2009, 241). She determined that since she had only met him a few times and that she was “a helpless, incompetent girl with documents showing her to be mentally deficient” (Larsson 2009, 242), if he died in a strategic way, then there would be no question as to her innocence because “it would be highly unlikely that a mentally handicapped girl could be the perpetrator” (Larsson 2009, 242). Aside from the fact that she is deemed as handicapped by society, Lisbeth acknowledges that as a girl, she is an unlikely suspect in such a situation because women are not generally viewed as the violent, malicious or capable of committing such a crime; women are often viewed as the victims of crime and not the perpetrators. “Even though women in fact are neither the sole objects of sexual violence nor the most likely targets of violent crimes, women constitute the majority of fearful subjects...feminine fear inspires the familiar sensations of ‘freezing’—involuntary immobility and silence” (Mui). Lisbeth is far from fearful in

any situation; she “was afraid of no-one and nothing” (Larsson 2012, 650), whether it is when she questions Björk or in her interaction with Bjurman; she challenges the feminine fear with her strength and survival skills in tragic, brutal and life-threatening situations. Her intelligence and methodic reasoning in her meetings with Bjurman, along with all other aspects of her life, stem from the code that she adopted from Holger Palmgren. Her intelligence enables Lisbeth to survive in a world where she is placed under a brutal and abusive guardian because she is intuitive enough to analyze situations and create a plan of action before entering into any situation. She is fully prepared by the knowledge she has of her appearance and her status and manipulates both as a means to survive by turning her perceived weaknesses into immense strengths.

Complete Composure and Control:

Society took away all control from Lisbeth when she was twelve, so as a thirteenth birthday present to herself, Lisbeth gave herself control and in turn, composure. In the cottage that she shares with Blomkvist during the Vanger case, she installs a series of thorough security measures on the cottage. She uses a variety of cameras, sensors and sirens to protect the cottage from potential intruders after the incident with the mutilated cat on their doorstep. This illustrates her control and composure because in an instance with a serial murder and rapist many people, especially women, would run. “The rape script describes female bodies as vulnerable, violable, penetrable, and wounded; metaphors of rape as trespass and invasion retain this definition” (Mui); however Lisbeth does not submit to this script when she is raped or when there is the possibility that she might be raped and killed by Martin Vanger.

In her confrontation with Martin she is completely analytical and unemotional in the situation, “her voice was as rough as sandpaper... Her teeth were bared like a beast of prey. Her eyes were glittering, black as coal. She moved with the lightening speed of a tarantula and seemed totally focused on her prey as she swung the club again” (Larsson 2009, 456) at Martin in an effort to save Blomkvist, thus depicting her sheer power and control in a truly gruesome situation. She had taken charge and after saving Blomkvist, she goes after Martin to ensure that he is dead before coming to check on Blomkvist. “She had somehow seized control of the situation and given him [Blomkvist] the guidelines that he himself was unable to formulate” (Larsson 2009, 468). This is completely defiant, as well as a role reversal of the stereotypical, hetero-normative superhero/damsel-in-distress expectation of the relationship between men and women. According to the typical superhero archetype “the “damsel in distress,”— a victim who is often pursued by male protagonists whose love and salvation is won by male heroes who save the day or by villains who destroy them...the ‘damsel in distress’ is depicted as a one-dimensional, vapid, sexual prize-for-the-taking” (Oney). Lisbeth is not in distress; she becomes the hero of the story, not only by saving Blomkvist’s life, but also in defeating Martin Vanger and eventually discovering where Harriet Vanger had been hiding. If anything, Blomkvist is the damsel waiting for his heroine to save him and defeat the villain. Lisbeth’s life is spent in the shadows evading those whom wish her harm and meticulously seeking revenge on those that have succeeded in harming her. The control that she lacks socially and legally is replaced with an even more powerful form of control that she gives herself, which allows her to survive and preserve in the direst situations. Lisbeth’s control allows her to survive a life on the run, abuse of every nature and a multitude of infringements on her rights.

*Death and Life*An Apathetic Life:

There is the expectation that women should “be happy with our children and ourselves” (Shields 24) and see the positives in life. Women are the bearers of life; women create life and bring life into the world, therefore they must appreciate life to a greater extent than men. “Women as child-bearers, or potential child-bearers, are connected to the life-giving process in a way that men are not, and therefore have a tie to the earth and its processes which gives us a particular responsibility to insure its continuation” (Albert 98). Lisbeth seemingly has no interest in having a child or a family, which partially segregates her from this belief and the belief that women should want to have children, but she is further segregated because she is extremely indifferent towards her life. She is expected to live a life in which she is always “having a good time” (Shields 24); like other young women, but Lisbeth does not believe she has a life. She believes that her life “had ended before she even turned thirteen” (Larsson 2010, 563), due to the Molotov cocktail incident. In an effort to protect her mother from an abusive relationship, Lisbeth, at this point twelve years old, creates and throws a Molotov cocktail into the car of her mother’s abuser, Zalachenko. This incident illustrates Lisbeth’s indifference towards life; because she willingly risks her own life to take on an extremely powerful and well-connected man in order to protect her mother. Not only could the Molotov cocktail have killed her in its explosion, but there was also the risk that Zalachenko would come after her for his attempted murder. Her mother plays a heavy role in determining how Lisbeth views the world; she witnesses her mother being abused to the point in which she cannot take care of herself or her children. This creates

Lisbeth's initial thoughts and beliefs on how men treat women and sets her up to be strong and unapologetic which she demonstrates immediately in her fight against Zalachenko. It is extremely uncommon for a young girl to believe so wholeheartedly that her life had ended; it is more representative of the stereotypical older cynical generation. Even at such an early age, Lisbeth defies her prescribed female gender role because instead of being the “adorable and vulnerable, the tiny innocent heart” (Walkerdine), she is aggressive, highly protective and has developed a detached attitude about her life.

Lisbeth has been fighting for herself and those around her since she was twelve; her will is unending but her physical fight only stretches so far. She fights back when she is declared incompetent, when she is in a psychiatric hospital, when she is brutally attacked and raped, when she confronts various evil and sadistic men, when she is buried alive and when she is shot multiple times. After her encounter with Zalachenko and her brother, Lisbeth falls unconscious and wakes up in the hospital. She had escaped being buried alive, but she had been shot multiple times, including once in the head “and suddenly she realized that if she closed her eyes and let go there was a good chance that she would never wake up again. She analyzed this conclusion and gradually came to understand that she didn’t care. On the contrary. She felt almost attracted by the thought” (Larsson 2010, 625). This is significant, not because Lisbeth is giving up her fight, but she realizes that she no longer can fight to the extent that she needs to because of her injuries. After analyzing the risks, she acknowledges that finally being able to rest and have peace in death is better than continuing to fight with life-threatening injuries. The purpose of her overall fight is to finally gain peace and freedom in her life and she is finally realizing that she can obtain these aspects in death more easily than she can in life. “She was surprised to be alive. Yet she felt indifferent. If death was the black emptiness

from which she had just woken up, then death was nothing to worry about. She would hardly notice the difference” (Larsson 2012, 51). Lisbeth equates her life, as equivalent to death, considering the constant abuse and infringement that she has to combat. In thinking about her life she “came to the realization that she felt mostly indifferent towards her entire life” (Larsson 2012, 195).

This indifference comes across strongly to others that care about her, especially Blomkvist, Armansky and Palmgren, thus they believe that she needs help contending with the oppressive forces attempting to hurt her. It is highly possible that her indifference heightens their want to protect her because it makes it seem like she does not care enough to protect herself, even though she does care about her life, as evidenced when she calls Blomkvist for help after being shot by Zalachenko and as she prepares for a fight while in the hospital with a bullet in her head. They silently support and protect her because as careful as she is, she often places herself in situations where she could be seriously injured or killed. Her indifference creates an issue within society because people have trouble understanding a person who has little or no care about anything especially life, but it doesn't infuriate society; it is more of a confusing aspect. In certain circumstances she becomes too tired of constantly fighting and the idea of death is somewhat attractive but it does not mean that she wants to die; it is more that she has accepted that dying would not be the worse than living with her constant fights. Her apathetic view on her life challenges the female gender role because she is not ‘connected to the life-giving process’ and she does not fit into the expectation of “women as blissfully happy”(Moskowitz) or as the happy housewife. Lisbeth is indifferent and she makes no effort to hide her apathy in any situation; she has a dry attitude and a matter-of-fact way of speaking and acting that are not generally associated with women, thus

making those around her uncomfortable. In this respect, Lisbeth is more challenging the idea that women are constantly happy, positive beings that feel connected to life because they bring life into the world. Lisbeth's indifference towards her life may have lead her into life-threatening situations, but her apathetic view has helped her to survive in a society where she was neglected and left to be abused or killed.

A New Type of Superhero or a Simple Redefinition of One?

A Heroic Archetype?:

It is clear that Lisbeth Salander is the heroine of the Millennium trilogy, but in literary terms can she really fit into a heroic archetype? Just as she refuses to be defined in the novels, definitively placing Lisbeth's character into a heroic archetype is remarkably challenging. Lisbeth has attributes of the traditional hero, the anti-hero and the gothic or Byronic hero, yet she does not completely conform to these archetypes.

- The Hero is “a man (or occas. a woman) distinguished by the performance of courageous or noble actions, esp. in battle; a brave or illustrious warrior, soldier, etc.” (OED Online) that is admired and held in high esteem.
- The Anti-hero is “one who is the opposite or reverse of a hero; esp. a chief character in a poem, play, or story who is totally unlike a conventional hero” (OED Online), often depicted in a darker and more flawed manner than that of the traditional hero.
- The Gothic or Byronic hero “does not possess ‘heroic virtue’ in the usual sense; instead, he has many dark qualities. With regard to his intellectual capacity, self-respect, and hypersensitivity, the Byronic hero is ‘larger than life,’ and ‘with the

loss of his titanic passions, his pride, and his certainty of self-identity, he loses also his status as [a traditional] hero” (Characteristics of the Byronic Hero).

Lisbeth embodies the hero, as she is extremely courageous, brave and fights for the protection of others, most notably her mother, Blomkvist and Mimmi. Lisbeth represents the anti-hero, as she is totally unlike the conventional hero in her mannerisms, attitude and beliefs; she creates her own moral code that falls outside of what is generally acceptable in society. Lisbeth personifies the gothic or Byronic hero, as she is a darker, moody character that is isolated from society. Though she seemingly fits into these archetypes, the Gothic or Byronic hero best, she cannot definitively be placed into them. The traditional hero “leaves the world of his or her everyday life to undergo a journey to a special world where challenges and fears are overcome in order to secure a quest, which is then shared with other members of the hero’s community” (Archetypes), but as a social outcast, Lisbeth cannot fit into this archetype. She is not admired or revered by society; she does not regenerate and restore society or fight the villains and criminals to protect society. Even though Lisbeth has many traits of the anti-hero in that she establishes her own code and is a displaced and oppressed member of society, she is not “unattractive, fearful, dull-witted, disrespectful, ill-groomed, clumsy, and awkward, or any other combination of characteristics that do not elicit spontaneous admiration” (Archetypes). Unlike many anti-heroes, Lisbeth completes a risk analysis before acting and has a distinctive motive for every action that she takes; she is prepared to succeed in any situation and if she does not, she develops a modified plan and eventually succeeds. The Gothic or Byronic hero archetype fits Lisbeth best; she is a rebellious outcast; however she is not doomed by some “fatal flaw which dooms him [her] to fail. [S]He understands

his [her] fate and knows that it was caused by his [her] own actions, but is not wholly deserved, yet his [her] suffering has meaning. [S]He has flaws that lead to his [her] downfall” (Archetypes).

Considering the apparent contradictions surrounding Lisbeth’s character, can she truly be defined or placed into a specific archetype? An argument could be made either way because her character is so dynamic; however it seems that the only fitting definition or labeling of Lisbeth Salander is to not restrict her to a single archetype or classification. She refuses to be labeled and fights adamantly in the novels against the brands that are forced upon her by society and by the men who hate women; her effort and fight should be respected during the reading process and in critical reviews. Perfectly defining Lisbeth might be impossible, but there is no question that she is the ultimate heroine of the Millennium trilogy, who has become a completely unique, remarkable and unforgettable cultural icon.

Larsson and His Heroine:

Stieg Larsson passed away before any of the novels in the Millennium trilogy were published. He never saw the success of his trilogy or the success of the respective Swedish and American film adaptations of his novels. Larsson developed a female character unlike any other and “despite Larsson's passing, his publishers have noted that he had planned to continue the books well past the current trilogy. By some accounts, the overarching outline he had in mind included at least an additional seven novels” (Dwyer). Speculations can be made about what Larsson had planned for Lisbeth Salander, but the more intriguing aspect is how and why he created his character. It is evident that Larsson wanted to create and succeeded in creating a dynamic character that

is able to transcend traditional gender roles and hetero-normative behavior in order to spark some type of social commentary and maybe even social change. Larsson was an extremely private person, much like his protagonist and various other similarities can be found between the two. Much like Lisbeth, Larsson had distrust for authority; “Larsson’s anti-authoritarian writings won him and Expo many enemies...Larsson received death threats. He took precautions” (Acocella). The two were shaped by early experiences in life, Lisbeth with the abuse of her mother and Larsson with racism and his grandfather’s prominent influence; “he wanted to protect equal rights and fight for democracy and freedom of speech in order to prevent history, and what happened to his grand father, from repeating itself” (Biography).

Larsson is determined to protect equal rights and fight for social justice, thus he creates a character with her own set of moral beliefs and a code in which she determines what is equal and right. As an oppressed person, Lisbeth is the perfect individual to spark a change and to make commentary on societal expectations and beliefs. Lisbeth defies gender roles and hetero-normative behaviors, but there are instances in which one could argue that Lisbeth submits to these ideas, thus weakening the argument that she is a progressive autonomous and gender-bending heroine.

Is Lisbeth Salander a new type of female character with her own agency or did Larsson simply write a male character into female clothing? Again, the point could be argued either way in that Lisbeth is a character unlike any before her; though this is not to say that there have not been dynamic female characters that challenge gender roles and hetero-normative behavior previously. On the contrary, Lisbeth embodies many masculine traits and takes on traditionally masculine roles in various circumstances. Related to defining what type of heroine Lisbeth is, how she is written faces similar

issues; her character is written with aspects of both masculine and feminine gender roles. It seems more that she transgresses between the masculine and the feminine depending on the situation in order to suit her needs best. Considering her astonishing image, conduct, isolation and privacy, unbreakable façade and her social status, Lisbeth is more representative of a new type of female character than a male written into female clothing. She has complete agency when she is provided with none, she has extensive prowess in her intelligence, will, determination and fight. She is not the perfect victim, as everyone around her seems to think she is; Lisbeth Salander is the heroine for Blomkvist, Harriet Vanger, her mother, Erika Berger and countless others, but more importantly Lisbeth Salander is the heroine of her own story.

Emulation Aspect

A Cultural Icon:

What makes Larsson's Lisbeth Salander a cultural icon? How does a fictional character become a household name in society? Simply put, Lisbeth Salander fills a void that society, particularly a void that women in society feel. She is neglected, ignored and pushed aside due to various extraordinary circumstances; women in modern society often feel and experience the same neglect. Tracing back to de Beauvoir's argument against the idea that women are generally considered secondary to men; Lisbeth challenges this view and becomes a true heroine, superseding the male protagonist as a hero. There is a huge gender gap in modern society, which is generally "referring to systematic differences in the outcomes that men and women achieve in the labor market. These differences are seen in the percentages of men and women in the labor force, the types of occupations they choose, and their relative incomes or hourly

wages” (Goldin). Lisbeth creates her own code of moral and ethical standards because society has not only ignored her, but it has also infringed upon her rights at every chance. The modern day woman can relate to Lisbeth because, to a certain extent the two share the same experiences. Lisbeth’s character is admirable and an inspiration to women of all ages because she has complete agency and takes control of every aspect of her life. The way that she lives her life allows her to supersede the gender gap and void in society to create an environment in which she is able to thrive.

The emulation of Lisbeth Salander occurs because individuals in modern society see how successful she is and wish that they could imitate her. Part of the emulation aspect is there is a lack of contemporary heroes and heroines in society; to clarify, “a lack of leadership qualities in those people filling leadership positions” (Davis 11). Society is not lacking in those seeking political, economical, financial or cultural power, but it is lacking individuals with integrity and moral values who seek such power. Lisbeth encounters similar situations in which those in power are morally corrupt and infringe upon her rights; however she is able to change this because she lives by her own moral code. She is able to negate the immoral actions of others and fill the void that these individuals have created for her. Women in contemporary society idolize this; if only they could take control like Lisbeth and combat everything from her social and legal status to government cover-ups in just a few years time. If this were possible, the various voids, gaps and expectations concerning women could be diminished and there would finally be a society in which equal rights and democracy could be protected. Lisbeth inspires non-hetero-normative, feminine emulation in the Millennium trilogy through her outlaw status and unyielding determination to seek justice for herself. The emulation of Lisbeth Salander is quite simplistic; she “is a dark, conflicted young woman who is

nonetheless very clear and confident about her world view and where she stands in it” (DeMarco). It is extremely difficult for individuals to be clear and confident about their worldview and where they stand in it because almost everything in modern society is complicated by a number of factors. Lisbeth sees the world in black and white, which enables her to fight back in extreme ways; however contemporary society is made up of an amalgamation of shades of gray. She is unapologetic in her beliefs, powerfully striking in her actions and exceptionally clever in her thinking. She does not consider what other’s think of her, what standards she should uphold or what expectations society expects her to meet; she is completely autonomous and uses her skills to create her own agency when her agency was stolen from her. She is a true heroine and the heroine of her own story, an idea that every individual can aspire to.

The Girl Who Blazed Trails

Lisbeth Salander: *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo. The Girl Who Played with Fire. The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest.*

Stieg Larsson’s Millennium trilogy brings to life a remarkable character that inspires women to take control and truly be themselves. She is a character that does not submit to the labels and brands that are placed upon her by those in power or by the expectations and standards created and maintained by society. Lisbeth Salander is anything but easy to handle; she creates her own agency, power and control through her own moral code. She gives herself a dominant and formidable voice when her voice was taken from her. The women in the novels and the readers admire Lisbeth because she is simply a tough character; she embodies that idea of ‘I do what I want, when I want and with whomever I want’. She lives her life by a strict code of what is right and what is

wrong and then enforces this code; something that individuals in society cannot, will not or are afraid to emulate. Stieg Larsson's character challenges and resists the expected hetero-normative behavior and standard feminine gender role that is generally placed upon female characters and women in society. Lisbeth Salander is a complex heroine, who cannot be placed into a specific heroic archetype because of the intricacy of her traits, attitude and mental state. She is wildly divergent from the typical female character or heroine, thus she creates a new female model that fits any woman: the woman who illustrates herself as she sees fit by constructing an individual mold that fits her and her alone. She inspires her fellow characters and readers alike to be the heroes of their own stories, even when everyone sees them as a victim. Lisbeth Salander is the girl who blazed trails for the modern woman to be exactly who she is, unapologetically always.

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