

# A Parallaxic Analysis: Masquerade, Femininity and Fantasy in Claire Dolan

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## Abstract

The essay examines what Žižek calls “the real of sexual difference” in relation to his notion of “parallaxic gap” through a formal analysis of the film, *Claire Dolan* (Lodge Kerrigan 1998). The article primarily focuses on the ineliminable alterity of the sexual antagonism or ‘the real’ of sexual antagonism: the ‘symbolic Real.’ The parallaxic gap, opened up by the fantasy structures of the male and female protagonists, reveals ‘the real’ of sexual difference—these fantasies are two exemplary cases of a fantasmatic support of the Symbolic. Through the analysis of the formal aspects of the film, this paper argues that the function of the real is not situated within the diegetic realm, but is founded on the borders between the diegetic and non-diegetic domains.

**Keywords:** Masquerade, Prostitution, Sexual Difference, Fantasy, Slavoj Žižek.

While *Claire Dolan* (Lodge Kerrigan, 1998) clinically portrays the life of a prostitute, heavily centering on her business dealings, it also delves into a complex and tightly interrelated range of issues including, commodification, prostitution and masquerade. In the film, Claire (Katrín Cartledge) is an Irish immigrant who works as a prostitute in New York to eliminate her and her mother’s debt to a pimp, Roland Cain (Colm Meaney). Cain, who has known Claire since she was a child in Dublin, is a fellow countryman and family friend. The nature of the relationship between Cain and Claire’s mother is not disclosed; it is based on buried mutual history. Cain maintains a formal politeness with Claire and their connection is purely business throughout the film. The protagonist, having no permanent residence, stays in hotels, primarily serving white-collar businessmen in offices and hotel rooms. Set in an urban landscape, Claire Dolan foregrounds stylized, modern settings

marked by reflective or drab, colorless surfaces, without showing the Manhattan skyline or any signature buildings of New York.

The film opens with images of urban architecture, in which the camera carefully studies the exterior of skyscrapers and high-rise apartments. The title sequence is composed of a series of cuts, and in each cut a building surface fills the screen and the emphasis is on the geometry of the architecture. In every image, there is repetition of a particular graphic pattern, which contains reflective or opaque windows. These surfaces veil what is beyond them and merely reflect the facing building’s geometrical pattern. Thus, through the recurring pattern in each shot, the title sequence establishes a tone of purity, monotony and repetition in form. In this sequence, a continuous low humming sound along with several piano strikes accompanies and accentuates the repetitiveness and dullness of the images. This entire title sequence prefigures the

parallel between how the camera examines these structures and how it examines the main protagonist: throughout the film, there is an emphasis on the buildings' façades and also on Claire's body and appearance. Just as the surfaces of the buildings do not reveal what is inside (their interiority), the camera's insistent observation of the protagonist does not provide any knowledge of interiority but only the materiality of the body as a surface, a surface without any depth behind or beyond it. This dichotomy between surface/appearance and depth/meaning—evoked and then subverted by the film—applies to Claire Dolan's elaboration of both the prostitute's body and the city's architecture.

Claire Dolan deprives its spectators of the background story and dodges the questions of how/why has Claire 'become' a prostitute, what brought her from Dublin to NYC, and what the relation of her pimp to her parents is. By denying a background story and a chain of causality that would lead the story to the current events being presented, Claire Dolan empties the contents of its narrative. In parallel to the film's insistence on the surfaceness with regard to its protagonist and the architecture, by minimizing its story Claire Dolan draws attention to its formal procedures. The self-reflexive emphasis on the formal procedures—such as the camera's insistence on the surface as well as the use of off-screen space and sound—points at the "designated external content:" the repressed real of the sexual difference. That is to say, in the film, the disavowed, excluded contents of the diegesis are expressed in, as Žižek suggests, "the designated external content [...] sustained by the self-reference to the form itself" (*The Fright of Real Tears* 56). In this respect, I argue that there is certain dialectic at work between Claire Dolan's deliberately hidden narrative—which disavows the contents of the relationships among the characters—and its methodically and meticulously studied cinematic form.

In Claire Dolan, it is evident right from the first scene that the prostitution is practiced

through the mastery of disguises and masquerade. The dialectic between surface/exterior and depth/interior evident in the film's elaboration of architecture is both reproduced and subverted by Claire's performative acts, which deny any claims of authentic self. Following the title sequence, the first scene opens with an image of a confined space: Claire is in a public phone booth, while behind it traffic flows. The camera is positioned outside of the booth, facing Claire, and the people who pass in front of the camera momentarily block its view of her. The rush of the traffic in the background and people passing by in front of the camera establish a sharp contrast with Claire's immobile position. Then, Claire's first lines are heard: "I want to be with you. I am here for you. I just miss having you inside of me. I want you to fuck me. [...]" Next, she makes another phone call: "Hello George, it is Lucy, I missed you. I am at home. [...] I want you inside of me. I do not want to wait any longer. What do you want, you can tell me. I want you to. I am leaving now [...]" In the two phone calls, Claire's lines are quite similar and her performances are slightly distinct from one another, as she performs different "selves" to serve the needs of her customers. When Claire opens the booth door, the camera abruptly cuts to the next scene, which takes place in an elevator. Thus, the feeling of confinement in the opening scene is transferred into the confined space of the elevator.

This transition is quite significant as it indicates a pattern in the film: by framing Claire via windows, mirrors, and glass surfaces, the film calls attention to her status as a commodity in a display window. In this scene, Claire is in an elevator which has mirrors on all sides. Claire's multiple images reflected in the mirrors echo her similar-yet-different performances in the phone booth. In this enclosed space of mirrors, the camera shows not Claire, but rather her image mirrored in the elevator door. As the doors open from the center to the sides, her reflection splits and disappears, then, the image of the corridor

fills in the screen. The mirrors in the elevator not only indicate that Claire has multiple images and identities sustained by performances, but also they point to the failure to differentiate these multiplied images, invalidating the notion of authentic identity/self. As soon as Claire steps out of the elevator into the corridor, the camera cuts to the hotel room. Here the editing is quite similar to the previous cut; again, the camera does not follow Claire, walking ahead outside of the enclosed space, but cuts to another image where she is standing still. The camera thus repetitively confines its protagonist in the interior spaces that are filled with reflective surfaces.

The subsequent scene in the hotel room is representative of many similar instances in which the film scrutinizes Claire's unemotional, mechanized interactions with her clients. In the room, Claire is standing with her back to the window, overlooking the repetitive rows of windows from the adjacent building. Against this background, standing still in her shiny, tan colored dress, Claire looks like a mannequin in a store window. She steps closer to her client, whose back is facing the camera, and tells him how much she has missed him. Claire's face does not communicate any emotion while she is saying, "he is not like other men." Then, the camera cuts to the reverse shot to show a close-up of the man's face over the back of Claire's shoulder—and her hair neatly wrapped up with a clip. The client, who is a very ordinary white-collar man, seems confused. When the camera cuts back to Claire, the close-up of her face resists revealing any knowledge of intimacy/interiority. This flatness of the face as a surface—without any depth behind it—is emphasized here with the shot-reverse-shot structure as it shows that the face does not reveal any more interiority/internality than the back of the head. Next, in order to prove how she "feels things with" him, Claire lets him touch her genitals and says, "see." Only pausing for a second, she perfunctorily utters, "It will be five hundred dollars this time, ok?" Then, from the

reverse shot, again, we see the client's mesmerized face, and he agreeably mumbles, "five hundred." While the man, who is off-screen, is supposedly counting the money, Claire walks back to where she was standing before, in front of the window, and undresses. As she slowly lets the shoulder straps fall, baring her inanimate-looking torso, the camera cuts to a close up of Claire, staring directly at her client as the camera is positioned behind the man. Claire confronts the camera's presence with an assertive look.

From Claire's close-up, by omitting the sex scene, the film noticeably cuts to the bathroom where, surrounded by mirrors, Claire is correcting her mascara while checking her voice messages. As Claire listens to a message left by her mother's nurse, she turns her head away from the mirror in the front. While Claire calls the nurse, who tells of her mother's death, the camera shows both her face and her controlled hairdo reflected in the rear mirror. Her hair and demeanor are unmoving in the same way: Claire does not lose control even upon hearing the sad news and preserves her mechanical self-containment. What is exposed with the shot-reverse-shot structure in the previous scene is doubly accentuated here via the simultaneous exposition of face and back of the head reflected in the mirror: Claire's face becomes a surface such that—analogous to back of her head—denies disclosing any interiority. The camera's treatment of the face does not diverge from that of the body; there is no intention to confer a semiotic quality to the close-up of the face, but on the contrary, the camera establishes an analogy between the face and the body. That is why there is a constant shift from the face to the back of the head and also a simultaneous exposition of both.

The camera's insistence on the surface is a refusal to penetrate or decode the protagonist's psychic reality, which is allegedly lying under the surface or readable upon the flesh. Claire's expressionless face is an unyielding surface that rejects being captured. The camera does not treat

the face as an unknown landscape to be explored, nor is the face available to such incursion. In Claire Dolan, the face is not understood as privileged topography enveloping the psyche or the self. The camera's strong emphasis on surface does not intend to unmask a mental 'substance' (or a psychic structure) hidden behind—something that is hidden from sight or not available to direct observation; such persistence does not reveal anything but an opacity, disclosing the face itself as a mask: the masquerade. By insisting on the 'surface' and systematically denying any interior 'substance,' Claire Dolan indeed attempts to evoke an awareness in its spectators; the film provokes its audience to confront their obsession with the depth/substance that is ostensibly lurking behind the seductiveness of the surface. In his article, "Death and the Maiden," Žižek elaborates that what is behind the surface occupies the status of a feminine secret, an "Enigma" only for whom it is staged; for the Other. "[A] 'feminine secret' [the Enigma embodied] which eludes the male gaze, is constitutive of the phallic spectacle of seduction — the first lesson of feminine seduction is that In-itself is always For-us, for the very other whose grasp it eludes [...]" ("Death and the Maiden" 214). Claire Dolan invests in this notion of "Enigma," staging such a "phallic spectacle of seduction" through its protagonist for the man in its diegetic world. Yet, at the same time, the film accentuates the fantasmatic structure within which lies this enigmatic 'womanliness,' the secret/enigma of 'femininity' searched for tirelessly—beyond the surface.

Claire's meticulous acts analyzed above are different from the "feminine masquerade," an overacted performance of femininity, which as a cultural phenomenon has long been associated with prostitution. In Claire Dolan, the female protagonist does not masquerade femininity; she does not flaunt her femininity but rather mimics the mannequin. Claire masquerades inanimateness and inorganicity: the commodity form. The insistence on such a masquerade (embodying a 'mannequinized' figure)

diminishes the distinction between the authentic body and the mannequin, the organic and the inorganic, or the animate and the inanimate. Throughout the film, the images of Claire recall the notion of "dialectical image" proposed by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. For Benjamin, "dialectical images" expose their false illusions, their hidden purposes serving to the countless promises of capitalism. As Esther Leslie explains in her article, "Ruin and Rubble in the Arcades," the figure of the prostitute is a particular dialectical image which "dissolves the divide between production and consumption eradicated by commodity society" (176). By embodying "commodity and seller in one," the prostitute is the primary example of dialectical images for Benjamin (Buck-Morss, "The Dialectics of Seeing" 185). The dialectical synthesis apparent in the figure of the prostitute is that through masquerade, emphasizing the display of her body, she reveals her status as a product; thus, the prostitute cannot fully hide her role as vendor. In other words, while performing (displaying herself) as a commodity, the prostitute inevitably unveils the controlling, industrial capitalist system.

The affinity between women and the artifice/unnatural or the commodified/reified is evidently revealed in the act of masquerade. By underscoring this affinity and giving a central role to the figure of the prostitute in this context, Benjamin aims to cut off women's ties with nature and instead situate them in realm of history and culture. As Leslie proposes, Benjamin's emphasis on "women's affinity for the unnatural and the commodified" is far from "a romantic nostalgia for a lost naturalness," on the contrary, it is a counter attack against the idea of "biology as destiny, nature as fixity," propagated by fascist ideology (102). Through the association of women and the commodity, the artifact, women are historicized and thereby the umbilical cord linking them to nature is cut. In this connection, the figure of the prostitute, as a master of masquerade, is not exclusively exploited or unprivileged, but rather, as Leslie

claims, “potentially politically disruptive, that is, transgressive and modernist” (99). Claire Dolan manifests such a disruptive and transgressive figure as the protagonist’s masquerade entails a complicated relationship of subject/object, surveyor/surveyed, and dominant/submissive, facilitating a continuous alternation between such positions. Although Claire’s masquerade is different from the feminine masquerade—an excess of femininity—still her masquerade enables her to keep a distance from her own image, as she is quite aware of self-representation. In this sense, masquerade is a powerful theoretical strategy to ward off any claims of essentialism, specifically essential ‘femininity’ or ‘womanliness,’ because through the conceptualization of masquerade, identity (or femininity) is regarded as a function of the mask.

Mary Ann Doane, in “Masquerade Reconsidered,” defends her position from an earlier article, “Masquerade and the Film,” supporting the concept of masquerade as a powerful strategy against “anything claiming to be a ‘female epistemology,’ with a theory which valorized closeness, immediacy, or proximity-to-self” (*Femmes Fatales* 37). Moreover, Doane equally rejects the criticisms which claim that the formulation of masquerade as “distance and differentiation” belongs to a “male epistemology;” rather, she clarifies that it belongs to “an epistemology [...] which is collapsed onto a theory of sexual difference that throws the epistemology into phallogocentric arena” (37). It is evident in her own description that Doane is hesitant to defend the latter epistemology—through which masquerade can be posited—because of her articulation of the psychoanalytic notion of sexual difference. Doane mistakes the phallus for Lacanian ‘phallic function’: this point is quite crucial to the concept of masquerade. Although still acknowledging its potential, Doane concludes her essay by expressing her concerns about masquerade which is “haunted by a masculine standard”: “Masculinity as measure is not internal to the concept itself (the masquerade

designates the distance between the woman and the image of femininity)” (39).

In *The Indivisible Remainder*, Žižek expresses reservations and discontent concerning both perspectives—so called “female epistemology” and “male epistemology”—through what he calls a “topological cut.” He posits a “topological difference” between the feminist perspective—which assumes some authentic feminine features—and the male perspective which produces male clichés about women. To come to this conclusion, Žižek makes reference to “positive content,” those attributes which are produced by either critique/perspective. He argues that when we consider the topological difference between the two critiques, there is no longer a question of what specific attributes belong to each perspective; all the attributes belong to “both at once.” In this respect, it becomes impossible to decide what “truly” makes woman what she is, because what we are dealing with is what Žižek would call the parallaxic views of the same “content.” This, however, “(for man) in no way compels us to the ‘male-chauvinist’ conclusion that woman is what she is only for the other, for man: what remains is the topological cut, the purely formal difference between the ‘for-the-other’ and ‘for-herself’” (*The Indivisible Remainder* 160). The question of “what is the feminine ‘in itself,’ obfuscated by male clichés” therefore, leads Žižek to the conclusion that “‘woman-in-herself’ designates no substantial content but just a purely formal cut, a limit that is always missed [...]” (my emphasis 161-2). According to Žižek, the only way to situate this problem is to view the difference between “for-the-other” and “for-herself” as a “topological cut,” a traumatic kernel dividing these two perspectives.

Žižek shows how this “traumatic kernel” uncovers the ‘real’ in sexual difference, by analogy with Hegel’s description of the “Beyond” and the world we live in (in *Phenomenology of Spirit*):

[I]n its original dimension, Beyond is not some positive content but an empty place, a kind of screen on to which one can project any positive content whatsoever — and this empty place is the subject. Once we become aware of it, we pass from Substance to Subject, that is, from consciousness to self-consciousness. In this precise sense, woman is the subject par excellence. [...] it is precisely insofar as woman is characterized by an original ‘masquerade,’ insofar as all her features are artificially ‘put on,’ that she is more subject than man [...] what ultimately characterizes the subject is this very radical contingency and artificiality of her every positive feature, i.e., the fact that she in herself is a pure void that cannot be identified with any of these features. (The Indivisible Remainder my emphasis 160)

For Žižek, masquerade confirms the fact that the woman is more subject than man. The woman is aware that her self-representation is not a mask concealing the inner Substance (Self), but is the very domain where the Symbolic operates. Similar to Doane, Žižek affirms “that in the case of man we are not dealing with the same cut, we do not distinguish in the same way between what he is ‘in himself’ and what he is ‘for the other’ qua masquerade.” However, the very point Doane is critical of—that masquerade designates not the distance between the man and the image of masculinity, but rather the distance between the woman and the image of femininity—is therefore the advantage for woman in Žižek’s conceptualization of masquerade. In other words, the woman’s consciousness of the very insubstantiality—the emptiness which is constitutive of subjectivity—makes woman more reflected, less immediate to herself, thus, more subject. Whereas, Žižek explains, “[a] man stupidly believes that, beyond his symbolic title, there is deep in himself some substantial content, some hidden treasure which makes him worthy of love [...]” (my emphasis 163). In Claire Dolan, acts of masquerade enable Claire to have a more stable subject position as—unlike man—she does not believe she has

substantial, inherent worthiness above and beyond the Symbolic. As a master of masquerade, Claire “knows that there is nothing beneath the mask — her strategy is precisely to preserve this ‘nothing’ of her freedom, out of reach of man’s possessive love” (my emphasis 163). Thus, in the film, while masquerade enables Claire to occupy a stronger subject position, the male protagonist’s attempts at masquerade fatally fail.

Deep inside her, she is a whore...

Roland Cain

### Elton’s Fantasy

Following the visit to the hospital to see her deceased mother, Claire hurries to catch a meeting with another client so that she can make another payment to her pimp, Cain. After burying her mother and having random sex, Claire attempts to escape from Cain and checks into a hotel in Newark where she visits her cousin. In Newark, she finds a job as a beautician and meets a cab driver, Elton (Vincent D’Onofrio). Soon after, Cain appears unexpectedly to bring her back to New York. Claire meets Elton the day after she checks out of the Newark hotel. When Elton asks where she is living now, Claire does not answer and rushes out his cab. Upon seeing this, Elton becomes suspicious and begins following her. When he figures out what Claire does for a living, Elton confronts her, asking, “Do you have a pimp?” Claire replies without hesitating: “I owe a man some money.” Following the end of this conversation, the camera abruptly cuts to the final moments of the two having sex. Afterwards, Elton asks, “did you come?” She answers, “Yes, could you tell?” Elton, tired and frustrated, says “no.” Claire repeats, “I did,” to comfort him. This conversation is critical as it discloses the dynamics of how the man is seduced by and entangled in the ‘mystery’ of a woman, once he attaches an enigmatic, mysterious jouissance to her. Claire is as direct as possible by immediately confirming that she has a pimp. As she does not withhold any

‘secret,’ Claire does not lead Elton into a fantasy scenario. However, simply after learning Claire is a prostitute, Elton is entrapped in the fantasy of feminine jouissance. In the brief period of time they spent together, Elton did not know or care much about Claire until he learned that she was a prostitute. Considering these details, it cannot be fully claimed that Claire seduced Elton to enter the domain of fantasy. There were also moments that Claire did not use her masquerade against Elton; instead she let her mask fall, taking off the masquerade. These very moments initiate Claire’s descent into her own fantasy.

Following the night Elton spends in Claire’s New York hotel room, he continues to spy on her. He seems unsatisfied with what he learned about Claire, and indeed he becomes even more driven to look for clues to decipher her alleged ‘mystery.’ The next morning, he goes through the small box on the nightstand and, after quickly sorting through the stack of photographs belonging to Claire’s youth, he carefully examines two driver licenses, one with an address in New York City and one from Wayland, MA, identifying her with different names; and finally, he scrutinizes Claire’s Irish passport. (The first two IDs have color photographs in which Claire has long hair; the last photograph is black and white and a younger Claire has short, black hair.) Then, Elton notices the photograph showing Cain on the left, next to him a man who is presumably Claire’s father, then her mother, and on the far right, young Claire. Cain is in the foreground, closest to the camera and focused, the father and mother are relatively less focused, and Claire is out of focus. Cain almost looks like he is ‘photomontaged’ into the family picture. This photograph discloses the hidden past of Cain and Claire’s father to the spectators as well.

Towards the end of scene, Elton goes through some more boxes in the walk-in closet and finally the ‘medicine’ cabinet. Interestingly enough, from the end of this scene, the camera again abruptly cuts to a sex scene where Claire is with a client. Claire is sitting on a couch, her legs

are wide open, and the man is kneeling down in front of her, performing oral sex on her. Claire seems very uncomfortable, says, “don’t, no, don’t,” but the man keeps going, while Claire gets even more irritated. Soon after, in order to direct him, she hesitantly says, “yeh, right there.” The way the scene is shot is entirely unerotic in that it invokes an unpleasant atmosphere more akin to a physician performing genital ‘examination’ on a woman than a man performing oral sex. The scene is brightly lit as it is daytime and the couch is in front of large windows through which reflective surfaces of the high-rises are seen. Both Claire and the man have white shirts on, reminiscent of doctor-patient gowns. Since the camera is low near the floor, the man’s back blocks most of Claire’s body; only after the camera slightly tilts up and moves to a closer shot does it show Claire’s breasts. Overall, the scene does not exploit the eroticism of the female body as a spectacle, but rather it points at an eroticism of knowing the female subject/sexuality. The sex scene is evidently a response to Elton’s frustration over his search through the boxes in order to investigate something secret. Elton’s search evokes the Pandora myth by drawing attention to the topographies of surface exterior and secret interior with regard to both the woman and the box. The succeeding sex scene further reinforces the respective topographies of appealing surface/hidden secret and interior/exterior through an eroticism which is not attached to the notion of female body as a landscape—a spectacle/an object of a male gaze—but relates to a clinical/sadistic eroticism to dissect and know what is inside the female body. While the former eroticism is about fetishization of the visible surface, the latter is about sadistic intrusion and dissection of the surface to reach the invisible interior beyond the surface. Therefore, the cut from Elton’s search through the boxes to the oral sex signals the sadistic path that Elton’s curiosity takes. The editing of the two scenes explicitly reveals that Elton is driven by a curiosity to know about female sexuality,

which is assumed to be hidden in the body's interiority, in the female genitalia.

Elton's unyielding search leads him to investigate more about female sexuality, hidden behind the seductive, deceptive appearance which allegedly camouflages secrecy and danger. Next, the two brief scenes are cut consecutively: the first one in which Elton meets his teenage daughter and gives her some money, and then the second one in which he meets with Claire and gives her a sum of money to help her wipe out her debt. The following scene, although quite insignificant in terms of the narrative, makes Elton's descent into a fantasy scenario more explicit: his investigation involves pursuing not only secret/mystery but also guilt/danger in the unknown sexuality of woman. The scene starts with a long shot of the public library building, in front of which several taxis are parked. Elton gets out of his cab and stands next to the other two taxi drivers. Then, the camera quite visibly cuts to a closer view of the street to show a woman walking. The woman is dressed in formal business clothes; she has a distinctly big, curly mess of dark hair. It is hard not to notice the Medusa-like image of the woman. As she walks from the left side of the screen to the right, the camera pans to the right to follow her direction; meanwhile, she is staring right where the camera is. Then, the camera cuts to where she is looking and reveals Elton's torso. Upon hearing the very distinctive sound of a woman's high heel shoes, Elton turns back to see who is walking. The camera, assuming the point of view of the woman, tracks the woman's movement to show Elton's curious look in response to her. Then, the camera cuts back to a view of the woman, who turns her head to the left, in the direction where Elton and his friends are. She keeps walking while persistently, looking towards Elton's direction. The camera cuts back to the medium shot of Elton once again, and shows that his look still follows the direction of the woman—and of the camera, which he thus looks at directly. Finally, the camera makes a half circle around Elton's torso,

abruptly cuts to his back, and then cuts back to his face again. This final series of shots is quite disorienting, almost functioning as a set of jump cuts, and demonstrate how perplexed Elton is after he notices the woman who looks at him. As soon as the movement of the camera ends, the sound of horns and traffic becomes noticeable again and the conversation of the other two drivers is heard. The fact that the traffic sounds are muted to foreground the pounding of the heels emphasizes the significance of the incident for Elton. Through this sound effect the entire incident is further 'subjectivised,' and discloses the contents of Elton's fantasy construction. It is Elton's troubles with and fear of confronting the female sexuality that set up this woman as a Medusa figure.

The scene ends with the off-screen conversation of the other two cab drivers, in which one of them mentions a woman who will do anything when it comes to sex. This scene and the following one are quite communicative: from the shot of Elton's face the camera cuts first to the exterior of the high rise building and then to the interior of an office, where Claire—who is dressed quite similar to the woman on the street—is talking to a young businessman who wants to have unprotected sex with her. When Claire turns down his offer, the man kicks her out of his office, angrily saying, "Get the fuck out of here, you piece of shit." The cut—from the brief conversation about "how a woman will do anything in bed," to the following conversation demonstrating the limits that a woman has—makes obvious how Elton's distorted construction of Claire diverges from the reality. The congruity between the business woman on the street, the woman mentioned in the conversation, and Claire points at Elton's fantasy construction of female sexuality which is uncontrolled, subversive, and dangerous. Moreover, this metonymic congruity draws attention to the fact that fear of women (and female sexuality) is not exclusively attached to the figure of the prostitute; instead, fear is evoked because of this very affinity, which

resulted from the commodification and massification of woman endorsed by the capitalist system.

A little later in the narrative, Elton is robbed at gunpoint in his taxi—whether or not the robbery is at the behest of Cain is not made clear. This serious assault on his ego does not stop him; on the contrary, expecting a recuperation of his ego, Elton becomes further entangled in the fantasy of mystery/danger Claire possesses. In order to understand how it might be between Claire and a client, Elton hires the new girl in the pimp's stable, who was introduced to us earlier in the film. In his attempt at masquerade, Elton dresses up as a businessman, wearing formal clothes and introducing himself with a fake name, Peter. The conversation between the woman and Elton is as follows:

Elton: How long have you been in the states?

Eva: 9 weeks. [Pause] You have a very beautiful face. What do you like?

Elton: Like what?

Eva: Half and half, something else. I'll do anything.

Elton: O you'll do anything.

Eva: Yes.

Elton: Do you like to fuck?

Eva: I like you.

Elton: Do you like to fuck?

Eva: Yes.

Elton: What do you like to do?

Eva: Anything.

Elton: What do you like?

Eva: I like to suck you.

Elton: Why?

Eva: I like to suck you. Do you like that?

In the final moments of the scene, Eva gets up from the armchair and approaches Elton, who, in return, steps back and asks, "Why?" Eva repeats the same answer she has already given. Elton does not ask again, but is still confused. What he concludes from this encounter is, bluntly speaking, how much Claire 'loves to fuck,' or rather, he receives affirmation that Claire has access to "a mysterious jouissance

beyond the phallus about which nothing can be said [...]" (Žižek, "Death and the Maiden" 214). On the other hand, the spectators—through the similarity between the performances of Eva and Claire—are shown once more how mechanical and carefully studied the performances of the prostitutes are: there is nothing mysterious about their practice.

Elton's masquerade completely fails as he searches for phallus in the wrong place, that is to say, behind and beyond the masquerade; however, "the phallus is a pure semblance, a mystery which resides in the mask as such" (Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder* 162). In other words, the masquerade is staged to cover the phallus which is itself a masquerade. I would like to pause to note that the common misunderstanding of Lacan's formulation of sexual difference—thus, the accusations of phallocentrism—resides in dismissing the very point that the phallus is a pure semblance. Lacanian formulation of the sexual difference is internal to the "phallic economy," however, as Žižek points out that the difference is not situated between "'having' and 'being' (man has the phallus, woman is the phallus)," but in the opposition between "to have/to appear":

[W]oman 'is' not the phallus, she merely 'appears' to be the phallus, and this appearing (which, of course, is identical with femininity qua masquerade) points towards a logic of lure and deception. The phallus can perform its function only as veiled — the moment it is unveiled, it is no longer the phallus; what the mask of femininity conceals, therefore, is not directly the phallus but, rather, the fact that there is nothing behind the mask. (*The Indivisible Remainder* 162)

Elton's attempt to masquerade (as someone powerful, rich, macho, etc.) completely fails as he thinks acquiring some 'phallic' symbols (a new suit or a name) would suffice to make his act believable. He tries to give "the impression that he really is what he pretends to be" but Elton does not realize that only 'by pretending to be something,' by "acting as if we were something,"

we assume a certain place in the intersubjective symbolic network, and it is this external place that defines our true position" (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 74).

After ascertaining Claire's guilt (her enigma or her possession of a *jouissance* behind the phallus), what is next for Elton is to take Claire under control; to dominate her. From the hotel room, the camera cuts to Elton, who is anxiously smoking and walking on the streets. He enters the Irish pub where Claire frequently meets Cain. Inside the bar, Cain greets him, saying, "I was expecting you." Elton angrily attempts to make a move on Cain, but Cain does not even give him a chance and punches Elton hard. While choking Elton, Cain says, "She may pay me off, but she will never quit. I've known Claire since she was twelve years old. I knew then what I know now. Deep inside her she is a whore. She was born a whore. She'll die a whore." Elton is crawling on his hands and knees; Cain helps him to his feet and pats his back. Cain even offers him a drink. He says, "It is the time to look after yourself; you are not a boy anymore." Elton cannot speak; he is utterly defeated. Next, he is walking on the street, not angry but terribly disturbed and disoriented. Elton is defeated by Cain because he assumes Cain as a man of power—that Cain is the real possessor of the phallus. However, again, no one can have or be the phallus, only appear to have/be one. This perfectly fits in with the film's ambiguity concerning whether or not the robbery is at the behest of Cain. Cain sustains this appearance only for Elton—it is only 'for-the-other' that it is staged, and no one else. Cain was 'expecting' him; he was prepared; his act was rehearsed for Elton.

The next two scenes show Elton's final attempts to pursue his fantasy of the 'mystery/danger' Claire possesses. In the first one, Claire enters her hotel room, checks to see if anyone is around, then gets her stash from the kitchen. Throughout, the camera is outside on the balcony; it shows the interior and Claire from behind the glass doors. Then, the camera cuts to the inside. Claire takes money out of the box and

counts it. Meanwhile, the camera shows Elton, who is standing behind the balcony's glass door, peeping at Claire. This scene once more emphasizes that Claire does not hide any horrible secret in the box, just her money. There is no secret to be deciphered. The stash, which was shown right at the beginning of the film, is the only secret: "she owes the man some money," this is the fact that Elton still cannot comprehend. In the next scene, he goes to the extreme of watching Claire and a client from the building across the street, behind translucent glass, desperately in search of something that does not exist. Elton tirelessly asks questions which only lead him to commonplace assumptions, not ones which would yield interpretation and insight. The question Elton should have asked is not 'What does Claire want?' (Formulated in the famous question Freud asked, "What does Woman want?" when he faced with "the riddle of femininity" and "the enigma of feminine sexuality"), but rather 'why do I (Elton) want Claire, who owes an unpaid debt?' ("Femininity" 112-135) Why does man want a woman who is fantasized as being deeply entangled in the phallic economy of enjoyment? The Lacanian insight that "[In language], the sender receives his own message back from the receiver [the Other] in an inverted form" enables us to reformulate Elton's question via the inversion of the addressed and addressee in the question (*Écrits* 85). The answer to Elton's question is thus included in the question itself.

You will make a good mother, Claire

Roland Cain

### Claire's Fantasy

I have above demonstrated how the fantasy structure in which Elton finds himself entangled relates to Freud's original question regarding "Female Sexuality." In "Feminine Sexuality in Psychoanalytic Doctrine," Lacan reformulates Freud's original question—which concerns the little girl and the mother—as follows: "the question of what she wants is as much as the question of the girl herself as it is that of the

Other, whether this be Freud, ourselves, or again and in the first instance, the Mother” (131). Having noted this, the question which we as the spectators should ask—in order to understand Claire’s fantasy structure—can be reformulated as ‘What does Claire’s mother want?’ Throughout the film, the only narrative clue about Claire is the fact that she is trying pay off her ‘mother’s debt,’ or in other words that she fulfills ‘what her mother wants.’ From the beginning of the film, Claire’s mother is absent from the narrative. Considering that the first and only time we see the mother is when she is dead, it can be suggested that this figure hangs—visually and symbolically—at the edge of the film’s symbolic universe. Without a name, and only referred to as “the mother,” her presence—except for one incident—remains in off-screen space. As she is situated on the fringes of the film’s system, and does not have an on-screen presence as a living character, the mother forces us to speculate about her position in the film: What is the nature of the relation between her and Cain? What is the secret of the uncanny family picture which shows Cain focused and the rest out of focus?

As the answers to these questions are not available in Claire Dolan’s narrative, the film provokes us through its narration to search for clues and thereby evokes an interpretation. The film’s most outstanding formal procedure is its use of sound and sound editing. The entire film soundtrack is carefully sculpted, composed of a haunting droning sound—which at times merges with the raw sounds of city life, and distinctively dispersed piano notes. In the film, diegetic sound is employed only in a few scenes while the majority of the scenes are accompanied by non-diegetic, off-screen sound. I argue that the mother’s off-screen presence persists via off-screen sound, specifically the tones of a piano. The mother’s dead body remains in off-screen space, but the eerie, piercing notes of the piano remind of its existence. The narrative moments where the sound signals the mother’s off-screen presence carry special significance.

Following the title sequence, the first time the piano tones are heard is when Claire is in the bathroom. Just after the nurse tells of her mother’s death, there is a knock on the bathroom door, and Claire’s client calling for her. Following the knock on the door are three short notes from a piano, then two notes together repeated after long pauses. These notes resume after the cut to the next scene when Claire is in the hospital with her deceased mother. Afterwards, while Claire is making the final arrangements with the nurse, the nurse mentions the name of Mr. Roland Cain as the billing party for her mother’s account. As soon as we hear the name, the non-diegetic sound starts playing long, droning notes, which continue quietly during the conversation. Claire “prefers to settle the account” herself, and mentions twice that she wants to be the one who tells Mr. Cain of her mother’s death. As the conversation ends, the volume of the sound gradually increases, and while Claire walks away without taking her mother’s belongings, it reaches a crescendo ending abruptly with the scene.

The next scene where the non-diegetic piano notes are heard is the first time in the film that Claire meets with Cain to make a payment. At the Irish bar, the jazz tune in the atmosphere diminishes and the sound of the heels of an off screen woman becomes audible as soon as Cain utters, “and the rest goes toward your debt.” While the two short distinct piano notes are heard; the camera cuts to Claire, who upon hearing the heels of the shoes, slightly turns her head towards the left of the screen. Claire seems alerted at the sight of what she sees. (Interestingly enough, Elton notices the off-screen woman on the street upon hearing the sound of her heels in the middle of the heavy sound of the traffic.) In order to show Claire’s point of view, the camera cuts to the woman who is off-screen. The tall, blond woman’s torso is seen through a window opening into a corridor. The thick, brown frame of the window contours the woman who stands against a dark green painted wall and then slowly exits screen right.

Here, the camera remains static on the window frame—which functions as a ‘frame-within-a-frame’—while the woman is standing.

The camera, by placing the woman (the new girl/prostitute) in a ‘frame-within-a-frame’ structure, reminds us of the earlier images of the protagonist as confined in spaces. In the earlier scenes—until the first meeting with Cain—the camera punctuates the protagonist’s confinement by framing her via windows, mirrors, and glass surfaces. However, in those earlier moments, surrounded by mirrors Claire was quite conscious of her self-representation and of the camera’s presence through her frequent direct address. On the other hand, this double framing of the new woman is quite significant, yet different in several respects. The woman in the ‘picture’ is not only placed in this ‘frame-within-a-frame’ structure but also she is utterly unaware of the looks directed at her. Through ‘frame-within-a-frame’ structure the camera not only distance itself from its subject—having an awareness of its own frame, but also puts a distance between its own representation of woman and the particular representation of woman in cinema as coded with “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” 27). In other words, Claire Dolan’s camera in a way puts the latter form of representation in quotation marks.

From the woman in the ‘picture,’ the camera cuts back to Claire who is still captivated by the sight of the woman, and continues to look at the screen’s left off to the woman until the camera cuts back to Cain who asks, “How is your mother?” The sudden cut from Claire’s face to Cain is accompanied by another two distinct piano notes and then, the softer piano notes dispersed through the rest of their conversation. In this scene, it becomes evident that off-screen piano notes signal the off-screen persistence of Claire’s deceased mother—and even more importantly the mother’s unpaid debt. This scene is also quite important as it points out Claire’s descent into a fantasy of entrapment—which is diegetically presented as her attempt to escape

from Cain. This ‘frame-within-a-frame’ structure is repeated quite similarly in a later scene; this time, Claire herself is doubly framed. In the chronology of the film narrative, the double framing of Claire is utilized when Cain shows up in Newark to bring her back to New York.

I argue that in Claire Dolan, Claire’s fantasy of entrapment is bracketed via these two uses of ‘frame-within-a-frame’ structure: the first one signaling Claire’s wish to escape from Cain (and his ‘frame’ of business) and the latter putting an end to the fantasy of entrapment as the pimp ‘actually’ captures her. In other words, the narrative space between these two images of the other prostitute and Claire demarcates Claire’s fantasy of entrapment—not a fantasy of escape. As soon as she moves to Newark, Claire begins to have a growing suspicion that she is being followed, that she is going to be trapped by Cain. Being ‘recaptured’ in New York, this time, after telling him she is a prostitute, Claire begins to suspect Elton of following her. Claire’s suspicions of being followed by Cain, and then Elton are conveyed quite differently. In the latter case, as the spectator is given Elton’s perspective, the viewer knows Elton is shadowing Claire before she does. Thus, Claire’s doubts with regard to Elton are assured to the spectators even before she has such doubt. However, in Newark, it is never clear if she is being followed or not. Her ‘realistic,’ justified suspicion of Elton leads Claire to understand that she will be followed by any man—let it be Cain, Elton or a former client—as long as she remains ‘framed’ in this network. Here we should note that the symbolic network,

[...] the system (of public Law, of phallic economy) is effectively undermined by identification with it without reservation. [Otherwise,] the subject is effectively ‘in’ (caught in the phallic function, in the web of Power) only and precisely in so far as [one] does not fully identify with it but maintains a kind of distance towards it (posits an exception to the universal phallic function; indulges in inherent

transgression of the public Law). (The Indivisible Remainder 158)

Thus, Claire's exit from the net of prostitution ensues only when—through masquerade—she fully identifies with the system, after realizing that Cain is no 'exception' to the phallic function. Only upon gaining this insight, Claire regains and remasters her ability to masquerade and finally finds a getaway, not from the pimp, but from the very network of prostitution. "As long as she is not caught in her own act, as long as she does not forget that masquerade [has] a social effectivity," Claire can see through the cracks of the system, of the symbolic itself (Doane, "Masquerade Reconsidered" 43).

The film underscores the shift from Claire's entrapment within the system to her own fantasy construction of entrapment via cinematography as well as the use of sound. The cinematography of the Newark segments which include Claire's fantasy of entrapment is quite different than the New York segments which punctuate the protagonist's 'confinement' within the larger capitalist system and within the representational system of the cinema because these scenes not only emphasize Claire's status as a 'commodity' but also as an 'image,' a 'spectacle.' In the New York segments, the protagonist is either displayed as a mannequin, a product in front of large glass surfaces or she is enframed by mirrors within the enclosed spaces—in the latter instances, the camera's close proximity to its protagonist accentuates Claire's awareness of her own representational status. On the other hand, in the Newark segments, the camera distances itself from Claire, creating a sense of 'imprisonment' by showing its protagonist behind the vertical bars of the blinds, behind the fences/climbing bars, or the frames of the window-pane doors. In these scenes, the camera is positioned significantly distant from its protagonist. In one of these instances, Claire is calling her cousin to arrange a meeting. The camera, which is placed behind the bars of the window-paneled door, shows Claire who is

sitting on the side of the bed. As the conversation takes place, the camera slowly tracks towards the three window frames to the point that the frames of the pane become the camera's frame and Claire's image is framed by two vertical bars. The camera shoots her from the profile and Claire does not show any awareness of her confinement or representational status.

In the Newark segments, the film accentuates the 'fantasy' status of Claire's entrapment via the 'subjectivised' off-screen space. From the very beginning of Claire's attempt to escape—which is indeed again a further 'entrapment,' the off-screen space is heavily 'subjectivised.' After Claire packs her luggage in her New York hotel room, as the camera cuts to the street to show Claire walking, the camera views the surrounding over Claire's shoulders in slow motion, suggesting escape is a heavy decision for her. As Claire turns a corner, the camera, still in slow motion, shows the busy NY street where people are walking, and the street sound is diminished to a low hum in order to isolate the sound of Claire's heels. Next, the camera cuts to Claire's face: her eyes are wide open, while she is hesitant to take another step. Claire, distressed and fearful, looks far ahead. The camera cuts to where Claire is looking and reveals nothing particular, but just the people in the street. Then, one last time, the camera cuts to the close up of Claire's who seems more anxious and alerted. The camera cuts back to where her look is directed—to the off-screen space just designated as Claire's point of view, revealing an unidentifiable man standing far away at the end of the next intersection. As soon as the camera shifts to the normal speed, a car loudly squealing its brakes is heard. The scene ends as Claire hurries to call for a taxi.

Further in the narrative, Claire is at the beauty salon, and calming atmosphere music playing. Claire is sitting by the window, giving a manicure to her customer who is talking softly and complaining about her husband. Claire looks out the window and the camera cuts to her view of outside. There is only the road and the traffic

under the bridge. The atmosphere music diminishes and the grating sound of the manicure is heard louder. Claire, distracted, is forced to ask the woman to repeat her question. Claire's attention again shifts outside, as the camera cuts to her point of view it is accompanied by a distinct piano note. Outside, in the distance, there is some movement behind the bushes by the bridge, but nothing is recognizable. Then, separate piano notes follow when the lady says, "Your mascara is bleeding." Claire, again distracted, does not answer. When the woman repeats herself, Claire acknowledges and wipes her mascara. The lady asks if she is alright. Sweating, Claire excuses herself, leaving the customer with a coworker. Then, the camera cuts to outside the salon, Claire stands in front of the door and looks around suspiciously. Piano notes are heard until the end of the scene. Claire's mascara bleeds as she is no longer aware of her 'actual' entrapment within the system. Her mask begins to fall as she loses her distance from her own image, her own representation, thus, leading her to fall further into the fantasy of entrapment.

This instance is exemplary of how the protagonist's confinement is increasingly 'subjectivised' in the Newark segments as Claire's fear is attached to the off-screen space which is rendered ambiguous. In these segments, the presumably objective view of off-screen space is frequently 'subjectivised' despite the fact that Claire's point of view is demarcated as 'objective:' there is always something/someone menacing, which is further from the camera, far from being identifiable. These spectral apparitions are not the cause of Claire's fear, on the contrary, they are the effect of Claire's fantasy of entrapment: "[I]t is not sufficient to say that we fear the spectre—the spectre itself already emerges out of a fear, out of our escape from something even more horrifying: freedom" (Žižek, *Mapping Ideology* 27). The 'fantasy' status of Claire's fear of entrapment—which is from the outset associated with the mother via the off-screen piano tone, is thus further

accentuated by the 'subjectivised' off-screen space.

Claire's fantasy of entrapment is closed off by Cain's sudden 'appearance' in her Newark apartment. Claire returns to her apartment after work, she looks into another room with a suspicious look, and seeing nothing, continues with her routine. Taking off her coat, she walks to a mirrored armoire. A few notes from a piano are heard as Claire starts to open the armoire. Stopping suddenly, Claire slowly shuts the mirrored door. Just as the door is about to shut, the camera cuts to a closer view of the mirror, showing Cain behind a glass-paneled door in the reflection. Cain approaches Claire, who remains frozen. The camera shifts from Cain's close-up to Claire in front of the armoire with Cain's face reflected in the mirror beside her. Only a sliver of Cain's face is physically in the frame, while his reflection, his 'apparition' seems to be staring at Claire from behind, giving the sense that Claire is surrounded. At first Cain says quietly, "Look at me." When Claire shifts her look to the other side of the room, he shouts, "Look at me!" Startled, Claire looks straight into his eyes. Then, Cain asks, "Where's your money?" The 'fantasy' status of Claire's fear of entrapment is ultimately exposed with Cain's words. His only and primary concern is money: he wants Claire to pay 'her' debt which is not her mother's debt. It is Claire who "owes the man some money." The fact that he can 'magically' appear right in the middle of Claire's apartment makes it evident that Claire is not 'haunted' by Cain or his hired man. It is in her fantasy that Claire imagines herself as 'doubly' trapped because of an unpaid, pre-symbolic debt—to the mother—yet, in reality, it is as an actual debt, that needs to be paid at the level of the 'symbolic'—to Cain.

In order to emphasize the 'fantasy' status of Claire's fear of entrapment, Claire Dolan utilizes the sound of piano tunes—which are, from the earliest moment of the film, associated with Claire's mother and her debt. The piano tones are scattered throughout Claire's fantasy structure—in the Newark scenes—and notably, they cease

the moment Cain brings her back to New York. While Claire continues to work to pay off her debt the sound of the piano is not heard again until the very moment Claire meets Cain for the last time to pay off all her debt. On the other hand, the low pitched droning sound that is associated with Cain's name tenaciously persists through the entire film, including the fantasy structures of both Elton and Claire. The mother's off-screen presence persists via the dispersed piano notes; however, the one who is entirely blocked off from the film's diegetic universe returns back most vigorously: the father. The droning sound that the film connects with Cain's name at the very beginning dominates the film's universe. In the parallaxic shift from Elton's perspective to Claire's, what remains as constant, as the real of sexual difference is embodied by Cain.

### The Parallaxic Gap

Through its unrestricted narration, not tying the representation of the entire narrative only to Claire but including Elton's perspective as well, Claire Dolan plays on these 'male clichés' by presenting Elton's fantasy. In other words, the film demonstrates a male fantasy yet puts it in parentheses within its structure. Rather than considering the two protagonists' divergent points of view as the juxtaposition of the so called "female perspective" and "male perspective," I pointed out the parallaxic gap between these perspectives opened up by shifting from the respective fantasy constructions of Elton to that of Claire. This gap would allow one to point out the 'real' in sexual difference in the sense that "the status of the Real is purely parallaxic and, as such, non-substantial: it has no substantial density in itself, it is just a gap between two points of perspective, perceptible only in the shift from the one to the other" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 26). Claire Dolan places Elton's (male) fantasy within its filmic system as "an Exception," an "inherent transgression" (of the fantasizing about some mysterious Beyond avoiding its grasp)," without which the very

phallic economy entirely disintegrates (Žižek, "Death and the Maiden" 214).

Within the fantasy structures of both Elton and Claire, the figure of Cain operates as a fantasmatic agency or fantasmatic support of the paternal function/law. In the film's diegesis, Claire's father does not have a name and he is not even referred to within the narrative. The father only appears in a family picture as a faded figure standing next to his dominant double, Cain. (It is interesting in this context that in the film, the only time the word of Father is heard is the mother's funeral, when Claire thanks the priest). The father is absent in the narrative but his function as 'the Name-of-the-Father' is almost omnipresent, yet, in a 'perverted' way, the paternal function returns as "the Father-of-Enjoyment."

[The] murder [the primordial crime] of the father is integrated into the symbolic universe insofar as the dead father begins to reign as the symbolic agency of the Name-of-the-Father. This transformation, this integration, however, is never brought about without remainder; there is always a certain leftover that returns in the form of the obscene and revengeful figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment, of this figure split between cruel revenge and crazy laughter [...] [T]he Oedipal father—father reigning as his Name, as the agent of symbolic law—is necessarily redoubled in itself, it can exert its authority only by relying on the superego figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment. It is precisely this dependence of the Oedipal father—the agency of symbolic law guaranteeing order and reconciliation—on the perverse figure of the Father-of-Enjoyment that explains why Lacan prefers to write perversion as *père-version*, i.e., the version of the father. Far from acting only as symbolic agent, restraining pre-oedipal, 'polymorphous perversity,' subjugating it to the genital law, the 'version of,' or turn toward, the father is the most radical perversion of all. (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 23-4)

Thus, Claire's fantasy posits another 'Exception' which is "constitutive [Lack] of the phallic function, [that is] the phantasmic obscene

figure of the primordial father-jouisseur who was not encumbered by any Prohibition and as such was able fully to enjoy all women" (Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder* 156). The only instance in the whole film these piano and droning sounds—one associated with Claire's mother, and the other with Cain's name—are heard together is when Claire makes her final payment. In this respect, in Claire's fantasy, the mother too operates as a fantasmatic agency or fantasmatic support of the paternal function/law. For Elton and Claire—once she is caught up in her own act, when she is entangled in the fantasy of being entrapped in phallic economy of Enjoyment—Cain embodies the place of this fantasmatic agency, who is not bounded by any Law. This figure as a fantasmatic agency points at the inconsistencies in the paternal law, and being an

Exception to the Law, the figure paradoxically exposes the Impossibility of the very Law it supports. The droning sound of the dying father—that brings together the primordial dead father, and his menacing double, Cain—is a fantasmatic support of the paternal function/law as an Exception to the Law: "Voice thus relates to the (written) Law as fantasy relates to the synchronous symbolic structure: as the stand-in for its unthinkable 'origins,' it fills in (and, at the same time, holds the place of) its constitutive lack (*The Indivisible Remainder* 153). The roaring voice of figure of "the Father-of-Enjoyment," who surfaces in the parallax gap opened by the fantasies of Elton and Claire, fills in the non-symbolized antagonism existing in the system.

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