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The 1990 film *Misery*,based on the novel by Stephen King, tells the story of the damaged Annie Wilkes, and her prisoner, Paul Sheldon. From feminist perspective, *Misery* explores the human fear of insanity.

From a feminist critical perspective, Annie Wilkes is portrayed as powerful on a superficial level, but ultimately displays traits of the stereotypical female who can be controlled by men. Annie is “one of [Stephen] King’s first attempts to create a fiercely independent woman” (Magistrale, 62), a character who holds a godlike amount of power over the protagonist and “is not only Paul’s jailer, but also his sole connection to the rest of the world” (Magistrale, 63). Rather than retelling the stereotypical story of a male captor and a female victim, *Misery* may provide feminists with “some degree of poetic justice in [the film’s] role reversal” (Magistrale, 66). On the surface, feminists might appreciate Annie’s role as the dominant female, but she displays behavior that conflicts with the feminist school of thought. As an avid reader of romance novels, Annie fulfills a stereotype by “accepting the general structure of patriarchy” (Burnett & Beto, 1) in works of romantic fiction, which “scholars argue… reflect and reinforce a patriarchal society” and promote “definitions of women as deriving their happiness only through men” (Burnett & Beto, 1). In much of modern film “women are manipulated to support the current understanding of the limited gender roles that are set by male society and that are supported by cultural norms and practices” (LeClair, 1), just as Annie is romantically manipulated by Paul in *Misery*. Paul flatters her with compliments, referring to her as his “’favorite nurse’” (*Misery*), and asking her to have dinner with him. Annie’s susceptibility to Paul’s insincere romance distracts her and makes her vulnerable; Paul’s plan to poison her relies on the fact that he can easily flatter her and make her lose her focus. Paul also reassures himself of his masculinity by calling Annie a “’crazy bitch’” (*Misery*). The use of the word “bitch” has sexist implications, “a word we use culturally to describe any woman who is strong, angry, uncompromising and, often, uninterested in pleasing men” (Zeisler, 1), often used by “across-the-board woman-haters” (Zeisler, 1). From a feminist perspective, Paul is using the word to compensate for the fact that he is being held captive by a woman because saying the word “bitch” is “simply another way to denigrate women” (Zeisler, 1), something that *Misery* manages to do regardless of Stephen King’s original intentions.

From feminist perspective, *Misery* explores the human fear of insanity. The character of Annie Wilkes reveals that sometimes the most terrifying monsters are living among us.

Works Cited

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