



Sex and Sexuality in Modern Screen Remakes

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Praise for *Sex and Sexuality in Modern Screen Remakes*

“From a gender-swapped *Hamlet* in 1921 to the all-female *Ghostbusters* in 2016; from Baz Luhrmann’s sexed-up *Romeo + Juliet* to Noelle Stevenson’s girl-friendly *She-Ra*; from early cinema through classical and New Hollywood to the most recent TV and movies, Lauren Rosewarne combines in-depth historical perspective with hot takes and humour. Breathtakingly encyclopaedic about remakes of all kinds, and impressively detailed in its range, it’s also extremely readable: a scholarly survey broken down into bite-sized chunks and bullet-point lists. *Sex and Sexuality in Modern Screen Remakes* is like academic *Buzzfeed*, and it works brilliantly.”

—Will Brooker, *Professor of Film and Cultural Studies, Kingston University London, UK*

“Everyone has opinions about sex, and nearly everyone has opinions about film remakes, but most of these opinions lead to nothing but idle chatter and bar bets. So it’s a particular pleasure to read Lauren Rosewarne’s exhaustively detailed discussion of the ways remakes queer, reverse genders, or sex up the stories they take on board. The results will gladden the hearts of audiences unwilling to skim in search of the good parts. It’s all good here.”

—Thomas Leitch, *Professor, Department of English, University of Delaware, USA*

“In its broad sweep of cinema and television histories, citing productions from the silent film era to Lady Gaga’s recent remake of *A Star Is Born*, Rosewarne’s book not only demonstrates the manifold complexities of screen remaking, but it also catalogs how sex and sexuality, as creative and critical points of focus, can unveil an expansive range of cultural possibilities. This accessible book is a welcome addition to the critical literature, especially with its feminist and queer emphases on the subject.”

—Kenneth Chan, *Professor of English and Director of Film Studies, University of Northern Colorado, USA*

“*Sex and Sexuality in Modern Screen Media Remakes* offers an impressively wide-ranging overview of the filmic practice of revising old stories for new contexts, with a particular emphasis on how changing notions of sexuality and gender identity have shaped both marketing and meaning in such films. Drawing extensively on popular reviews and online fan discourse, this book offers compelling insight

into how audiences conceptualize gender and sexuality within film and beyond, paving the way for crucial further conversations in the #MeToo era.”

—Sherryl Vint, *Professor of Science Fiction Media Studies and Director of Speculative Fiction and Cultures of Science, University of California, Riverside, USA*

“This far-reaching study provides insight into why changes in sex, sexiness, and sexuality are central to film remakes. Surveying a vast array of films right up to our current moment and the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, Lauren Rosewarne reveals the complexity of understanding what such shifts signify, as she traces how they are motivated by various cultural and commercial purposes.”

—Renata Kobetts Miller, *Professor of English and Deputy Dean of Humanities and the Arts, City College of New York, USA*

“An incredibly well-researched and thought-out deconstruction of sex and sexuality in remakes. Comprehensive in nature, this is exactly the type of innovative research on remakes that is sorely needed.”

—Ryan Lizardi, *Assistant Professor of Digital Media and Humanities and Communication and Information Design Program Coordinator, State University of New York Polytechnic Institute, USA*

“In looking at and taking seriously cinematic and television remakes, Lauren Rosewarne has found a near-perfect vehicle for charting the filmic depiction of sex and sexuality from the silent era to 2019. Conversely, its focus on sex and sexuality proves a perfect vehicle to chart the ways in which stories evolve decade by decade across multiple iterations. This is an authoritative and engaging book, one we’ve long needed and yet one that also seems to have come along at just the right time.”

—Daniel Humphrey, *Associate Professor of Film Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies, Texas A&M University, USA*

“In her analysis of an impressively broad sample from cinema and television, Lauren Rosewarne provides a grand-sweep articulation of the central role played by sex, gender, and sexual orientation in remakes. The range of her material facilitates an understanding of the historical contexts within which the films were made and consumed which allows Rosewarne to paint a nuanced picture of how the use of sex—its accentuation and attenuation—has evolved in response to the expectations of viewers and economic needs of the studios over time in the process of updating a work for its current audience.”

—Erik R. Lofgren, *Associate Professor of East Asian Studies, Bucknell University, USA*

“Lauren Rosewarne’s nuanced discussion of the role of sex—in the broadest sense of the word—in remakes offers a number of fascinating and useful way of thinking about the social, political, and cultural changes that underlie the recycling of old stories for new audiences. Rejecting views of remakes as unworthy of serious attention, *Sex and Sexuality in Modern Screen Remakes* points out that they are not only one of our most valuable sources of information about changing attitudes towards sex, but also ideal sites for an exploration of notions of originality, modernity, and nostalgia. Drawing on an impressively broad range of films, reviews, and critical works, Rosewarne here makes a substantial contribution to the study of one of the film industry’s central processes.”

—Eric Sandberg, *Assistant Professor, Department of English,
City University of Hong Kong*

“Exhaustively sourced and bursting with examples from a range of genres spanning from comedy to horror to porn, this book maps out the myriad ways that sex and gender have shaped contemporary film and television remakes. Weighing industry logic against broader sociopolitical contexts, media scholars and casual viewers alike will appreciate the insights conveyed here in lively, highly readable prose.”

—Colleen Kennedy-Karpat, *Assistant Professor
in the Department of Communication and Design, Bilkent
University, Turkey*

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CHAPTER 1

An Introduction to Sex and Modern Remaking

For a remake to attract a new audience, in a new era, it needs to offer new enticements. Remaking an old film or television series can involve a bigger budget, higher production values, special effects and a contemporary setting; for this book, I focus on sex. *Sex and Sexuality in Modern Screen Remakes* focuses on stories that have already been filmed—sometimes many times previously—that are made afresh with new approaches to sex. While *sex* in this context refers to inserted or increased erotic content, my discussion is broader than this, also incorporating an analysis of new approaches to gender and sexuality, feminist reimaginings and queer retellings as well as an exploration of material made modern through *less* explicit presentations.

This book is split into three sections. This Introduction unpacks the key concepts and provides an overview of material that will (and won't) be covered in this volume. I outline how I use the term *remake*, and present my rationale for focusing on such media. I outline debates around originality, introduce the key role of celebrity in “sexier” depictions, and briefly discuss the integral role of sex in media marketing.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of sex-swaps. Titles like *Ocean's 8* (2018) and *Ghostbusters* (2016) are high-profile examples of films that have been remade with sex-swapped casts: their predecessors—*Ocean's 11* (1960; 2011) and *Ghostbusters* (1984)—boasted predominantly male casts; the remakes were modernized through putting women at the helm. The act of sex-swapping on screen dates back to the earliest days of cinema,

and while male-to-female swaps have received most attention, the reverse also sometimes transpires where films that originally had female casts, or a female protagonist, are remade with men: the comedy-drama *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), for example, focused on three single women seeking millionaire husbands and was remade for television as *How to Marry a Billionaire* (2000) with three single men seeking rich wives. The politics of sex-swaps are examined and explanations for the recent surge of such productions are proposed, including to reflect the zeitgeist, to create a star vehicle, to grow an audience, and to insert some politics. Politics is further probed in a discussion of feminist remakes. The notion of what *feminism* means in the context of filmmaking is examined and its manifestation in remaking is investigated through a range of modern remake presentations including moderated misogyny, inserted misandry, positive portrayals of women, progressive gender roles, the female gaze, and the casting of feminist actresses. Chapter 2 also examines the backlash *against* such films, as well as the production of postfeminist and anti-feminist remakes.

Chapter 3 examines the use of erotic content and overt displays of sex and sexuality in remaking. I investigate the discourse around *steamier* and *raunchier* remakes and explore the notion of sexiness as subjective. Three central ways that films are remade as sexier are outlined: the casting of sexy talent, the inclusion of more nudity, and the depiction of more sex. The rationales for increased sexiness that I propose include to create buzz around a film, to boost the classification, to expand an audience, to mirror social mores, and to present a more definitive film. Chapter 3 also explores the idea of a queer remake. Queer-swaps are examined whereby a storyline that had previously been heterosexual is remade with queer characters, for example the made-for-television *Mother, May I Sleep with Danger?* (1996/2016). In the 1996 film, a teenage girl is unaware that her boyfriend is a vampire; in the 2016 remake, the central teen couple are lesbians. The notion of (re)inserted queer content, whereby queer material that had been sidelined from a previous version, is also examined—for example, the lesbian content that had been eliminated from the drama *These Three* (1936) but reinserted (in part) in the remake *The Children's Hour* (1961)—alternatively, where entirely new queer material is added, such as the drag queens in *A Star Is Born* (2018), who had no presence in the 1937, 1954, or 1976 versions of the film. I discuss the queer gaze and inverted casting, and examine the range of explanations for queer spins on premade titles including to represent a changing society, to aid in marketing, and as queerbait. Also explored are remakes that *lower* the sexual quotient, be it by decreasing the sexiness

or reducing the queer content. A brief discussion of pornographic remakes is also provided.

I begin my discussion of key concepts with a definition of *remake* and detail why I consider such films worthy of scholarly attention.

WHAT IS A REMAKE?

The notion of what constitutes a remake is had in almost all academic work in this field. Questions like “how do we measure the amount of elements that have to be repeated for a film to count as a remake?”¹ or “How far, and in what ways, can the boundaries of ‘remake’ be stretched, ‘made over’, before a new ‘original’ emerges?”² are asked by scholars to establish parameters and assign criteria to determine which films warrant the “remake” label.

For general audiences, the term simply refers to material that has been made again; to use film theorist Thomas Leitch’s definition, remakes are just “new versions of older movies.”³ This broad and accessible definition is the one I employ in this book: my focus is on already-filmed stories that have been given a new life—or, even, new *lives*—by being filmed anew. Such a wide-ranging definition however, is not without contestation.

The adventure-drama *King Kong* (1933) for example, was remade with the same title and near-identical storylines in 1976 and 2005. The 1976 and 2005 versions exist as relatively clear-cut examples of remakes; in other instances, such classification is more complicated. Outside of refilmed screenplays, originary material might come from a different medium such as a play or a novel that gets adapted for the screen: think of the many screen incarnations of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (c.1597), or Alexandre Dumas’s *The Three Musketeers* (1844). While I consider a first screen version to be an adaptation—and thus not of central interest to this volume—my focus lies on the next productions. While subsequent films can still be considered as adaptations, they are likely also influenced by the other screen versions: as film theorist Anat Zanger spotlights, “the same filmic text may wear both caps simultaneously, constituting both an adaptation and a cinematic version.”⁴ The thriller *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) is an example of a film that “is evidently both remake and adaptation”⁵: the film was based on the 2005 Stieg Larsson novel which was first adapted for the screen in Sweden as *Män som hatar kvinnor* (*Men Who Hate Women*) in 2009. I consider the Swedish film as an adaptation but, as film theorist Lucy Mazdon notes, the 2011 American film is both an adaptation *and* a remake.

Part of my rationale for using such a broad definition lies in my lack of interest in conducting a deep dive into authorship. Cultural theorist Carolyn Durham references the sheer complexity of such scholarship in her work on American remakes of French films, notably when she posits: “Is *Three Men and a Baby* [1987] a remake of *Trois Hommes et un couffin* [1985] or are both films remakes of *The Three Godfathers* [1916; 1936; 1948] and, if so, of which version?”⁶ Cultural theorist Laura Grindstaff alludes to similar complexities: “How far back should one go to uncover the founding narrative that has inspired a film or series of texts?... [T]he closer one looks, the blurrier the edges of what constitutes ‘the remake’ become.”⁷ These ideas point to the challenges of definitively determining authorship but also underscore the likelihood of remakes being influenced by screen adaptations as much as they are by any “original” literary source. With my focus being on the role of sex as a modernizing tool, my interests eschew a search for “originality” outside of previously filmed versions of the story.

The issue of remaking and adapting is further complicated when a filmmaker views their film differently to critics and audiences. Don Siegel’s film *The Beguiled* (1971), for example, was an adaptation of Thomas Cullinan’s 1966 novel. When Sofia Coppola (re)made *The Beguiled* in 2017, her film was popularly interpreted as a remake. Coppola, however, considers her film as “not a remake but a *reinterpretation*,”⁸ and she is representative of a range of directors refuting the remake status of their film. In his taxonomy of remakes, film theorist Robert Eberwein identifies one type of remake as those whose “status is denied by the director,” nominating the thriller *Blow-Up* (1966) and its apparent remake, *The Conversation* (1974), as illustration.⁹ I uncovered a range of directors who have articulated similar denials. Cecil B. DeMille, for example, claimed that his 1956 biblical epic *The Ten Commandments* was not a “remake” of his own 1923 film.¹⁰ Steven Spielberg denies that his romance *Always* (1989)—a title often linked to *A Guy Named Joe* (1943)¹¹—is a remake:

I wouldn’t call it a remake. I’ve never looked at it like that. I think the film owes a great inspiration to the 1943 Victor Fleming film *A Guy Named Joe*. But it’s not really a remake. It was the basis for a new story.¹²

When director Spike Lee made the action-drama *Oldboy* (2013)—an apparent remake of the South Korean film *Oldenboi* (*Oldboy*) (2003)—he also denied the R-word: “We’re not doing a remake, we’re doing a

reinterpretation.”¹³ Producers also deny the remake status: Richard Zanuck, one of the producers of *Planet of the Apes* (2001)—an apparent remake of the 1968 film—argues, “The important thing for people to know is that it isn’t a remake at all. There’s a common falsity out there that this is a remake. This has nothing whatsoever to do with the first picture.”¹⁴ Actors articulate similar denials. Discussing the television mini-series *Around the World in 80 Days* (1989)—based on Jules Verne’s often-filmed 1873 novel—actor Pierce Brosnan says, “Oh, but you mustn’t call it a remake!”¹⁵ In pre-publicity commentary on the crime-drama *Point Break* (2015)—an apparent remake of the 1991 crime-drama—actress Teresa Palmer says, “It only has a very loose skeleton of what the original is about. It really is its own movie. It’s definitely not a remake, we’re calling it a re-envisioning.”¹⁶ Commenting on the adventure film *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017)—an apparent remake of *Jumanji* (1995)—actor Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson claims, “For the record, we are NOT making a reboot, but rather a ‘continuation of the story.’”¹⁷ In an interview about the horror film *Suspiria* (2018)—the apparent remake of the 1977 film—actress Tilda Swinton says, “It’s another version, not a remake... It’s inspired by the same story, but it goes in different directions.”¹⁸ Studios also make this claim: Ted Hartley, then chairman and CEO of RKO Pictures, said, “At RKO, we call them adaptations, because we believe that there is no such thing as a remake.”¹⁹ Some directors²⁰ and actors²¹ even claim to have never even *seen* the earlier film(s) to bolster such claims. While it is worth acknowledging that such denials, particularly the modern ones, might be facetious—riffing on the widespread negative sentiment around remakes (expanded on later in this chapter)—it’s equally feasible that such denials are responses to the popular perception that remakes are somehow *lesser*, or as film theorist Kenneth Chan terms them, “a filmic form of secondariness.”²² While such denials provide insight into the low prestige attached to remakes and raise interesting questions about who gets to decide how a film is labeled, ultimately their relevance to my project is narrow: my focus is on films that have been described—by reviewers, by fans, in academic discussions—as remakes.

Less clear-cut remake examples discussed in this book are those films that bear very strong storyline semblance to originary material but might have a new title, a new setting, or which don’t acknowledge originary works. I discuss for example, several loose adaptations of Charles Dickens’s novel *A Christmas Carol* (1843), which change the setting and on occasions make the protagonist female: *Ebbie* (1995) is one example, whereby Ebenezer

Scrooge becomes Elizabeth “Ebbie” Scrooge in a film restaged in 1990s America. I consider such examples as remakes because they (re)tell a previously filmed story even if—invariably—not everything remains the same: as literary theorist Jonathan Culler contends, “a story can be told in different ways and remain, in an important sense, the same story.”²³

While film is the predominant medium of remakes explored in this book, I also discuss television. I explore films like *Charlie’s Angels* (2000), based on the television series (1976–1981), and the television series *Friday Night Lights* (2006–2011), based on the film (2004) (both adapted from the 1990 novel). While my discussion focuses on the specific modification of modernization—and, more narrowly, *sex* as a tool to do this—akin to adapting a novel for the screen, adapting *between* media necessitates a translation of content, sometimes substantially so (and arguably this is why scholars like Leitch suggest that television doesn’t quite fit the remake label).²⁴ While the art and complexities of adapting between media is interesting, the only aspect of the discussion specifically relevant to my project is the role of sex in any new production. As I discuss in Chap. 2, women play a much more substantial on screen role in the television production of *Friday Night Lights* than in the film. While this is relevant to my exploration of the expanded presence of women in remakes, such an act can also be interpreted as a consequence of what occurs when a television show has 76 episodes to tell a story compared to the mere two hours of a film.

Transnational remakes are also discussed whereby content, for example the British sitcom *The Office* (2001–2003), is remade in the US (2005–2013). When *The Office* was remade in America, the show expanded far beyond the 12 episodes of the British series. The 201 episodes of the remake series thus had far greater scope for more characters, and also greater characterization, thus serving as one explanation for the remake’s inclusion of the recurring queer character, Oscar (Oscar Nuñez), who was present for the entirety of the American show’s run and who didn’t have an equivalent in the British series.

I acknowledge that my broad definition of *remake* could be accused of including everything. As several theorists note, the concept of remake can, if desired, be stretched wide enough to include pretty much every media item in existence. Doris Milberg in her book *Repeat Performances: A Guide to Hollywood Movie Remakes*, for example, observes: “Many a famous writer has, at one time or another, stated that there are only six or seven original stories to be told – all the rest are variations upon a theme.”²⁵ Film theorist Constantine Verevis discusses a similar idea:

At its most contracted, a textual approach leads to accounts of remaking which attempt to reduce all narrative structures to a single (Oedipal) logical or variant thereof. [Writer] Michael Eaton, for instance, notes that ‘there are only two premises for stories: The Odd Couple and The Fish Out of Water... Although Oedipus, if you think about it, is a bit of both.’²⁶

Cultural theorist Krin Gabbard also references Oedipus in his contribution to the everything-is-a-remake debate: “I occasionally suspect that all films are versions of the Oedipus story, and after recently immersing myself in musical biopics, I sometimes believe that all Oedipus stories are versions of *The Jazz Singer* [1927].”²⁷ My definition is narrower than this. I focus on remakes of material already filmed and thus restrict my discussion to instances where an obvious relationship exists between two or more screen productions, as distinguished from attempts to link films back to non-screen originary material like Shakespeare, fairytales, or the Bible.

Philosopher Julia Kristeva proposes a slightly different approach to the notion of broad definitions through her concept of *intertextuality*, contending that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”²⁸ Here, rather than every story being viewed simply as derivative of a handful of myths and legends, instead, Kristeva proposes that every text is a *composite* of influences both from within the medium and also outside. Such thinking moves us away from the early preoccupation of adaptation studies—fidelity—and instead focuses on how all cultural products are created and connected. Arguably, with over a century of moviemaking, the links between films are increasing, as are the possibility for remakes themselves to be remade again and again: I’ve already mentioned the four versions of *A Star Is Born*; other titles like Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) have each been filmed scores of times.

As Kristeva argues, *any* film can be connected to any other. While fascinating, again, my focus is not on mapping the complicated relationships between films. Kristeva’s point though, that subsequent versions of an originary text also likely references future adaptations, is indeed relevant to this volume.

My focus on modernization—of a subsequent film appearing more contemporary than its predecessor(s)—gets to the heart of why remakes have been chosen as my media of analysis rather than a more generic investigation of sex in film. By focusing on remakes, examples of the *same story*

being told with new sexual additions (or, occasionally, sexual *subtractions*), provides fascinating insight into political and cultural change and illustrates how sex—in the broadest sense—is frequently used to sell old films to new audiences.

WHY EXAMINE REMAKES?

Part of the motive for directors, producers, and actors to deny that their film is a remake is because such movies have a well-established stink about them. Such productions are routinely condemned by critics, commentators, and fans as rip-offs,²⁹ knock-offs,³⁰ clones,³¹ pale imitations,³² and carbon copies,³³ and *remake* is habitually coupled in reviews with adjectives like pointless,³⁴ painful,³⁵ excruciating,³⁶ slavish,³⁷ stupid,³⁸ insipid,³⁹ anemic,⁴⁰ inferior,⁴¹ irrelevant,⁴² ill-advised,⁴³ half-hearted,⁴⁴ and redundant.⁴⁵ Psychoanalyst Harvey Greenberg denounced remakes in his 1998 chapter as “shallow attempts to trade on an original’s smash success by using new stars, new technology, sometimes a new setting,”⁴⁶ and I could quote dozens of similar slights (further such examples are discussed in the Conclusion). This largely unnuanced discourse posits that remakes are bad—are unoriginal,⁴⁷ uninspired,⁴⁸ unnecessary⁴⁹—and thus simply can’t be *good* films, let alone *better* ones. Such criticisms however, highlight a fascinating paradox whereby not only critics but *audiences* supposedly hate remakes—and articulate such hatred widely—yet Hollywood keeps making them, a point unpacked in a *Mega Nerd Media* article: “Remakes are like fast-food joints, it’s super trendy to hate on them, yet somehow they keep turning a handsome profit. Despite what many may say, most people love remakes.”⁵⁰ The continued production and *popularity* of remakes introduces a key rationale for my analysis of them: they are a dominant feature of Hollywood output and constitute much of what audiences consume. Equally—and perhaps most importantly—the apparent loathing of remakes in no way discounts their value as cultural artifacts: as James Francis Jr. argues in his book *Remaking Horror: Hollywood’s New Reliance on Scares of Old*, “[r]emakes do not have to be liked or disliked to create discussion.”⁵¹

The idea of material being made again—and again on occasions—provides useful change-over-time information about media production and, more specifically, the ever-evolving role of sex both in society and as depicted on screen. While more sex, for example, is often considered a sign of modernity, nowadays gratuitous displays of female nudity are regularly interpreted as sexist and anachronistic, in turn highlighting that modernity

and even *progressiveness* around sex on screen is not a linear story. Brian De Palma's horror film *Carrie* (1976), for example, was known for arguably gratuitous teenage female nudity and is often discussed in the context of the male gaze.⁵² When the film was remade by Kimberly Peirce in 2013, the modernization involved *removing* nudity of the kind that—37 years on—could be viewed as unnecessary and objectifying. This example can be contrasted with the short-lived *Charlie's Angels* (2011) television series, a modern remake that *didn't* tone down the sexual content from the 1976–1981 series. Discussing the 2011 series, feminist theorist Cristina Lucia Stasia observes: “This is one reason that the reboot failed: it wanted women to see the Angels as heroes yet also pandered to straight men, sexualizing the Angels.”⁵³ The series was canceled midway through the first season. Both *Carrie* (2013) and *Charlie's Angels* (2011) are products of, as well as consumed in, a zeitgeist that is more conscious of the portrayal of women: *Charlie's Angels* didn't adapt and thus got construed as anachronistic; *Carrie* did adapt and was critically panned. *Carrie's* poor critical reception thus highlights the treacherous terrain of depicting female sexuality in the twenty-first century—and, more specifically, in the MeToo era—and the resultant challenges created for modern remaking. For viewers who saw and enjoyed the 1976 *Carrie*—who considered the nudity as a key component of their viewing experience—the 2013 film appears sanitized in comparison.⁵⁴ The remake therefore—indicative of the reception of most remakes—is not judged on its own merits; rather, is compared to the first film and appraised accordingly.

Outside of sex and politics, remakes also tap into a range of topics that I have long been interested in: notably nostalgia.⁵⁵ While it seems in recent years that studios have been fixated on nostalgia, arguably, its appeals—of revisiting our past as *imagined* rather than lived—is nothing new. I argue that, in part, the production and consumption of remakes is motivated by looking backward with longing. While audiences love original concepts and new characters, they also enjoy the familiarity of stories they know, be it revisiting a story they cherished in childhood or simply a story that is comfortably familiar. Richard Corliss explores this idea in his *Time* magazine review of the sci-fi thriller *Total Recall* (2012), the remake of the 1990 film:

Audiences can be counted on to see a remake of a venerable hit rather than some work of startling originality, the way children demand to hear a favorite fairy tale for the hundredth time. They don't want to be perplexed by the new; they want to relive the shock of the old.⁵⁶

Remakes fill this yen, offering the safety of a story that audiences may already know and which has been repackaged with modern tweaks for filmgoers. An extension of the appeal of the familiar is the pleasure derived from comparison: as Andrew Horton and Stuart McDougal write in their anthology *Play It Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*, “the remake invites the viewer to enjoy the *differences* that have been worked, consciously and sometimes unconsciously, between the texts.”⁵⁷ While contrasting two (or more) titles may delight some audiences, the existence of more than one filmed version of a story also provides an excellent dataset for scholars, be they analyzing fidelity, categorizing films according to a taxonomy, or, as in my case, exploring the different ways that sex and sexuality have been used in storytelling across different presentations.

It is important in a book on remakes to outline my approach to questions of originality: a concept inextricably linked to remaking and one that needs to be addressed even if it plays a limited role.

UNPACKING “ORIGINALITY”

To discuss a remake, there needs to be source material: for the purposes of this discussion, I consider the preceding film(s) as such. Earlier titles might not be the *only* source material—as noted, a novel or play might have started the cycle—but for there to be a remake, according to the definition employed in this book, there exists a first version filmed for the screen.

In this book I use *originary* when referring to a novel or play that might serve as early source material, but I avoid using *original* to describe films, instead favoring *first*. Partly, this is to avoid battles around authorship which, for this volume, I’m not interested in waging, and also because chronology plays a more substantial role here than fidelity: I’m far less interested, for example, in how closely the film versions of *Wuthering Heights* adhere to Emily Brontë’s 1847 novel, and much more concerned with how the material has broached topics of sex and sexuality. My use of *first* is therefore primarily about time—and the order of screen productions—and, thus, in part, reflects postmodern scholarship whereby *first* has no inherent specialness: literary scholars Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn, in their work on adaptation, flag that in postmodern thinking “to be second is not to be secondary or inferior, likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative.”⁵⁸

Of course, even *first* is not without contestation. In Chap. 2, I discuss the German silent film *Hamlet* (1921), which is thought to be one of the first sex-swap presentations of Shakespeare on film. In many cases—particularly

in the context of adaptations of classic literature—it is oftentimes difficult to definitively determine a “first” given that not only have many silent films been lost,⁵⁹ but also because in film scholarship there is a tendency to prioritize Western content. Literature scholars Alexander Huang and Charles Ross, for example, discuss the aforementioned German *Hamlet* and note that “around the time Asta Nielsen’s cross-dressed *Hamlet* (1921) was filmed, gender-bender silent film adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* were being made in Shanghai.”⁶⁰ My determination of *first* is thus reliant on entries in the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) with a recognition that its contents—particularly as related to non-Western productions—is potentially incomplete. While I use *first*, other scholars have proposed alternate names: “primary,” as suggested by Robert Nowlan and Gwendolyn Wright Nowlan in their book *Cinema Sequels and Remakes, 1903–1987*,⁶¹ or “premake” as offered by film theorist Katrin Oltmann.⁶²

Another complicating factor in discussing originality is that every remake offers something wholly new, in turn becoming its own original production: as theorists Scott Lukas and John Marmysz argue in their work on horror, “no remake is, in fact, an exact replica of the film it has remade, and so there is always some degree of creative originality involved in its production.”⁶³ Gus Van Sant’s 1998 shot-for-shot remake of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) illustrates this well. The Van Sant production is arguably far closer to the Hitchcock film than most remakes are to their predecessor—down to use of the same shooting script and replication of camera positions—and yet, as explored in Chap. 3, Van Sant manages to subtly insert queer content and make the film slightly sexier. In turn, the director produced a new—and arguably *original*—film that is also a remake.

A key component of updating previously filmed stories is the use of celebrities. Contemporary celebrities can modernize a film and, notably for the themes of this book, are a means to insert sex: this can center on the casting of a sexy celebrity to attract a new audience, alternatively, involve a celebrity’s personal activism or, as explored in Chap. 3, capitalize on a celebrity’s sexual preference to inject something new to a production.

MODERNIZATION AND CELEBRITY

A common way that a remake modernizes existing material—and an important device used to entice audiences into revisiting a title—is the casting of celebrities. Researchers note that celebrities are a notably potent factor in Americans’ decision to see a film; as Deborah Hornblow observes in the *Los Angeles Times*, “most Americans have demonstrated that they

refuse to pay money for films... whose stars are not on the cover of this week's celebrity chronicles."⁶⁴

While the availability of new technology,⁶⁵ or a significant anniversary,⁶⁶ can motivate a remake, casting also serves this function; something discussed by film producer Stanley Rubin:

If a studio is going to remake an old film – especially a successful one – they better have something in mind that will make the new picture as good or better than the original... For example, maybe the theme is timely again, or perhaps, there's a 'hot' piece of casting that makes the project an 'exciting' one.⁶⁷

Nicolas Rapold makes a similar point in *The New York Times*:

In the sausage factory of moviemaking the remake is an age-old temptation. For love or money (but usually money) studios have tapped old stories for different times, fresh stars and ambitious directors, streamlining conceits and translating inconvenient foreign languages.⁶⁸

Hot casting and fresh stars can take a range of forms; in this section, I examine the use of celebrities as manifested in the star vehicle remake.

The Star Vehicle

Feminist film theorist Karen Hollinger explains the concept of the "star vehicle":

A major venue for star acting is the star vehicle, a film specifically made to promote a given star. The star vehicle is often thought of simply as a film written to showcase a star's talent, but several types of star vehicles exist. A film can be written to suit the character type, setting, genre, or theme favored by a star; a literary work can be adapted to the screen with a star in mind to play the lead, or a script can be written or a part changed or expanded to accommodate a star's image or abilities.⁶⁹

There are many examples of remakes produced as star vehicles. Discussing Universal's decision to remake the Western *The Spoilers* (1942), for example—a film that had previously been made in 1914, 1923, and 1930 (and which was made again in 1955)—Michael Druzman in his book *Make it Again, Sam: A Survey of Movie Remakes* notes that the film was remade to provide "a vehicle for Marlene Dietrich."⁷⁰ In previous versions of the film, the role of Cherry, the saloon owner, had been small, but

in 1942 the role was substantially expanded for Dietrich. Discussing the comedy *Masquerade in Mexico* (1945)—a film described as “a loose remake of the 1939 classic *Midnight*”⁷¹—biographer Christine Rice identifies the remake as a “showcase vehicle for Paramount star Dorothy Lamour.”⁷² Laurence Raw, in his work on screen adaptations of classic literature, discusses the romantic-drama *I’ll Never Forget You* (1951)—a remake of *Berkeley Square* (1933)—observing that it was “[c]onceived as a vehicle for Tyrone Power, who had reigned supreme as Twentieth Century Fox’s leading male star since the late 1930s.”⁷³ Such star vehicles, of course, aren’t restricted to the Hollywood “studio system” days: more recent remakes have also been labeled similarly. In his review of the drama *Sybil* (2007)—the made-for-television remake of *Sybil* (1976)—Matthew Gilbert suggests that the remake project “was hatched to give actress Tammy Blanchard a big vehicle to suit her big talent.”⁷⁴ In a *Huffington Post* discussion on the action-drama *The Karate Kid* (2010)—a remake of the 1984 film—the film was observed as having “been refashioned as a star vehicle for Jaden Smith.”⁷⁵ Other examples of modern star vehicle remakes include Emma Watson in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), the remake of the 1991 animation; Scarlett Johansson in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), the American remake of the Japanese animation *Kōkaku Kidōtai* (*Ghost in the Shell*) (1995); Tom Cruise in *The Mummy* (2017), a remake of the 1932 and 1999 titles; Anna Faris in *Overboard* (2018), a remake of the 1987 title; and Bruce Willis in *Death Wish* (2018), a remake of the 1974 film.

Stars are key in modernizing titles but, most relevant for this volume, work to incorporate sex appeal. The audience for old films is limited: modern audiences—particularly so young filmgoers—want to see contemporary productions with recognizable actors (a key reason why films are remade and not just rereleased). Journalist Rob Owen makes this point in his discussion of the mini-series *Roots* (2016)—a remake of the 1977 drama series: “The original, though daring for its time, feels dated today with a cast that’s largely unknown—and thus, less of a draw—to today’s youth.”⁷⁶ By utilizing contemporary celebrities, a remake can repackage an old story as new. Pop star Lady Gaga, for example, brings her unique singing and performance skills, sex appeal, queer sexuality, and also her massive fan base to *A Star Is Born* (2018), in turn creating new reasons for audiences to be attracted to an 81-year-old story.

Cultural theorists Jennifer Forrest and Leonard Koos observe that star vehicles “capitalize on a performer’s established persona.”⁷⁷ A star’s sexiness that has been proven through other film roles can thus be channeled into a remake. An example proposed by Forrest is Rita Hayworth in *Miss*

Sadie Thompson (1953), a remake of *Sadie Thompson* (1928) (which had also been remade as *Rain* [1932]): “Hayworth draws upon the heritage of her seductive singing roles in *Gilda* [1946] and *Affair in Trinidad* [1952] – [providing] yet another boost for male attendance.”⁷⁸ Forrest spotlights how the marketing materials for *Miss Sadie Thompson* drew specific attention to the sex appeal of Hayworth: “See Rita in 3D! She’s the only dame with a kiss of flame!”⁷⁹ In such an example, producers capitalize on star persona and the enticements established through previous work to inject something new into a remake. As explored in Chap. 3, highly sexualized marketing is often key in selling remakes to audiences.

While remakes can be vehicles for established stars, they can also provide an opportunity for up-and-comers: a remake gives a new star an opportunity to ingratiate themselves to an audience within a title that has previously been positively received. Nowlan and Wright Nowlan discuss *Alice Adams* (1935), a remake of the 1923 silent drama, noting that—akin to *Masquerade in Mexico* being tweaked for Marlene Dietrich—the 1935 film was altered to utilize its up-and-coming star: “The producers wished to emphasize the romantic aspects of the story for their young star, Katharine Hepburn.”⁸⁰ Film theorist Robert Lentz similarly identifies the crime-drama *I Died a Thousand Times* (1955)—a remake of *High Sierra* (1941), and also remade as *Colorado Territory* (1949)—as another such example, identifying it as a vehicle for “up-and-coming film star Jack Palance.”⁸¹ Francis also discusses the widespread use of up-and-coming stars in horror remakes.⁸² In more recent years, *True Grit* (2010)—the remake of the 1969 Western—could be construed as serving in this fashion for up-and-comer Hailee Steinfeld, who received an Academy Award nomination for her role; ditto *Let Me In* (2010)—the remake of the Swedish vampire horror *Låt den rätte komma in* (*Let the Right One In*) (2008)—and *Carrie* (2013), both serving in this capacity for Chloë Grace Moretz.

Something that undergirds the wisdom of using established stars also, conversely, hints to a shortcoming of using up-and-comers. Film historian Barry Salt discusses this in his comparison of the 1960 and 1988 versions of *Psycho*:

In the original *Psycho*, Anthony Perkins and Janet Leigh were established stars, and heading into middle age, whereas in the 1998 remake, the leads were Anne Heche and Vince Vaughn, who were younger, and not really established as film stars.⁸³

In such an example, the *absence* of established stars in the remake constitutes part of the criticism: while a cast might be newer and debatably “hotter,” remakes aren’t always enhanced by their casting.

Just as remakes can be vehicles for both established and rising stars, they can also be *comeback vehicles* for actors whose careers have hit a plateau and are looking to endear themselves to audiences once again. Paul Meehan in his book *Horror Noir: Where Cinema’s Dark Sisters Meet* presents Lon Chaney as an early example of this:

For his talkie debut, MGM chose to remake *The Unholy Three* in 1930 as a vehicle for this new iteration of Chaney’s career at time when many silent stars were unable to make the transition to sound.⁸⁴

The Unholy Three was a remake of the 1925 silent film of the same title. The remake gave Chaney an opportunity to reposition himself as a star of talkies within a title that audiences were already familiar with. Similar to the career function that remakes can serve for new stars, such films can provide an opportunity for established or aging stars to (re)connect with audiences. Film scholar David Meuel discusses the remake *Mogambo* (1953), for example, as devised to resurrect the career of Clark Gable:

Conceived by MGM executives as a comeback vehicle for an aging Clark Gable (who hadn’t made a good film in years), [*Mogambo* is] an unabashed remake of *Red Dust*, another Gable-centered love triangle made all the way back in 1932.⁸⁵

Other remakes discussed as comeback vehicles include Judy Garland in the 1954 *A Star Is Born*⁸⁶; Lana Turner in *Imitation of Life* (1959), a remake of the 1934 film⁸⁷; Eddie Murphy in *The Nutty Professor* (1996), a remake of the 1963 film⁸⁸; and Bess Armstrong in *That Darn Cat* (1997), a remake of the 1965 film.⁸⁹ Also, for stars attempting to resurrect a career after scandal—Mel Gibson’s leaked racist tirade put him in such a position in 2006—a starring role in a remake can potentially serve to rehabilitate: Gibson’s attempt at a comeback vehicle was the crime-drama *Edge of Darkness* (2010), a remake of the British mini-series (1985).

In Chap. 2, the role of sexy stars as well as *feminist* stars in remakes is examined in more detail; in Chap. 3, I also discuss queer celebrities whose own sexuality is used to make a remake appear modern.

My focus on remakes in this book also exploits my interest in depictions of sex in advertising which is where my academic career began.⁹⁰ While all

films need to convince audiences of their worth, selling a remake often requires additional efforts to convince audiences to pay to see something that they've seen before. I am, therefore, also interested in sex being used as part of remake marketing.

SEX AS SELLING POINT

Film and television are commercial products and thus to make money studios need people to pay to see their output: marketing is the vehicle by which audiences are introduced to a film and whereby anticipation to see it is created. Sex can play a key role in this.

The notion that *sex sells* has been a truism in advertising and marketing for over a century. The Woodbury's Facial Soap campaign in the early 1900s—a man nuzzles the neck of a woman, the image captioned by the slogan “A Skin You Love to Touch”—is considered as one of the first examples of the use of erotic content to market a product.⁹¹ In the years since, sex is everywhere in advertising, and while marketing scholars still argue about whether or not it “works” and translates into sales, the industry operates from the perspective that it does. From trailers to posters to press junkets, sex is frequently used to promote film and television. The assumption is that its use has merit: if not in necessarily building an audience, certainly in generating publicity. I contend that in the world of remaking, sex plays a central part in marketing.

In an early scene in the romcom *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), the narrator explains that part of protagonist Richard's (Tom Ewell) work for the Brady and Company publishing house is to find new audiences for classic literature:

Narrator: In the 25-cent book business you can sell anything. Even the old classics, no matter how dreary they are. The trick is you've got to soup-up the title a little and get yourself a cheerful and interesting cover. It's all a question of imagination.

Richard then signs off on a revised cover of Louise May Alcott's novel *Little Women* (1869), repackaged as *The Secrets of a Girls Dormitory*. Richard's sexy spin on literature is, in part, what's done in the context of many of the remakes discussed in this book. While Richard's new book covers—akin to the aforementioned posters for remakes like *Miss Sadie Thompson* and *The French Line*—repackage old material with a new sexy wrapping, sex in the broadest sense can also be incorporated into the

narrative, from providing depictions of sexual minorities to feminist retreads of well-worn stories.

In the final section of this chapter, I explore my frequent reference to film reviews throughout this book.

THE ROLE OF POPULAR CRITICISM

My preparation for this book not only necessitated watching a deluge of films and television series and reading a shelf of books about remakes, but also plowing through hundreds of film reviews. Published by professional critics in newspapers and magazines and posted by fans online, reviews play an enormous role in understanding the discourse around a film. While sources like the aforementioned IMDb and endless “best of”⁹² and “worst of”⁹³ remake lists helped to create a dataset of media for analysis, ultimately there are far too many remakes to watch them all, let alone watch them and then also watch their filmic source material(s). Reviews, therefore, serve a range of functions in this volume. First, despite my having read—and also referenced—the vast majority of scholarly work on remakes in this book, the reality is that—as Mazdon notes—“the large majority of work on remakes is journalistic.”⁹⁴ Such reviews provide an invaluable source of information on how remakes are thought and written about. Such reviews often also couple titles, something enormously important for films remade with a new title: as Verevis notes, remakes are easier to spot when they “carry a pre-sold title *and* repeat readily recognizable narrative units,”⁹⁵ but, of course, on many occasions such features *aren’t* present. Reviews are also the place where films get called out as sexier or raunchier and where queer content is discussed. Reviews importantly give insight into the perception of a film. Of course, each viewer interprets films differently, but reviews—particularly when multiple reviews of the same film are considered—help to give insight into reception: for example, even though filmmakers might deny that their film is a remake, their framing as such in reviews both reflects and, potentially, *informs*, broader audience reception. This idea of subjectivity—about what, for example, constitutes a *sexier* portrayal—is also well-illustrated by reviews that differ in their appraisals, in turn providing insight into the conflicting commentary around remakes and offering insight into why a film that looks modern and sexy to one reviewer won’t necessarily be perceived as such by audiences.

In Chap. 2, my discussion moves to sexy modernization as transpiring through sex-swaps, reimaged gender roles, and feminist retellings.

NOTES

1. Knöppler (2017, 46).
2. Holmlund (1998, 217).
3. Leitch (2002, 37).
4. Zanger (2006, 30).
5. Mazdon (2017, 32).
6. Durham (1998, 17).
7. Grindstaff (2002, 277).
8. In Lodge (2017). (My emphasis).
9. Eberwein (1998, 28–30).
10. Blanke (2013, 133 n.11).
11. Gordon (2008) and Parish (1994).
12. In Friedman and Notbohm (2000, 141).
13. In Prigge (2013).
14. In Lindner (2012, 128).
15. In Bawden (1989).
16. In McGrane (2015).
17. In Child (2016). (Emphasis in original).
18. In Jagernauth (2017).
19. In Dunne (1998, G1).
20. In his discussion of *All the King's Men* (2006)—a remake of *All the King's Men* (1949)—the director, Steven Zaillian claims he had never seen the 1949 version: “It was a choice, originally, that I didn’t want to be influenced by it in any way... It’s hard to get images out of your mind once they’re in” (in Halbfinger 2006).
21. In his discussion of *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004)—a remake of the 1962 film—Richard Carter notes that the remake’s star Meryl Streep “sheepishly admitted that she’d never even seen the original” (Carter 2004, 10).
22. Chan (2009, 8).
23. Culler (1976, 123).
24. Leitch (1990).
25. Milberg (1990, ix).
26. Verevis (2006, 10).
27. Gabbard (1998, 96).
28. Kristeva (1986, 37).
29. *Birds II: Land’s End* (1994), for example, has been described as a “rotten Hitchcock rip-off” of *The Birds* (1963) (Roush 1999); *‘Til There Was You* (1997) as a “truly stupendously boring rip-off of *Sleepless in Seattle* [1993]” (Lowing 1997); and *My Favorite Martian* (1999) as “more rip off than blast off” of the television series (1963–1966) (Chester 1999).

30. *666: The Child* (2006), for example, has been described as “so obviously a knock-off” of *The Omen* (1976) (Renner 2016, 32); *The Italian Job* (2003) as a “souped-up knock-off” of the 1969 title (“DVD: Caine remake is very able!” 2004); *Piranha* (1978) as “a cheap and nasty *Jaws* [1975] knock-off” (“Horror remake really takes the bait” 2010); and the television series *Mistresses* (2013–2016) as a “cheap knockoff” of the UK drama (2008–2010) (Perigard 2013).
31. The television series *In the House* (1995–1999), for example, has been described as a “clone” of *Who’s the Boss* (1984–1992) (Jicha 1995); *Carrie* (2013) as a “horror clone” of the 1976 film (May 2013); and *Guess Who* (2005) as a “thinly disguised clone of *Meet the Parents* [2000]” (Hobson 2005).
32. *Kid Galahad* (1962), for example, has been described as a “pale imitation” of the 1937 film (Bondanella 2004, 100); *Vanilla Sky* (2001) as a “pale imitation” of the Spanish film *Abre los ojos* (*Open Your Eyes*) (1997) (Gillespie 2001); and *Poltergeist* (2015) as a “pale imitation” of the 1982 film (“Poltergeist review” 2015).
33. *Village of the Damned* (1995), for example, has been described as a “carbon copy” of the 1960 film (Owen 1995); *Bad News Bears* (2005) as a “virtual carbon copy” of the 1976 film (Bellamy 2005); and *The Omen* (2006) repeatedly as a “carbon-copy” of the 1976 film (Iddings 2006 and Mullen 2006; “Going to the Show with a Regular Guy: New ‘Omen’ is eerily familiar” 2006). While the *carbon copy* accusation frames a remake negatively, there are rare subversions of this. In Andy Breslow’s review of *Quarantine* (2008)—a remake of the Spanish film *[Rec]* (2007)—he observes, “When I got a chance to see *Quarantine* I was pleased to see that the film is almost a carbon copy of the original.” For Breslow, it was *positive* that the American remake remained true to what he had enjoyed so much about the Spanish film (Breslow 2008).
34. *Alfie Darling* (1975)—a remake of *Alfie* (1966)—for example, has been described as “a crude and vulgar rip-off with no subtlety and no point” (Nowlan and Wright Nowlan 1989, 15); *Ben-Hur* (2016) as a “pointless remake” of the 1959 film (Smith 2017); and *Psycho* (1998), the remake of the 1960 film, as “a pointless failure” (Canet 2018, 21).
35. *The Plainsman* (1966) for example, has been described as a “painful remake” of the 1936 film (Cameron 1997, 148); *Buddy Buddy* (1981) as a “painful remake” of the French film *L’emmerdeur* (*A Pain in the Ass*) (1973) (Halliwell and Walker 1996, 169); and *The Ladykillers* (2004) as a “painful remake” of the 1955 film (“TOH! Ranks the Films of the Coen Brothers from Worst to Best” 2016).
36. *Lost Horizon* (1973), for example, has been described as an “excruciating remake” of the 1937 film (Griffin and Masters 1997, 73); *The Parent Trap*

- (1998), as an “excruciatingly unfunny” remake of the 1961 film (Anthony 1998); and *The Women* (2008) as an “excruciating remake” of the 1939 film (Solomons 2008).
37. *Slavish* can on occasions be complimentary—observing that a remake has meticulous attention to detail—for example, *Let Me In* (2010) has been described as a “very faithful, even slavish remake” of the Swedish film *Låt den rätte komma in* (*Let the Right One In*) (2008) (“Let Me skip the re-vamp” 2010). More commonly, however, *slavish* is a criticism, for example *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979) as “an almost slavish remake” of *Nosferatu* (1922) (Wiener 2002, 290); *The Assassin* (1993) as a “slavish, redundant remake” of *La Femme Nikita* (1990) (Frank 1997, 34); and *Psycho* (1998) as a “faithful-unto-slavish” remake of the 1960 film (Cheshire 1998).
 38. *Gone in Sixty Seconds* (2000), for example, has been described as a “relentlessly stupid” remake of the 1974 film (Maltin 2014); *The Karate Kid* (2010) as a “stupid remake” of the 1984 film (Oz 2010); and *Dukes of Hazzard* (2005) as “another unnecessary, stupid remake” of the television series (1979–1985) (Wolgamott 2005).
 39. *Red River* (1988), for example, has been described as an “insipid remake” of the 1948 film (Clifford 1998); *Born Yesterday* (1993) as an “insipid remake” of the 1950 film (Seavor 1993); and *No Reservations* (2007) as an “insipid remake” of the German film *Mostly Martha* (2001) (Lindenfeld and Parasecoli 2017, 74).
 40. *Man in the Attic* (1953), for example, described as an “anaemic remake” of *The Lodger* (1927) (O’Neil 1970, 88); *The Clown* (1953) as an “anemic remake” of *The Champ* (1931) (Parish 1974, 831); and *13 Sins* (2014) as an “anemic remake” of the Thai film *13 game sayawng* (*13 Beloved*) (2006) (“Film Review: 13 Sins” 2014).
 41. *Satan Met a Lady* (1936), for example, has been described as “an inferior remake” of *The Maltese Falcon* (1931) (“Satan Met a Lady” 1935); *The Lost World* (1960) as an “inferior remake” of the 1925 film (Kinnard 1988, 13); and *Criminal* (2004), the remake of the Argentinian film *Nueve reinas* (*Nine Queens*) (2000), as having been “given the inferior-remake treatment” (Bradshaw 2016).
 42. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), for example, has been described as an “incompetent, utterly irrelevant remake” of the 1951 film (“The Day the Earth Stood Still” 2009); *Fame* (2009) as an “irrelevant remake” of the 1980 film (“Fame? No chance: This irrelevant remake doesn’t light up the sky like a flame” 2009); and *Point Break* (2015) as an “irrelevant remake” of the 1991 film (Mann 2016).
 43. *Love Affair* (1994), for example, has been described as an “ill-advised remake” of the 1939 film (“‘Affairs’ of the heart” 2014); *Red Dawn*

- (2012) as “an ill-advised remake of the campy 1984 original” (Coyleap 2012); and *Brighton Rock* (2010) as “a moderately stylish but deeply ill-advised remake of John Boulting’s noir thriller [1948]” (“If Pinkie were perky, Brighton might rock” 2011).
44. *Docks of New Orleans* (1948), for example, has been described as “a half-hearted remake of the earlier Mr. Wong film [*Mr. Wong, Detective* (1938)]” (Backer 2012, 152); *Grease 2* (1982) as a “half-hearted remake” of *Grease* (1978) (Moore 2016); and *Sleepless* (2017) as a “half-hearted remake” of the French film *Nuit blanche* (*Sleepless Night*) (2011) (Miller 2017).
 45. *The Fog* (2005,) for example, has been described as “a dreary and redundant remake” of the 1980 film (Tookey 2006); *The Tourist* (2010) as a “redundant remake” of the French film *Anthony Zimmer* (2005) (Stanbrook 2011); and *Secret in their Eyes* (2015) as a “redundant remake” of the Argentinean *El secreto de sus ojos* (*The Secret in their Eyes*) (2009) (Dowd 2015).
 46. Greenberg (1998, 115).
 47. Film theorists Rüdiger Heinze and Lucia Krämer, for example, observe the “enduring connotations of unoriginality” that plague remakes (Heinze and Krämer 2015, 13). In his *Maclean’s* article, Brian Johnson similarly argues that the remake “makes a virtue of unoriginality” (Johnson 2009, 63). The *unoriginal* claim is, in fact, noted in most discussions of remakes (see for example: Gil 2014; Smith and Verevis 2017).
 48. *Quo Vadis?* (1985), for example, has been described as a “uninspired remake” of the 1951 film (Smith 2004, 195); *Notorious* (1992) as a “tedious, uninspired remake” of the 1946 film (Cameron-Wilson and Speed 1995, 141); and *Fun With Dick and Jane* (2005) as an “uninspired remake” of the 1977 film (Verniere 2005).
 49. *Between Two Worlds* (1944), for example, has been described as “an ultimately tedious and unnecessary remake” of *Outward Bound* (1930) (Nissen 2012, 70); *Swept Away* (2002), the remake of the Italian film *Travolti da un insolito destino nell’azzurro mare d’agosto* (*Swept Away*) (1974), as a “limp, uninspired and unnecessary” (Carter 2003, 11); and *The Last House on the Left* (2009) as an “ugly, unnecessary remake” of the 1972 film (Horton 2009).
 50. “Stop hating remakes – you love them” (2016).
 51. Francis (2013, 7).
 52. Mitchell (2013) and Coykendall (2000).
 53. Stasia (2014, 117).
 54. Sharkey (2013).
 55. Rosewarne (2011, 2017, 2018).
 56. Corliss (2012).
 57. Horton and McDougal (1998, 6).
 58. Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013, xv).

59. Harris (2013).
60. Huang and Ross (2009, 1).
61. Nowlan and Wright Nowlan (1989).
62. Oltmann (2015).
63. Lukas and Marmysz (2009, 5).
64. Hornblow (2002).
65. The remaking of silent films as talkies and black-and-white films in color illustrates this well.
66. *The Omen* (2006), for example—the remake of the 1976 film—was released not only 30 years after the first film but also, in the US, on 6/6/2006, a date considered especially creepy (because of the 666).
67. Druxman (1975, 15).
68. Rapold (2011).
69. Hollinger (2006, 52).
70. Druxman (1975, 195).
71. Rice (2013, 229).
72. Rice (2013, 229).
73. Raw (2006, 49).
74. Gilbert (2008).
75. “Jaden Smith to Star in ‘Karate Kid’ Remake” (2008).
76. Owen (2016).
77. Forrest and Koos (2002, 2).
78. Forrest (2002, 178).
79. Forrest (2002, 178).
80. Nowlan and Wright Nowlan (1989, 19).
81. Lentz (2000, 62).
82. Francis (2013).
83. Salt (2016, 475).
84. Meehan (2011, 30).
85. Meuel (2014, 109).
86. Nissen (2007, 7) and Furia (1996, 213).
87. Bass (2018, 6).
88. *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Screenwriting* (2001, 111).
89. Arnold (1997).
90. Rosewarne (2007).
91. Rosewarne (2007).
92. Acuna (2013), Roush (2016), and O’Falt (2018).
93. Labrecque (2013), Faraci (2017), and Lay (2018).
94. Mazdon (2000, 4).
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The All-Lady, Feminist Extravaganza: Sex-Swaps, Sexual Scripts, and Progressive Politics in Remakes

The Danish actress Asta Nielsen plays the title role in the German silent film *Hamlet* (1921). By 1921, the Shakespeare play had already been filmed several times previously—at least as early as Georges Méliès’s 1907 short—but the 1921 presentation remains memorable for two reasons. First, the film was made by Nielsen’s own production company in an era when women didn’t commonly produce films.¹ Second, the character of Hamlet was presented as a woman who was secretly living as a man, making it one of the first sex-swapped adaptations of Shakespeare on film.² While it was normal in the earliest Shakespeare performances for all characters, including female ones, to be played by men (or boys)—thus resulting in early sex-swaps—it’s a more recent phenomena to have all-female theater performances.³ While nowadays sex-swapped Shakespeare is common on stage, in film it remains a rarity. *The Tempest* (2010)—first filmed in 1911—exists as an atypical example. The character Prospero, who is male in the play, became *Prospera* in the film, with actress Helen Mirren in the role.

While uncommon in Shakespeare adaptations, in remakes more broadly the sex-swap is easily detected: it’s certainly common enough to be listed in film theorist Robert Eberwein’s remake taxonomy.⁴ Eberwein uses the screwball comedy *His Girl Friday* (1940)—the remake of *The Front Page* (1931)—as an example of a remake that switches the sex of the main character. In the first film—based on Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur’s play *The Front Page* (1928)—Hildy (Pat O’Brien) is an engaged ace male

newspaper reporter about to resign. In the remake—one that film theorist Elliot Shapiro flags as being “built around one radical decision”⁵—the sex of Hildy (Rosalind Russell) swaps: *she* is now the engaged ace reporter.

Undertaking a sex-swap provides filmmakers a new reason to revisit a title. With production being expensive and studios being risk-averse, sex-swapping can put a new spin on old material, all the while catering to audiences’ dual desires of newness and familiarity.⁶ Undertaking a sex-swap can position a studio as abreast of the zeitgeist, and as responsive to viewer expectations—notably as related to gender equality—all while potentially expanding the box office. The whys of the sex-swap remake are examined in this chapter, and the arguments defending the move as modern and positive,⁷ versus accusations that such films are regressive, reductive, and lazy are explored.

Also analyzed are other ways that new approaches to sex and gender roles can modernize material. Cultural theorist Christian Knöppler presents some of these in his work on horror, noting, “The adjustment of gender roles is a common trend in remaking, as newer version films tend to expand the number and agency of female roles in accordance with social change.”⁸ Along with sex-swapping, increasing female cast members and expanding their roles can also freshen an already-filmed story.

On occasion, filmmakers make a conscious effort to produce a remake that’s more feminist than the predecessor. This chapter examines such titles and proposes some reasons for their feminist modernization. Fairer or more progressive representations of women can, however, sometimes lead to backlash. This chapter also delves into filmic revolts against such revisionist remakes, postfeminist and anti-feminist remakes, and instances where sex-swaps turn a cast male.

A CAUTIONARY NOTE ON SEX-SWAPS

In this chapter, I present the sex-swap as something conscious: that filmmakers have deliberately modified ordinary material and cast a remake differently. On occasions, however, rather than filmmakers acknowledging that a sex-swap was deliberate and undertaken for political or social reasons, instead, a kind of genderblind casting is articulated⁹: that is, that the sex-swap was simply the result of filmmakers being open-minded. *Secret in their Eyes* (2015), for example, is an American adaptation of the Argentinian crime-drama *El secreto de sus ojos* (*The Secret in their Eyes*) (2009). In the first film, the protagonist is male; in the remake,

Julia Roberts is in the lead. The director and screenwriter of the US adaptation, Billy Ray, claims that while he had written the central character as a man, Roberts taking on the role wasn't significant: "I made only minor changes to the character – that was important to Julia... behaviorally, the character stayed the same."¹⁰ We can, of course, speculate as to why Ray doesn't play up the sex-swap: in doing so, his remake isn't framed as consciously (or "scarily") feminist, nor does Roberts's character get construed as *feminized*—both of which might hinder the box office. Another explanation, however, is that Ray may simply have envisioned one sex in the role but in the casting process the "right" actor was someone different; that is, a kind of *blind casting* transpires.¹¹ While I believe that when the sex-swap goes in the direction of a woman being cast in a role previously occupied by (or envisioned as being played by) a man, it *is* a political move—whether conscious or not—it's also likely that some filmmakers won't necessarily consider the politics nor acknowledge the swap as distinctly progressive. A filmmaker may, in fact, be more narrowly focused on making an entertaining product. Howard Hawks, for example, who directed *His Girl Friday*, hinted that his film's sex-swap was simply about humor:

I was going to prove to somebody one night that *The Front Page* had the finest modern dialogue that had been written, and I asked a girl to read Hildy's part and I read the [part of the] editor and I stopped and I said, "Hell, it's better between a girl and a man than between two men," and I called [playwright] Ben Hecht and I said, "What would you think of changing it so that Hildy is a girl?" And he said, "I think it's a great idea," and he came out and we did it.¹²

By changing Hildy's sex, Hawks created new opportunities for comedy. The film's sex-swap also paved the way for a new romantic storyline, as Hawks details:

See, *The Front Page* was intended as a love affair between two men. I mean, they *loved* each other. There's no doubt about it. And it was a lot easier for me to make a love story with a man and a girl and make some better scenes.¹³

While this chapter focuses extensively on the sexual politics of sex-swaps, it's important to recognize that filmmaking is a business and, thus, box-office objectives routinely trump politics or social engineering. Hawks provides a particularly good illustration of this: he is a director who has

never had a reputation for feminist filmmaking¹⁴; some scholars, in fact, have noted the “profound misogyny” of his films.¹⁵ Interpreting the *His Girl Friday* sex-swap as progressive, therefore, likely lies more in audience reception than filmmaker intent.

“GENDER-BENDING” IN REMAKES

As occurred in *His Girl Friday* and *Secret in their Eyes*, sex-swapping in fact, transpires widely, and while I use the term *sex-swap*, the practice has also been dubbed “gender-bending” or “gender-swapping” in reviews. A brief, consciously incomplete survey of sex-swapped protagonists and casts is given below:

- Just as *His Girl Friday* sex-swapped *The Front Page*, *Switching Channels* (1988) sex-swaps the same ordinary material: the storyline moves from a newspaper to a television studio, with producer Sully (Burt Reynolds) trying to win back his news anchor ex-wife Christy (Kathleen Turner).
- The Charles Dickens story *A Christmas Carol* (1843) has been filmed many times since 1901.¹⁶ In most adaptations, Ebenezer Scrooge is presented as a man and portrayed by male actors; occasionally, however, the material is reworked with a female protagonist, for example in *Ebbie* (1995), *Ms. Scrooge* (1997), *A Diva’s Christmas Carol* (2000), *A Carol Christmas* (2003), *Barbie in A Christmas Carol* (2008), *Three Wise Women* (2010), *Christmas Cupid* (2010), *It’s Christmas, Carol!* (2012), and *All American Christmas Carol* (2013).
- Robert Louis Stevenson’s story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) has been filmed many times since 1908, and, occasionally, the material is sex-swapped. In the British horror film *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971), Dr. Jekyll (Ralph Bates) accidentally creates a “Hyde” alter ego of a beautiful homicidal woman (Martine Beswick). In *Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde* (1995), the same male-to-female transformation occurs. In the French film *Madame Hyde (Mrs. Hyde)* (2017), a female protagonist (Isabelle Huppert) develops a dangerous alter ego following a lightning strike. A different spin transpires in *Daughter of Dr. Jekyll* (1957), whereby a female protagonist (Gloria Talbott) develops an alter ego of a werewolf.

- In the comedy *Brewster's Millions* (1914), Robert's (Edward Abeles) inheritance is conditional on him spending a million dollars quickly so that he can receive a much larger sum. The film has been remade several times, including as *Miss Brewster's Millions* (1926) with a female heiress (Bebe Daniels).
- The Alexandre Dumas novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844), filmed many times since 1908, was adapted for television as *Revenge* (2011–2015). In the series, Emily (Emily VanCamp) seeks revenge on those responsible for the imprisonment of her father; in the book and in most other adaptations, a man seeks vengeance.
- The crime-drama *Casablanca* (1942) focuses on a nightclub owner (Humphrey Bogart) who discovers that his old flame is in town with her husband. *Barb Wire* (1996)—described as a “gender-reversed remake of *Casablanca*”¹⁷—has a female bar owner (Pamela Anderson) at the helm.
- In Frank Capra's classic *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), George (James Stewart) learns to value life again with the help of an angel at Christmastime. In 1977, the film was remade for television as *It Happened One Christmas* with Marlo Thomas in the lead as the new female protagonist.
- The story of Tarzan—based on Edgar Rice Burroughs's character—was first filmed as *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918), and then many times since, and focuses on an orphan boy raised by apes. *Sheena* (1984), and the television series of the same name (2000–2002), reimagines Tarzan with a female protagonist.
- In the romcom *The Charm School* (1921), a man (Wallace Reid) inherits a girls' boarding school. The film was remade as *Sweetie* (1929), with a woman (Nancy Carroll) inheriting a boys' boarding school.
- In the crime-drama *Dr. Socrates* (1935), a small-town male doctor (Paul Muni) is coerced into assisting in a bank robbery. In the remake, *King of the Underworld* (1939), the small-town doctor is a woman (Kay Francis).
- In the musical-comedy *It Started with Eve* (1941), Robert Cummings plays Johnny, the son of an ailing millionaire who insists on meeting his son's fiancé before his death. In the remake, *I'd Rather Be Rich* (1964), Sandra Dee plays Cynthia, the granddaughter of an ailing man who insists on meeting *her* fiancé.

- In the British romcom *Last Holiday* (1950), George (Alec Guinness) thinks his death is imminent so chooses to live it up for the last of his days. In 2006, Queen Latifah played the protagonist in the sex-swapped remake.
- In Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951), two men arrange to commit a murder on the other's behalf. In the remake, *Once You Kiss a Stranger...* (1969), a woman (Carol Lynley) is half of the homicidal dyad.
- In the Western *Shane* (1953), a mysterious gunfighter (Alan Ladd) drifts into town and is embraced by a farming family. In the Australian sex-swap remake, *Shame* (1988), a female lawyer (Deborra-Lee Furness) stops in a small outback town after her motorcycle breaks down and is taken in by the local mechanic and his family. This sex-swap remake was then remade for television in the US as *Shame* (1992).
- Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954)—a thriller about a man (James Stewart) who thinks he witnesses a murder—is sex-swapped for the romcom *Head Over Heels* (2001).
- In the sci-fi *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), protagonist Scott (Grant Williams) is exposed to radioactive chemicals and begins to shrink. In the comic remake, *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* (1981), a woman (Lily Tomlin) suffers the same malady.
- The crime-drama *The Defiant Ones* (1958) focuses on two escaped male prisoners—one black (Sidney Poitier), one white (Tony Curtis)—chained together and on the run. The Blaxploitation remake *Black Mama White Mama* (1973) casts a black woman (Pam Grier) and a white woman (Margaret Markov) as the escapees.
- In the romcom *Some Like It Hot* (1959), two male musicians witness a mob murder and go into hiding by posing as women. In the sex-swap *Connie and Carla* (2004), two female musicians witness the kill and hide out as female impersonators.
- *Ocean's 11* (1960; 2001) is an all-star male ensemble heist film. In 2018, the material was revisited as *Ocean's 8* with an all-star female cast.
- The comedy *Bedtime Story* (1964) stars Marlon Brando and David Niven as two con artists who prey upon women; it was famously remade as *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (1988) with Michael Caine and Steve Martin. *Heartbreakers* (2001) and *The Hustle* (2019) each reimagine the plot with female con artists.

- In the family sci-fi series *Lost in Space* (1965–1968), Dr. Smith (Jonathan Harris) is an enemy agent sent to sabotage the Robinson family’s mission. In the most recent series remake (2018–), Dr. Smith is a woman (Parker Posey).
- The drama *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966) is about a vitriolic and alcoholic married couple. *Who’s Afraid of Vagina Wolf?* (2013) presents a comic, all-female spin on the material.
- In the comedy *Bedazzled* (1967), Stanley (Dudley Moore) sells his soul to Satan (Peter Cook). In the 2000 remake, Satan is female (Elizabeth Hurley).
- *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1983–1985) is an animated series about the title character protecting the universe. The animated series *She-Ra: Princess of Power* (1985–1987)—and its own remake *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018–)—reimagines the story with a female protagonist.
- The British series *Fawlty Towers* (1975) focuses on incompetent hotelier, Basil Fawlty (John Cleese). In the American remake, *Amanda’s* (1983), a woman (Bea Arthur) is at the helm.¹⁸
- *Ghostbusters* (1984) is about a team of male ghost removal specialists. In the 2016 remake, the team is female.
- In the family-drama *The Karate Kid* (1984), the protagonist was adolescent Daniel (Ralph Macchio). In the remake, *The Next Karate Kid* (1994), the protagonist is an adolescent female (Hilary Swank).
- In the comedy *Back to School* (1986), a wealthy businessman, Thornton (Rodney Dangerfield), enrolls at the same college as his son (Keith Gordon). In *Life of the Party* (2018), a woman (Melissa McCarthy) enrolls in the same college as her daughter (Molly Gordon).
- The British horror film *The Wicker Man* (1973) centers on a remote island where the residents observe Pagan rituals at the behest of the island’s leader, Lord Summerisle (Christopher Lee). In the 2006 American remake, the island and its rituals are presided over by Sister Summersisle (Ellen Burstyn).¹⁹
- *Muppet Treasure Island* (1996)—based on the oft-filmed Stevenson story (1882)—sex-swaps Ben Gunn into Benjamina Gunn to accommodate Miss Piggy.
- The comedy *Overboard* (1987) is about a spoiled heiress (Goldie Hawn) and her fraught relationship with her carpenter (Kurt Russell). The 2018 remake is sex-swapped: Leonardo (Eugenio Derbez) is the wealthy yacht owner and Kate (Anna Faris) is his mistreated employee.

- In the action-comedy *Midnight Run* (1988), a bounty hunter (Robert De Niro) is charged with transporting an embezzler (Charles Grodin) cross-country. In the sex-swap remake *Hot Pursuit* (2015), a policewoman (Reese Witherspoon) transports a drug boss' widow (Sofía Vergara). (The film *Furlough* [2018] is another female riff on the same story).
- The British mini-series *Sparkhouse* (2002) is a retelling of the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (1847), first filmed in 1920. In the sex-swap, the male character of Heathcliff “is transformed from a brooding foundling into a young working class woman called Carol Bolton [Sarah Smart].”²⁰
- In the British horror *Frankenstein* (2007)—based on Mary Shelley's 1818 novel filmed many times since 1910—the story is reimagined with a sex-swapped protagonist, Victoria Frankenstein (Helen McCrory).
- The horror film *The Mummy* (2017)—the remake of the 1932 film—has Sofia Boutella in the titular role. In the first film, the Mummy was played by Boris Karloff.
- The comedy *What Men Want* (2019) is about a woman (Taraji P. Henson) who has the power to hear men's thoughts. In its predecessor, *What Women Want* (2000), a man (Mel Gibson) hears *women's* thoughts.

Sex-swapping also transpires for supporting characters:

- In the thriller *Diabolique* (1996)—the American remake of the French film *Les diaboliques* (1955)—the detective is played by a woman (Kathy Bates); in the first film, the character is male (Charles Vanel).
- In the comedy *Arthur* (1981), the title character (Dudley Moore) is parented by his valet, Hobson (John Gielgud). In the 2011 remake, Hobson is sex-swapped and played by Helen Mirren.
- In the live-action *The Jungle Book* (2016), a remake of the 1967 animation (itself a remake of the 1942 film), the snake, Kaa, is reimagined as female.
- In the fantasy series *The New Legends of Monkey* (2018—)—the remake of *Saiyūki (Monkey Magic)* (1978–1980)—several characters are sex-swapped: the male Sandy (Gareth Armstrong) from the first series, for example, is reimagined as female (Emilie Cocquerel).

While it is common in discussions on remakes to reference similar or source films—notably to help contextualize a new title—arguably this yen is particularly pronounced for films with female leads because it’s a far rarer occurrence and, thus, any comparison to earlier material almost always means a comparison to *male* content: any sex-swap remake is, therefore, subject to scrutiny as being a *female spin* on a male “original.” The casting of women in roles—or even genres—associated with men is invariably scrutinized similarly. The crime-drama *Thelma & Louise* (1991), for example, is described by Anne Billson in *The Telegraph* as offering “a female twist on the male-dominated buddy film genre.”²¹ A similar point is made by Matt Singer in *Screen Crush* about the comedy *The Heat* (2013): “Paul Feig’s *The Heat* took a genre that has traditionally belonged to men—the buddy cop movie—and gave it a female twist.”²² In Tim Helman’s *Film Arcade* discussion about the all-female comedy *Rough Night* (2017), he also likened the film to its male predecessors: “The story is similar to a lot of previous dark male comedies though, but it’s nice to see a female twist on it at least.”²³ Sian Broderick writing for *Pretty 52* goes so far as to say that *Rough Night* is “basically the female version of *The Hangover* [2009],”²⁴ a point Rafer Guzmán also makes in *Newsday*.²⁵ *Rough Night* has also been described as a “feminist remake” of *Very Bad Things* (1998).²⁶ A range of reviews make similar claims, framing titles as ostensibly sex-swaps using descriptors like *all-female twist* or *female version*:

- The female Western *Bad Girls* (1994) as “like *Young Guns* [1988] in drag.”²⁷
- The romantic-comedy *The Truth About Cats & Dogs* (1996) as “a female twist” on the *Cyrano de Bergerac* theme.²⁸
- The psychological-drama *Girl, Interrupted* (1999) as “essentially an all-female twist on *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* [1975].”²⁹
- The drama *Girlfight* (2000) as “a rousing female twist on the *Rocky* [1976] tale.”³⁰
- The comedy *Beauty Shop* (2005) as “the female rendition” of the *Barbershop* (2002; 2004; 2016) movies.³¹
- The comedy *The House Bunny* (2008) as “a female version” of *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984).³²
- The family-drama *The Greatest* (2009) as a “gender-swap remake” of *Moonlight Mile* (2002).³³
- The action-drama *Fight Valley* (2016) as “a female version” of *Fight Club* (1999).³⁴

- The musical-drama *Patti Cake\$* (2017) as a “female twist” on *8 Mile* (2002).³⁵
- The crime-drama *Kidnap* (2017) as “a female twist” on *Taken* (2008).³⁶
- The drama *The Enemy Within* (2019–) as a “female twist” on *The Blacklist* (2013–).³⁷

While in these examples critics and commentators couple the two titles, on other occasions the links are made as part of a marketing campaign. Film writers Yoram Allon, Del Cullen, and Hannah Patterson, for example, observe that the military-drama *G.I. Jane* (1997) was actively “marketed as a female version of *Top Gun* (1986).”³⁸ Actors also make these connections. Dermot Mulroney appeared in both *Young Guns* and *Bad Girls* and linked the two films:

The closest to working on *Bad Girls* was *Young Guns* because both are gang westerns. I guess when you get right down to it, there isn’t that much different from Andie [MacDowell], Drew [Barrymore], Madeleine [Stowe] and Mary [Stuart Masterson] than from Charlie [Sheen], Kiefer [Sutherland], Lou [Diamond Phillips] and Emilio [Estevez].³⁹

Actress Gemma Arterton made a similar pitch for her horror film *Byzantium* (2012): “I guess our film’s kind of like the female version [of *Interview with The Vampire* (1994)] in some ways.”⁴⁰

By associating a new film with an older (and successful) title, there is likely perceived benefit, with the linkage functioning as a kind of *if you liked this film, you’ll most certainly love this one* tout to audiences. This is arguably even more pronounced in the context of female-led remakes, where extra effort is assumed to be required to cajole audiences into the cinema.

In her *Film School Rejects* article, Ciara Wardlow flags that the word *remake* still “rubs a good deal of people the wrong way.”⁴¹ First, such sentiment is grounded in the stink about remakes outlined in Chap. 1, whereby filmmakers want to distance themselves from accusations of being unoriginal and lazily rehashing old material. Second, there are legal reasons for such distancing, as film theorist Lucy Mazdon outlines:

The director and producers may have cited the novel as a source in order to bypass copyright laws... [T]he bypassing of a cinematic work in favour of its primary source was a means of avoiding legal complications in the United States.⁴²

Third—and most relevant to this discussion—such denials can be based on a belief that coupling titles is reductive. Part of this claim lies in the notion that *all* films are in some ways derivative (Chap. 1). Such an argument reflects postmodern scholarship that deems the preoccupation with locating a single, originary text as futile. Another aspect to this relates to it being *specifically reductive* to consider female-led films as some kind of lesser version of an older, male-helmed title: that there is something *uniquely* reductive about the discourse surrounding sex-swap remakes. Stacia Brown addresses this issue in her *New Republic* article on racial equivalence:

Framing characters or performers of color as ‘the black or brown’ version of a white one not only undermines the artist’s originality and narrows the lens through which audiences see a character. It also assumes that audiences of color want a mere facsimile of a famous white performer—or, for that matter, that white audiences only want performers of color who resemble white performers.⁴³

Brown’s discussion can be applied to the discourse surrounding sex-swap remakes where such films become reduced to their casting—that it’s *merely* a male film in drag—and are, as examined later in this chapter, additionally scrutinized based on comparisons to preceding male material. The act of considering a film as a remake—particularly when the later film has been recast with historically under- (or poorly) represented actors—can be considered as reductive, notably so given that all films are more than just their plot summary.

In the sections that follow, a range of justifications for revisiting material through a sex-swap are explored including attempts to address the zeitgeist, to provide a star vehicle, to expand an audience, and to tell the same story differently.

ADDRESSING THE ZEITGEIST

In her *New York Times* article, Amanda Hess proposes some motivations for sex-swap remakes like *Ocean’s 8*:

[The film] satisfied a couple of-the-moment entertainment industry imperatives: It allows Hollywood to reanimate lucrative old properties... while recasting them with diverse casts and woke politics.⁴⁴

A sex-swap can modernize material by tapping into the zeitgeist and being and, importantly, *appearing* progressive. This isn't a new trend though: remakes have long attempted to make themselves relevant through harnessing what is happening socially, culturally, and politically at the time of production, including through modern approaches to gender. In his analysis of *His Girl Friday*, for example, literary theorist Leo Braudy discusses the audience experience of watching the film at the time of its release in the early 1940s as compared to when they might have seen *The Front Page* a decade prior in film (or even 20 years prior in the theater):

Although *His Girl Friday* is self-contained, the audience's knowledge of the original play and its appreciation of the changes and adjustments constitutes an important part of the potential effect of the film: a reflection on the importance of women reporters in many other films of the period; the knowledge that *The Front Page* was a play of the 1920s and the change between that period and the 1940s setting of the film.⁴⁵

His Girl Friday distinguishes itself from its originary material by depicting some of the progress women have made, notably so in the workforce. Other remakes have been freshened similarly. In his discussion of the Western *The Outrage* (1964)—an American adaptation of the Japanese film *Rashômon* (1950)—cultural theorist Erik Lofgren discusses the emerging feminism that's detectable in the remake, identifying the film as

an early example of an evolving filmic portrayal of strong frontier women. This was, itself, a reflection of the broader cultural narrative in the mid-60s that saw a more forceful agitation in women's rights... Where *Rashômon* could only intimate a nascent shift in rights for women, *The Outrage* is, by virtue of the specific genre of its adaptation, able to offer a more substantial glimpse of the foment that was second-wave feminism at its earliest.⁴⁶

Second-wave feminism began in the early 1960s: *The Outrage* was one of the first remakes to dabble in portraying aspects of this emerging social movement. Film theorist Jerome Delamater highlights another example in his analysis of the 1976 version of the musical *A Star Is Born*—a film previously made in 1937 and 1954 (and then again in 2018). Delamater observes that in the 1954 film, for example, during the concluding memorial concert, the female protagonist (Judy Garland) is introduced with her husband's name as Mrs. Norman Maine. This can be contrasted with the 1976 film where the protagonist (Barbra Streisand) is introduced as Esther Hoffman

Howard—her name *combined with* her husband’s to reflect the zeitgeist’s move away from women’s identities being subsumed in marriage. Delamater also points to Esther having proposed marriage to John Norman Howard (Kris Kristofferson) as another small way that the 1976 film updates the material for the era.⁴⁷ Also discussing the politics of the 1976 film, Rebecca Keegan in *Vanity Fair* observes that “[o]ne especially strange romantic sequence has Streisand applying makeup to Kristofferson while they sit in a candlelit bathtub,” explaining the scene as part of the film’s efforts to show-case that it was produced “smack in the middle of the women’s liberation movement,”⁴⁸ and thus was dabbling in progressive approaches to gender. (The restaging of the scene in the 2018 film doesn’t quite have the same air of subversion). *King Kong* (1976)—a remake of the 1933 film and also produced during the second-wave feminist period—also used sexual politics as part of its modernization. In his *Maclean’s* article on remakes, Brian Johnson discusses the film:

Dino De Laurentiis produced a blockbuster *King Kong* remake that attempted a politically correct makeover in a contemporary setting. It marked the screen debut of Jessica Lange, as a babe in blue-jean cut-offs who sets Kong straight by calling him a ‘male chauvinist pig ape.’⁴⁹

While Johnson spotlights Dwan’s (Jessica Lange) use of the *chauvinist pig* slur—a jibe that had gotten traction during the second-wave feminist movement—he also flags that her attire seemed, perhaps, incongruous with a feminist revision. Film theorist Cynthia Erb also addresses this conflict:

the filmmakers could not seem to figure out whether to make the heroine Dwan (Jessica Lange) sexually knowledgeable or not, whether to have her scream or order Kong around... From a contemporary standpoint, it is unsurprising that 1970s feminism would force a retooling of the King Kong figure, but the frequent lapses into incoherence and occasional misogyny, born from what might initially seem progressive revision, are perhaps less predictable.⁵⁰

Johnson and Erb observe that the 1976 film attempts to *appear* modern—to reflect the sexual politics of the period—but acknowledge that in practice a somewhat muddled message is delivered. This is partly attributable to the fact that, like all films, *King Kong* was a commercial enterprise designed to attract audiences; it was not, primarily, an attempt to socially

engineer or somehow do justice to the feminist movement, nor impose its tenets on audiences. More so, while the film was made during the height of second-wave feminism, akin to every social movement, not everyone is on board—certainly not at the same time. Further, feminism has never only meant one thing or been one homogenous movement. Therefore, the problematic relationship that *King Kong* (1976) has with feminism—nodding, for example, to women’s liberation in dialogue but simultaneously portraying Dwan as a “sexpot in a Pebbles outfit”⁵¹—reflects the complicated relationship society had (and continues to have) with feminism.⁵² These ideas also underpin the discourse around modern-era remakes—think of titles like *Ghostbusters* (2016) and *Ocean’s 8*—where critics question the extent to which they are *feminist* revisions in light of all their contradictions.⁵³ Such films are tasked with needing to be modern and abreast of the zeitgeist but also broadly appealing⁵⁴; thus, such remakes can appear simultaneously feminist *and* sexist.

Writing for *Time* magazine, Richard Corliss laments that contemporary blockbusters “rarely try squarely addressing Zeitgeist anxieties.”⁵⁵ Modernizing a title and tapping into the broader culture—notably as related to gender—can mitigate such concerns and is, arguably, something positive. Sex-swaps as a tool of modernization have, however, been criticized. Some commentators have argued that instead of being motivated by a yen to portray women more fairly such films are merely a means for studios to appear modern, to appear *woke*, and to distinguish the remake from originary material. Such arguments posit that far from such presentations being genuinely progressive, instead, they reflect the risk-aversion of Hollywood and are a mere toe-in-the-water of gender equality delivered through the economically safe vehicle of the remake. Emine Saner in *The Guardian*, flags some of the sex-swap shortcomings, lamenting that “studios are using them as somewhere to funnel female talent because they are unwilling to take a risk on original big-budget female-centric films.”⁵⁶ Susannah Oddi makes a similar point in *Culturess*: “Is this really a commitment demonstrating that females can be bankable leads? Or is it about having an existing nostalgic audience that makes these swaps a safe bet?”⁵⁷ Brogan Morris posits such a case in *Refinery29*, arguing, “Hollywood’s answer to women being starved of on-screen roles in popular cinema is to pack its female stars into what it presumes are ‘safe’ existing franchises.”⁵⁸ Here, Saner, Oddi, and Morris argue that sex-swaps might, at a cursory glance, appear modern and pro-women (and perhaps *are* so in comparison to what has gone before), but that

ultimately they are—like all remakes—reflections of the economic imperatives and risk-averse nature of Hollywood where audiences are routinely sold rejigged *male* material rather than offered new, purpose-built female or feminist content.⁵⁹ The opportunity cost argument is also relevant here, whereby in funding a sex-swap remake a new and genuinely feminist film isn't produced. Melissa Silverstein, founder of the advocacy group Women and Hollywood, presented opportunity cost as one of her reservations about sex-swap remakes: "I think [an all-female reboot] is a lateral move: I don't feel like it's a step forward... I would like to see more original movies, like *Hidden Figures* [2016] or *Girls Trip* [2017], that are diverse, that allow us to see women as we are."⁶⁰ Hazel Cills makes a similar point in *Jezebel*:

[A]t the end of the day it still seems to signify that women's movies still need some sort of male appeal to get made. A gender-swapped movie implies that women aren't important enough to get their own original stories, and thus must piggy-back on franchises helmed by men that have already proven to be successful.⁶¹

Accusations of sex-swaps being gimmicky and merely publicity stunts are examined later in this chapter; suffice it to say addressing the zeitgeist through sex-swaps plays out in the very fixed parameters of a risk-averse modern studio system, in turn limiting the capacity for these remakes to be truly revolutionary.

Celebrity casting can provide another rationale to remake a title through a sex-swap.

THE STAR VEHICLE

I opened this chapter by discussing *Hamlet* (1921). Made by her own production company, Asta Nielsen spearheaded the project and also starred. Actors remaking films as star vehicles for themselves is nothing new—men, of course, do this frequently⁶²—but arguably this is distinctly important for women given that it can provide a retort to the lack of good, meaty, protagonist roles available to them. Women producing such remakes occurs for both sex-swaps and other kinds of female-led remake projects too. *It Happened One Christmas*, introduced earlier, is a sex-swap example: star Marlo Thomas was one of the film's producers and thus produced a star vehicle for herself.⁶³ *Beauty Shop*, also named earlier as a "female rendition"

of the *Barbershop* films, is another sex-swap example: Queen Latifah produced and starred. Queen Latifah also produced and starred in *Steel Magnolias* (2012), an all-black remake of the all-white, all-female 1989 film. When *Back to School* was reimagined as *Life of the Party*, Melissa McCarthy produced and starred. Outside of sex-swaps, the 1976 *A Star Is Born* remake mentioned earlier, starred and was produced by Barbra Streisand. Whitney Houston similarly produced and starred in the 1997 live-action *Cinderella*—an update of the 1950 animation—as well as the musical-drama *Sparkle* (2012), the remake of the 1976 film. In 2014, Angelina Jolie also produced and starred in *Maleficent*, a live-action reimagining of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959).⁶⁴

Remakes—notably sex-swaps—can provide star vehicles for women, notably so in a world where men still dominate as protagonists.⁶⁵ With Hollywood being risk-averse, sex-swaps can get more women into starring roles via titles that audiences have established familiarity with and favor for, thus rendering them comparatively less risky. Yohana Desta makes this point in her *Vanity Fair* discussion about sex-swaps noting, “All of these films make perfect sense, re-fitting modern classics to a female perspective and, frankly, giving actresses juicy roles that typically go to their male colleagues.”⁶⁶ Jessica Kiang in *IndieWire* similarly flags that these remakes can provide parts for older female actresses in a world where most protagonist roles go to men or the ingénue. Kiang names Sandra Bullock in *Ocean’s 8* and Julia Roberts in *Secret in their Eyes* as examples, and observes that such actresses

are approaching an age when Hollywood has typically had fewer leading roles for women, but at which male stars were historically considered to be in their prime. And so with the realization that these women still have substantial star power that can be exploited (Bullock, after all, was the front-and-center star of the 2013 Oscar-laden hit *Gravity*) but few vehicles written specifically with them in mind, we can expect to see more of the... Bullock/Clooney-style [*Ocean’s 11*/*Ocean’s 8*] switcheroos.⁶⁷

While such sex-swaps can be a career opportunity for women—notably so for older actresses—studios should not be construed as acting benevolently. Not only do audiences now *expect* to see women occupying substantial roles, but, equally, actresses are frequently stars in their own right and, thus, *they* are often the draw for an audience by virtue of *their* star power. Arguably the success of *Ocean’s 8* lies *less* in the sex-swap—after all, as *Ghostbusters* (2016) showed, sex-swapping is no guarantee of box-office

success⁶⁸—and instead centers on the appeals of much-loved actresses like Sandra Bullock and Cate Blanchett, who simply happen to be “older.”

Another key driver of remaking popular films with female leads is the hope that women *and* men might want to see it.

AUDIENCE EXPANSION

Sex-swaps can help to justify the production of a remake via the opportunities created to grow an audience. In this section I focus on two aspects of this: first, the creation of a modern-day “women’s picture,” and, second, such remakes appealing to female *and* male audiences.

“Women’s pictures”—also known as “weepies”—were melodramas made in the 1940s and 1950s by directors like Douglas Sirk and Vincente Minnelli. Feminist film theorist Pam Cook discusses the genre, noting:

The women’s picture is differentiated from the rest of cinema by virtue of its construction of a ‘female point-of-view’ which motivates and dominates the narrative, and its specific address to a female audience.⁶⁹

As Cook explains, such films were often considered as a *lesser* subgenre of cinema:

There is no such thing as ‘the men’s picture’, specifically addressed to men; there is only ‘cinema’, and the ‘women’s picture’, a sub-group or category specifically for women, excluding men; a separate, private space designed for more than half the population, relegating them to the margins of cinema proper. The existence of the women’s picture both recognises the importance of women, and marginalises them.⁷⁰

There is, already, a long history of women’s pictures being remade: for example, *Stella Dallas* (1925) remade in 1937 and again as *Stella* in 1990; *Imitation of Life* (1934) remade in 1959; *There’s Always Tomorrow* (1934) remade in 1955; *A Star Is Born* (1937) remade in 1954 (and then again in 1976 and 2018); *When Tomorrow Comes* (1939) remade as *Interlude* in 1957 and again in 1968; *The Women* (1939) remade in 2008; *The Lady Eve* (1941) remade as *The Birds and the Bees* (1956); *Mildred Pierce* (1945) remade in 2011; *All About Eve* (1950) remade for television as *Applause* (1973) and *Country Gold* (1982); and more recent incarnations like *Steel Magnolias* (1989/2012) and *Beaches* (1988/2017).

In *The Guardian*, Steve Rose discusses *Ocean's 8*, arguing, "It would be easy to sneer at [it] as a typical modern studio 'women's picture.'" ⁷¹ Given the heist plot of *Ocean's 8*, Rose's linking of the film to the "women's picture" label is worth unpacking. If we consider the genre of women's pictures as broader than just melodrama—for example, as focused on telling *women's stories* and consciously targeting a *female audience*—arguably, this is indeed something that *Ocean's 8* achieves: sex-swapping the earlier *Ocean's 11* films resulted in a narrative with a *female point-of-view* that addressed a female audience in ways that the earlier films didn't. *Ocean's 8* was distinctly successful in this endeavor: close to 70% of the tickets sold were bought by women. ⁷² A similar point has been made in the context of *Ghostbusters* (2016): while not as sharp a skew toward female audiences as *Ocean's 8*, nonetheless 54% of the box-office take was from women. ⁷³ Both *Ocean's 11* films and the 1984 *Ghostbusters* targeted male audiences. By remaking the earlier films as "chick flicks," ⁷⁴ the audiences expanded. Other remakes have made similar efforts to specifically attract female cinemagoers. *Bad Girls*, discussed earlier, is often viewed as a female spin on *Young Guns*. *Bad Girls* and also *The Quick and the Dead* (1995) were discussed by film theorist Chuck Berg as female Westerns with explicit audience-expansion objectives:

Historically, the western has been a virtually exclusively male-dominated domain. In the 1990s, in response to society's just demands for gender equality, roles for western women expanded. Or, so it seemed... *Bad Girls* and *The Quick and the Dead* are commercially motivated knockouts obviously designed to appeal to women via the novelty of converting glamour gals into take-charge gunfighters. ⁷⁵

While such films overtly targeted women by including them in protagonist roles, it's important to note that the casting of "glamour girls" can also be understood as an attempt to do double duty and lure *men* into cinemas: just as more typically male films frequently include female eye candy—Bond girls being an obvious example—a sex-swapped Western, or sex-swapped heist film, aims to attract an all-sexes audience keen to see famous, attractive actresses slinging guns. (The idea of female sex appeal used to make a film appear modern is discussed further in Chap. 3.)

While the audiences for *Ocean's 8* and *Ghostbusters* (2016) might have been mostly women, it's no surprise that these films weren't totally new offerings specifically targeting female audiences, but rather were sex-swapped

versions of older male-oriented titles. It could therefore, be interpreted that in making a sex-swap remake, producers attempt to do double duty and court women, but also lure men who liked the first film and could be convinced to see it again. Whereas remakes of more typical and melodramatic women's pictures—like *Beaches* or *Steel Magnolias*—would struggle to entice men, arguably women *and* men can find something of interest in a sex-swap remake of a once-macho title.

The idea of audiences wanting to see the same film again taps into the nostalgic appeal of the familiar. Drawing on the work of philosopher Umberto Eco, for example, film theorist Miguel Mera notes that for some audiences “narrative suspense is secondary to knowing exactly how the text will end but nonetheless enjoying the variation of the formula with which the conclusion is achieved.”⁷⁶ Modernizing a title through a sex-swap can be a way to tell the same story differently and give audiences the thrill of formula variation.

TELLING THE SAME STORY DIFFERENTLY

In her discussion on remakes, cultural theorist Jennifer Forrest observes that Hollywood has “striven to cater to – and keep satisfied – its audiences with a steady menu of the same-but-different.”⁷⁷ Sex-swapping can help achieve this, providing a means to tell a story that is both different from what has gone before but also kind of the same. By reimagining sex and gender a creative new film can emerge.

In 2017, a sex-swap remake of William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954)—previously filmed in 1963 and 1990—was announced (and, incidentally, also lampooned).⁷⁸ Justifying the possibility of revisiting the story this way, screenwriter Scott McGehee discusses the creative possibilities generated:

Taking the opportunity to tell it in a way it hasn't been told before, with girls rather than boys... it shifts things in a way that might help people see the story anew... It breaks away from some of the conventions, the ways we think of boys and aggression.⁷⁹

McGehee's comments reference the “women's picture” ideas discussed earlier, a concept underpinned by an assumption that there is a *women's point of view*—one that's singular and that differs from a man's—and, thus, by changing the narrative's perspective, an entirely different, innovative

and *female* story can be produced.⁸⁰ Certainly this was a remake justification articulated by Lionel Chetwynd, the scriptwriter for *It Happened One Christmas*, the aforementioned sex-swapped *It's a Wonderful Life*:

[T]he story makes more sense told from a woman's point of view. It is about staying home and giving up dreams of adventure in order to look after the needs of others, which very much characterizes the role of American women before World War II.⁸¹

While Chetwynd's explanation is similar to McGehee's—highlighting the new storytelling possibilities created through sex-swapping—it also hints to the notion of there being a best, or at least *better*, way to tell a story. Chetwynd's claim that *It's a Wonderful Life* is a story that makes *more sense* told from a female perspective alludes to the idea that through a sex-swap a more *definitive* story can be told. At various junctures in this book I examine remakes which are framed as being more definitive: that is, as a closer adaptation or more comprehensive telling of an originary text. Presenting an apparently more definitive story can also be achieved through changing the story's perspective: something well illustrated by *The Beguiled* (2017), the remake of Don Siegel's 1971 film; both films being adaptations of Thomas Cullinan's 1966 novel. The 1971 film focused on the convalescence of an injured male soldier protagonist, John McBurney (Clint Eastwood), at a girls' boarding school. In the 2017 remake, director Sofia Coppola revisited the material, changing the storytelling perspective:

Because it's about a group of women, I'd love to kind of reimagine what the story would be like from their point of view and tell the same story from their view. And I went back to the book which was written from the female characters' point of view.⁸²

While Coppola doesn't speak of “fixing” Siegel's film, she nonetheless frames her movie as something modern, creative and, distinctly *female-centered* while also justifying her changes as more faithfully adapting Cullinan's text (as opposed to it being a remake of Siegel's film, as discussed in Chap. 1). (*Ophelia* [2018] provides another example of this, reimaging *Hamlet* from Ophelia's perspective.)

Material gets eliminated from films for a range of reasons including censorship and runtime restrictions, the latter crucially important if it is a broadcast made-for-television film that needs space for commercials.

Reinserting sexual political content that had been sidelined from an earlier version can be a way to modernize. *Return to Oz* (1985), a film considered as a kind of horror spin on *The Wizard of Oz* (1925/1939),⁸³ provides an illustration of reinserted feminist content. Cultural theorist Frank Kelleter observes that the film “strongly re-emphasizes the feminist aspects of Dorothy’s visit to Oz,”⁸⁴ themes that he believes were present in Frank Baum’s novels but which had been downplayed in the 1939 film: “Much closer to Baum’s practical heroine than sentimental Judy Garland, [Fairuza] Balk’s Dorothy always finds a way out when someone gets too close to her.”⁸⁵ Reinserting Baum’s feminist themes was something Walter Murch, director of *Return to Oz*, admits was an objective, with him consciously wanting to honor the idea that “[a]ll the really creative, interesting people in [Baum’s] books are women.”⁸⁶ In such an example, an old film gets modernized through the inclusion of political content that was comparatively absent from the earlier production.

While sex-swapping is one way that gender can modernize a remake, the expansion of roles for female characters can function similarly.

EXPANDED FEMALE ROLES

In the Western *The Spoilers* (1942)—a film that had previously been made in 1914, 1923, and 1930 (and which was made again in 1955)—the role of the saloon owner, Cherry, was expanded for Marlene Dietrich. The title role in the romcom *Alice Adams* (1935)—a remake of a 1923 silent film—was similarly expanded as a romantic vehicle for Katharine Hepburn. In a range of other examples, female roles are enlarged in a remake. John Lee Mahin, the scriptwriter for *Show Boat* (1951)—a remake of the 1929 and 1936 films—discussed his expansion of Julie’s role: “I’d always thought that Julie was the best part of the story. [Producer] Arthur [Freed] agreed and we decided that the role should be built up.”⁸⁷ Julie was expanded to showcase Ava Gardner. Discussing the English language *The Blue Angel* (1930)—an alternate-language version of the German film of the same name (also 1930)—Michael Druzman in his book *Make It Again, Sam: A Survey of Movie Remakes*, observes that the director, Josef von Sternberg, “shifted the story,” making the female character Lola Lola the “more important player.”⁸⁸ Lola Lola was expanded to accommodate Marlene Dietrich. Knöppler presents a modern example of this in his discussion of horror films, notably in his analysis of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and its remakes including the sex-swapped *Body Snatchers* (1993) and *The Invasion* (2007):

The 1993 remake already features a female protagonist, but Marti [Gabrielle Anwar] never functions as a full replacement for Miles [the protagonist in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)] and Matthew Bennell [the protagonist in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978)]. *The Invasion* emphasizes the gender swap by assigning Carol [Nicole Kidman] the last name Bennett, and by turning Becky/Elizabeth Driscoll into the male love interest Ben Driscoll.⁸⁹

In *The Invasion*, more than just a sex-swap, the role of Carol is expanded to serve as a star vehicle for Oscar winner Nicole Kidman.

Cultural theorist Matthew Paproth also spotlights the expansion of female roles in his comparison of the small-town football drama *Friday Night Lights* (2004) with the television series remake (2006–2011), noting: “The increased voice of women is a major point of differentiation between the film and the series.”⁹⁰ Several scholars have pointed to the series’ feminization and inclusion of more overtly gendered topics including the “pressures facing women in this man’s world,”⁹¹ motherhood, female sexuality, slut-shaming, and abortion.⁹² While not common, remake reviews occasionally spotlight the expanded female roles. In Todd McCarthy’s review of the crime-drama *The Getaway* (1994), for example—the remake of the 1972 film—he observes that “the character of Carol [Kim Basinger] has been strengthened considerably.”⁹³ In her *Glamour* review of the made-for-television *Dirty Dancing* (2017), a remake of the 1987 film, Jessica Radloff similarly observes “Vivian Pressman’s [Katey Sagal] role was expanded in this version,”⁹⁴ with Sagal getting the opportunity to both sing and dance. Discussing the same film in *The New York Times*, Neil Genzlinger notes the expansion of the role of Baby’s mother, Marjorie (Debra Messing), as in fact, a point of *problem* for an already female-centered narrative.⁹⁵

In Tara Judah’s article about the Australian horror film *Patrick* (2013), a remake of the 1978 film, she notes that “in fleshing out Nurse Williams’ [Peta Sergeant] character, [Mark] Hartley’s film not only passes the Bechdel Test but also enhances the narrative by giving her three-dimensionality.”⁹⁶ The mention of the Bechdel test—a tool used to evaluate the portrayal of women in films through, for example, counting scenes where they talk to each other about things other than men—highlights that more than just a bigger role for Sergeant, the role was made more substantial. Kelleter, quoted earlier, suggests something similar for Dorothy in *Return to Oz* being a more fully realized protagonist than the 1939 presentation. A common feminist criticism of the portrayal of

women is that their primary function is to be looked at.⁹⁷ Expanding a role therefore—and doing so beyond an actress spending more time on screen as decoration—can be a way to modernize material.

While feminism doesn't always drive the expansion of a role—the enlarged parts for women in films like *Show Boat* and *The Invasion* are seemingly motivated by the creation of a star vehicle to exploit the draw of a popular actress (discussed further in Chap. 1) rather than to advance a feminist agenda—sometimes remake filmmakers do hint to wanting to be more progressive. Mentioned earlier was *Ophelia*, the reimaged *Hamlet*. Director of the film, Claire McCarthy, spoke about her feminist intentions:

We wanted to be faithful to that but also to re-interpret the story and see it through women's eyes. So I was really thinking about what Ophelia's experience would be as second-status person in that realm.⁹⁸

While it might be predictable that female directors—like Coppola and McCarthy—might be explicit about their progressive motives, male directors have also articulated a similar agenda. In discussing the 2016 live-action remake of *The Jungle Book* (1967), for example—itself a remake of the 1942 film—director Jon Favreau spoke about consciously updating the movie by casting more women:

When the stories were originally written, most of the characters were male and when Walt Disney did his version, the one prominent female character wasn't really included that much, which is Raksha, that figures much more heavily in the [Rudyard] Kipling stories and now it's a different time, and it seems unbalanced to have all male characters and we wanted to make a version of *The Jungle Book* for our generation.⁹⁹

As noted earlier, in the live-action version, the snake, Kaa, is sex-swapped (and voiced by Scarlett Johansson) and the role of Raksha (Lupita Nyong'o) is expanded. While Favreau doesn't claim to have made a *feminist* remake—in fact, his reference to the Kipling text positions him closer to filmmakers who justify their remake by aiming to tell a more *definitive* story (Chap. 2)—nonetheless, Favreau appears cognizant that modernizing a title necessitates updating the gender balance. Worth flagging of course, the female voices in Favreau's remake—Nyong'o and Johansson—are celebrities and already established as audience drawcards, so it could be argued that their inclusion is based just as much on their star power as their contributions to gender equity.

Women occupying large roles or even *protagonist* roles, of course, is no guarantee of a title being considered feminist: Disney films invariably have female characters at the helm—and such characters often do more than simply look pretty—but have nonetheless endured decades of feminist criticism for their limited gender portrayals.¹⁰⁰ Equally, sex-swapping a protagonist is no guarantee that a title will be construed as feminist by critics. Earlier I examined the discourse around *Ghostbusters* (2016) and *Ocean's 8*, where some authors were unconvinced that the sex-swaps were particularly progressive. Such criticisms have plagued earlier sex-swapped remakes too. The 1971 film *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, introduced earlier, is a modern riff on the oft-filmed Stevenson story, where Dr. Jekyll accidentally creates an alter ego of a beautiful homicidal *woman*. The film is a departure from the standard *evil* man alter ego portrayed in more conventional adaptations. In literary theorist Linda Hutcheon's discussion of the film, she observes that in the film “we see Britain's confused responses to feminism after the 1960s.”¹⁰¹ While her point isn't expanded on, as the film demonstrates—and as expanded on later in this chapter—a sex-swap isn't a panacea to cinema's problematic presentations including sexually liberated women who use their wiles to lure and then kill men, as well as gratuitous presentations of nudity. The observation about a “confused” response to feminism also describes remakes like *King Kong* (1976) discussed earlier, whereby feminism as manifested on screen is often quite different to feminism within the academy: the presentation of politics in film is often complicated and sometimes even contradictory, and this remains the case even when female roles are expanded.

Another gendered way that a remake can be modernized is by introducing new political themes that reflect the concerns of the zeitgeist.

THE POLITICAL REMAKE

In Anita Singh's review of *The Tempest* (2010), introduced earlier, she notes that the act of turning the character of Prospero into Prospera “transforms the play into a treatise on gender politics.”¹⁰² While not elaborated on by Singh, the same idea was addressed by literature scholar Kirilka Stavreva:

As soon as [director Julie Taymor and star Helen Mirren] approached the screenplay, they were reminded that English continues to encode political power as masculine and political/sexual submissiveness as feminine...

The knotty gender discourse in the paratexts of Taymor's *Tempest*, as the film itself, speaks volumes about the rifts and contradictions within dominant cultural notions of gender and power in the first decade of the twenty-first century.¹⁰³

Here, Stavreva spotlights that the act of sex-swapping can, in turn, produce a *treatise on gender politics*, both through the script adjustments needed to accommodate casting changes and, alternatively, in the jarring nature of a sex-swap that *neglects* to make such alterations. While the team behind *The Tempest* claimed that their project was not “the result of any feminist superimposition on the text,”¹⁰⁴ arguably a *superimposition* is unnecessary: as I argued earlier, the very nature of a sex-swap makes for a political act. While the resulting production may not always be a feminist film (a concept expanded on later in this chapter), certainly the notion of supplanting a male character with a female one can be interpreted as progressive even if not wholly transformative.

Sex-swap remakes that don't necessarily make any pretensions of being feminist can also be construed as such. In a scene from *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, for example, news reporters speculate on Pat, the shrinking protagonist, asking whether she is “a metaphor for the modern woman,” and debating if the role of housewives has “become increasingly less significant.” In his review of the film, Roger Ebert discusses these “feminist” ideas:

[A]t some basic level *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* is a protest against the lot of the housewife in American society. As Lily Tomlin slaves away in her suburban dream home, her husband (Charles Grodin) gets big raises and promotions for advertising home-care products.¹⁰⁵

The Incredible Shrinking Woman was not marketed as a feminist remake—promotional materials predominantly played up Tomlin's role in the new comedy—but the very act of the sex-swap positions the film as able to be read in relation to feminism: as a product of the successes of feminism, alternatively, as testimony to the ongoing necessity for it. *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* was made at the end of the second-wave feminist movement and thus was produced after audiences had experienced two decades of progress in regards to gender equality and had been impacted by works like Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and its cultural questioning of the happy homemaker millstone. Just by changing the protagonist's sex and, in turn, having a *female* protagonist getting

physically smaller—notably so because of her use of toxic *home-care products*—opens the remake up for interpretations that simply weren't relevant to the male-led 1957 film.

While sex-swaps aren't always about making a film more feminist, this can, of course, be an outcome. On occasions, filmmakers make overt attempts to position a remake as more feminist through the active superimposition of politics onto a script.

THE FEMINIST REMAKE

The question of what constitutes a feminist film has long been heatedly debated.¹⁰⁶ Jade Budowski summarizes some of the definitional complexities in her *Decider* article:

By branding every single film with a “strong female lead” (ugh) with the word “feminism”, we are diminishing the power and meaning of the word, and the efforts of those who actually intend to put feminist works out into the world. For years, I've called films and television shows “feminist” purely because they featured positive female representation. *Kill Bill* [2003] is not feminist just because its protagonist seeks revenge on the men who wronged her. Having a female ensemble cast does not make *Pitch Perfect* [2012] a feminist film. *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* [2017] doesn't get a feminist stamp purely because Frances McDormand plays a “badass”. A film with a female director is not automatically feminist, even if it helps to have a woman's story told through a woman's eyes. The truth, however, is that simply putting a woman front and center on screen does not a feminist film make.¹⁰⁷

Budowski argues that to be classified as feminist, a film must *do* more and *be* more:

[A] feminist film is one with an agenda, a political work intended to spark thought and conversation about women's social status and the female experience. It utilizes the female gaze and explores notions of femininity, sexuality, and feminist theory. As [director Anna] Biller writes, “to be feminist, a movie has to have the express purpose of educating its audience about social inequality between men and women.” Not just portray women in a non-misogynistic light.¹⁰⁸

The intention of this book is not to determine the extent to which remakes are feminist, but, rather, to examine films that have been remade with feminist themes and to explore the discourse around them. Needless to say—and in line with the liberal use of the term as alluded to by Budowski—there are several examples of remakes that have been casually described as “feminist” in reviews and analysis: *It Happened One Christmas*,¹⁰⁹ *Bad Girls*,¹¹⁰ *Patrick* (2013),¹¹¹ and *Ghostbusters* (2016)¹¹² have already been mentioned in this chapter and each was referred to as a “feminist” remake in reviews. *Ocean’s 8* was similarly described as “an all-lady, feminist extravaganza,”¹¹³ and *Rough Night* as “a feminist remake” of *Very Bad Things*.¹¹⁴ Other remakes labeled similarly include:

- The horror film *The Bride* (1985) as a “revisionistic feminist remake” of *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).¹¹⁵
- The zombie horror film *Night of the Living Dead* (1990) as a “brilliant feminist remake” of the 1968 film.¹¹⁶
- The crime-drama *A Stranger Among Us* (1992) as a “feminist version” of *Witness* (1985).¹¹⁷
- The made-for-television *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* (1993) as a “feminist remake of the 1958 sci-fi classic.”¹¹⁸
- Gillian Armstrong’s family-drama *Little Women* (1994), as a “muscular and feminist version”¹¹⁹ of the Louisa May Alcott novel (1869), first filmed in 1917.
- The crime-drama *Freeway* (1996) as a “distinctly feminist adaptation” of *Red Riding Hood*.¹²⁰
- The fairytale *Ever After* (1998) as “a sweet feminist remake of *Cinderella* [1950].”¹²¹
- The 1999 adaptation of Jane Austen’s novel *Mansfield Park* (1814)—filmed first as a mini-series in 1983—as offering “both a feminist and a postcolonial critique of slavery.”¹²²
- The crime-drama *Double Jeopardy* (1999) as a “feminist remake” of *The Fugitive* (1993).¹²³
- The drama *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003) as “a bit like a feminist version of *Dead Poets Society* [1989].”¹²⁴
- The Chinese comedy-drama *San qiang pai an jing qi* (*A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop*) (2009) as “a contemporary feminist reversion” of *Blood Simple* (1984).¹²⁵

- The British comedy *Powder Room* (2013) as “a feminist version of *The Inbetweeners Movie* [2011].”¹²⁶
- The horror film *Carrie* (2013) as a “feminist remake” of the 1976 film.¹²⁷
- The biopic *Queen of the Desert* (2015), as “[Werner] Herzog’s feminist version of *Lawrence of Arabia* [1962].”¹²⁸
- The political-drama series *Commander in Chief* (2005–2006) as the “feminist version” of *The West Wing* [1999–2006].¹²⁹
- The aforementioned period-drama *The Beguiled* (2017) as a “feminist remake” of the 1971 film.¹³⁰
- The sitcom *One Day at a Time* (2017–) as “a feminist remake” of the earlier series (1975–1984).¹³¹
- The biopic *Lizzie* (2018)—yet another retelling of the Lizzie Borden story—as offering a “fresh Lizzie, a queer Lizzie, a *feminist* Lizzie.”¹³²
- The period-drama *Mary Queen of Scots* (2018)—another presentation of the life of the executed monarch—described as “a modern feminist spin” on the story¹³³ and as a “queer feminist revisioning.”¹³⁴
- The supernatural series *Charmed* (2018–) as a fierce, “funny, feminist” reboot of the 1998–2006 series.¹³⁵

Invariably the discourse surrounding these productions stops short of explaining exactly *how* they are feminist—beyond, perhaps, their sex-swap or their *strong female leads*—thus relying on readers drawing their own conclusions. Before delving into characteristics of feminist makeovers, it’s worth pausing to flag that describing media as *feminist* isn’t always laudatory. When the sex-swapped *Ghostbusters* project was announced, there was an intensely misogynistic response from angry men opposed to women taking on the titular roles. It is, therefore, no surprise that in many criticisms the remake was branded *feminist* by commentators who intended the term as a slur. David Brown’s *Return of Kings* post is such an example:

No one has adequately explained why, in a world where everything from Microsoft to Snapchat is male-generated, the new globe-saving paranormal clean-up team is all female. Just because is what we have been told... In multiple areas, including gender, race and the celebration of obesity, *Ghostbusters 3* is a symbol of more or less everything that is wrong with both society and the filmmaking industry seeking to protect it.¹³⁶

Brown's dubbing of *Ghostbusters* as a "feminist remake" is not primarily centered on identifying the film as progressive, but, rather, condemns the film as a product of a politically correct agenda culminating in men being replaced by women as part of—to use Brown's claim—an "affirmative action" initiative. Other commentary has criticized such sex-swaps as a kind of *womanwashing*.¹³⁷ While the "feminist remake" description can frame a production as modern and progressive, it can also serve as a condemnation where all the worst stereotypes of feminism are extended to the new film.

While *Ghostbusters* may have divided critics on the extent of its progressiveness, a desire to make a more modern film was (at least part of) the intention of the director, Paul Feig, who—in a range of interviews—spoke of his deliberate efforts to be diverse:

It's my fourth film and we are struggling every day to go against that [gender] bias. We still get called in the press as a 'chick flick.' We are always referred to as the all-female *Ghostbusters*. It's just an uphill battle and I can't believe we are having to deal with it.¹³⁸

Women have been so poorly represented in comedy by guys who are getting back at them or just have unhealthy relationships with their mothers and girlfriends... You see that in characters like the shrewish mother or the angelic wife who does everything a man wishes his spouse would do. That's not interesting in life and particularly not on the big screen.¹³⁹

It's the pool being too small, but also it's the banality of people not thinking beyond their default setting. People in Hollywood just have to force themselves—I hate to say "force," but they do—to say, "Let's bring in men and women and people of color, and let's throw the thing wide open."¹⁴⁰

Other directors have made similar claims: Jon Favreau quoted earlier is one example. Kenneth Branagh, director of the live-action *Cinderella* (2015), similarly spoke of his efforts to make a film that had a progressive approach to gender:

So spiritually I think [*Cinderella*] is completely reinvented in this movie. She is a non-victim... Much of her power is latent, much of that is there in a quiet, still potential, something that Lily James brings to it very strongly I think. Her empowerment is not about putting hands on hips and being aggressive and assertive. It's a twinkle in the eye: 'I know who I am, I know who you are and I can bend with the wind'.¹⁴¹

In such examples, directors attempt to frame their film as new, and as offering modern appeals to audiences while also perhaps reflecting their own values.

In the sections that follow, I propose a range of ways that remakes have been remade as comparatively more feminist than their predecessor(s) including via moderated misogyny (and, in turn, occasionally, misandry), positive female narratives, progressive gender roles, use of the female gaze and deployment of feminist talent.

Moderated Misogyny

Remakes offer the opportunity to revisit and reshape the sexual politics of an earlier film. Two examples that illustrate this are *Shaft* (1971/2000) and *Alfie* (1966/2004), films that had originally contained high-level misogynistic content and were remade to reflect twenty-first-century values. In Saxon Bullock's comparison of the *Shaft* films, he observes, "John Singleton's loose 2000 remake of 1971's *Shaft* was sensible enough not to tamper with the basic set-up or Isaac Hayes' classic theme tune, but toned down the sexism and daft dialogue."¹⁴² Whereas the 1971 *Shaft* was made as a Blaxploitation film—in turn, was actively *celebrating* the "assumed rampant heterosexual traits of black men"¹⁴³—the 2000 remake was produced 30 years later and thus needed to adapt: modernizing the material meant downplaying the "aggressive and overly/overtly sexual"¹⁴⁴ and diluting the "sexually potent"¹⁴⁵ title character: elements which, three decades on, would be construed less as sexy and more as *sexist*. Such omissions were spotlighted—and notably *lamented*—by critics:

The one area in which the original *Shaft* succeeded is that it explicitly portrayed black men as sexual beings in a way they had never been on-screen before. Though an outrageous flirt, the nouveau Shaft [Samuel L. Jackson] has more affection for his wardrobe than anything else.¹⁴⁶

One thing modern about the movie is its low sexual quotient. Blaxploitation came along at a time when American movies were sexy, with lots of nudity and bedroom time. Modern action pictures seem prudish by comparison.¹⁴⁷

The 2004 film *Alfie* is another example of a remake that was modernized through toned-down machismo. In Leonard Maltin's review, he observes: "[Jude] Law is saucy, the women are well cast, but it doesn't add

up to much, especially compared to the 1966 film, which was darker and more misogynistic.”¹⁴⁸ While it is unclear whether Maltin is nostalgic for the first film’s woman-hating, nonetheless the absence of it is widely observed. Mark Kermode in *New Statesman*, for example, discusses the sexual politics of the 1966 film:

[T]he original *Alfie*... was a viciously misanthropic affair cleverly disguised as a sexy rake’s progress in which writer Bill Naughton explored the edges of modern misogyny. Most shockingly, [Michael] Caine’s Alfie referred to his female conquests as “it”, making us complicit in his rancid ramblings through mesmeric straight-to-camera monologues that both charmed and shocked the audience. In Caine’s company, we learned some genuinely unpleasant truths about the hollowness of male sexuality, and were forced to come face to face with the raw consequences of his character’s callousness.¹⁴⁹

In film theorist Tom Brown’s discussion of the 1966 film’s to-camera asides, he similarly spotlights the “vile misogyny of Alfie’s words and actions.”¹⁵⁰

Akin to some of the reviews of the *Shaft* remake, many writers like Maltin criticized the toned-down misogyny of the 2004 *Alfie*. Kermode describes the remake’s protagonist as “a far more cuddly customer all round, his cheery lecherousness bespeaking nothing more threatening than a wide-boy sense of infantile irresponsibility.”¹⁵¹ Jim White, in *The Telegraph*, notes that Law’s Alfie “is significantly nicer than Caine’s” and that “[h]e totally lacks the nasty edge of his earlier incarnation.”¹⁵² Nick Shager in *Slant* observes that “there’s little sassiness or swing to this toothless update,” and that “Law makes his Alfie... too adorable, too nice, to elicit anything more than a yawn.”¹⁵³ Such criticisms reflect the modern dilemma discussed in Chap. 1 of films needing to update for modern sensibilities but, in doing so, can compare poorly to their popular albeit-problematic predecessors. Such criticisms are also in line with the tendency for remakes to be accused of being sanitized and, notably, *desexualized* (Chap. 3). Rarer were reviews—such as Randy Pitman’s—who claimed that the remake actually *benefited* from the updates, describing the 2004 *Alfie* as both “less misogynistic” and “much-improved.”¹⁵⁴ While presentations of misogyny don’t necessarily make for a misogynistic film—depictions of misogyny, as Budowski notes, can offer commentary on the female experience and women’s social status—its deletion can nonetheless be construed as testimony to the perceived appetites of a new

audience. As John Hammerle notes in his review of the *Alfie* remake, “the ‘60s sexism comes across now as just that – sexist, and the [original] movie doesn’t really age well,”¹⁵⁵ and, thus, the protagonist needed a makeover. Actor Jude Law actually addresses this in an interview with the BBC: “Calling them ‘it’, demanding food and darning and cleaning. It would have been a very different universe that we’d have had to discover in a modern time to get away with it.”¹⁵⁶

Hammerle and Law identify that the sexism of the 1966 film would be unpalatable to a more enlightened audience. This, however, isn’t the only interpretation of the modifications made in the *Alfie* remake. White proposes an interesting economic explanation:

So why is Law so sweet? Because these days no star would be allowed to risk the sort of ignominy that would ensue from playing a true swine. Nor would any film-maker risk box-office suicide by presenting a hero so immediately attractive, yet so fundamentally unpleasant. Not when women make up over more than half of the cinema audience. Not when movie executives reckon those women will not pay to see a hero beyond hope.¹⁵⁷

In White’s explanation, the move away from misogyny is less about political progress and more so motivated by risk-aversion: that in the twenty-first century (a) a leading man can’t afford to be loathed, and (b) a film can’t risk turning away half of its possible ticket buyers. Such an issue was also addressed by the 2000 *Shaft* director, John Singleton, as related to his modifications: “The only battle I lost with the producers was over how much sex there was going to be... They said they didn’t want to offend any women. They didn’t want to offend anybody.”¹⁵⁸ Such explanations posit that, again, Hollywood’s economic drivers—of simply selling the most tickets—are generally a more potent force than politics or social engineering.

While the misogyny may have been toned down because of modern feminist sensibilities, it’s also important to recognize the distinct period that *Shaft* (1971) and *Alfie* (1966) were produced and the reality that remaking such titles necessitates modernizations else the new films would be rendered anachronistic. In film theorist Robert Shail’s discussion of the first *Alfie*, for example, he observes that the film was a distinctly contemporary title, speaking specifically to the era in which it was made and showing casing the many

confusions apparent in mid-1960s notions of male identity. There is the celebration of a liberated, hedonistic working-class male who is characterised through his self-confidence and dynamism. This is then tempered by a concern for the possible negative moral consequences of his selfishness and shallowness.¹⁵⁹

(Re)making either title at any other time in history would automatically deliver a different film: that, as with clothing and cars, audiences expect gender roles and sexual presentations to be updated in accordance with social reality.

Sometimes remakes turn the tables and in the process of sex-swapping or in the revisiting sex and gender, a kind of *matriarchy* gets created where women call the shots, generally at the expense of men. In turn, such films open themselves up for accusations of *misandry* where men come to be treated in the subordinated ways that women have been throughout the history of cinema.

Make Way for Misandry

The Stepford Wives (1975) is a film about wives being replaced with docile, subservient robots. As a *Fresno Bee* review reminds us, “what goes around comes around,”¹⁶⁰ and, in 1996, the film received a sex-swap makeover as *The Stepford Husbands*. In the reverse of what happens in the first film, in the remake *husbands* are made docile through lobotomies. Carole Horst in her *Variety* review identifies the remake as being a product of its time, noting, “It couldn’t have been made until now, in an era when, as one character puts it, women have made great strides with their careers and men have become confused as to their roles in society.”¹⁶¹ The plot offered by the first *The Stepford Wives*—of men wanting to control their wives—is thus turned on its head in *The Stepford Husbands*. In the remake, women are positioned as wanting to control their spouses. The sex-swap in this remake can, therefore, be interpreted as mirroring the progress that women have made since the first film. An alternate interpretation, however, is equally viable. The sex-swap in *The Stepford Husbands* can also be construed as in fact *continuing* the 1975 film’s dystopic vision and anxiety about women’s progress, albeit repackaged with women as the instigators. Whereas *The Stepford Wives* provided insight into men’s concerns about the women’s liberation movement, *The Stepford Husbands* can be construed as doing precisely the same thing: extending fears of feminism run

amok but with women now acting as egregious as men. Just as undertaking a sex-swap can open a film up to a range of feminist readings—as occurred, for example, in *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* discussed earlier—a sex-swap can also create new and problematic presentations that reinforce negative stereotypes about women and feminism. *The Stepford Husbands* seems to operate from the erroneous assumption that in the years since 1975 women have achieved liberation to such an extent that they have become crazed with power.

The more recent remake of the 1975 film—*The Stepford Wives* (2004)—also updates the material to a troubling end. In the first film, Diz (Patrick O’Neal) and the Men’s Society were the architects of the project to replace wives with robots. In the remake, however, it is a woman, Claire (Glenn Close), who heads the robot program: as Elyce Rae Helford writes in her *ScreenPrism* analysis, the film offers a critique of “the millennial career-driven superwoman” and notes that Claire “turns out to be even more malicious and insane than [the] Stepford husbands ever were.”¹⁶² While my interpretation of this sex-swap is that women are framed as acting as bad as men as a means to *demonize* feminism and position women as their proverbial *own worst enemies*, media theorist Sheryl Vint proposes a somewhat different interpretation. In her analysis of the 2004 *The Stepford Wives*, as well as *Bewitched* (2005)—the cinema adaptation of the television series (1964–1972)—Vint suggests that both films are indicative of

the pattern of a “new backlash” in popular culture. Such texts do not vilify feminism as did an earlier generation but rather try to make the concerns of feminism seem comedic by positing that we live in a postfeminist gender utopia.¹⁶³

Sex-swaps and their sometimes-regressive consequences are in line with a range of remakes where women are positioned not merely as taking on men’s roles but acting as bad as them, in turn serving as a warning about, and demonization of women’s liberation. In Knöppler’s comparison of the 1974 and 2003 *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* horror films for example, he spotlights that the remake “reshuffles gender roles quite thoroughly.”¹⁶⁴ Knöppler observes that while most of the violence committed in the 1974 film was perpetrated by men against women, he notes that in the 2003 film “the monstrous family is no longer exclusively male” and that “the family is [now] headed by the elderly matriarch Luda May [Marietta

Marich].”¹⁶⁵ In this example, the sex-swap positions women as breaking from the norms of their gender and becoming violent criminals, *just like men*. The horror film *The Wicker Man* (1973/2006) portrays a similar dynamic. While the 1973 film had Lord Summerisle as the cult leader, in the 2006 remake Sister Summersisle is in charge and the cult is now comprised of women devotees who use men as slaves. Discussing the remake, film theorist Karley Adney observes:

The remake of the original film places women in power and living in a society where men are unnecessary except as a means of reproducing. Furthermore, the title of “sister” rather than “lord” hints at a more peaceful society in which the women work together, instead of a patriarchal society like the one depicted in the original film.¹⁶⁶

While Adney’s interpretation is one of feminism and sisterhood, some reviewers have taken a very different position, reading the film—as I do—as far from progressive. In A.O. Scott’s *New York Times* review, he criticizes the remake as being “overlaid with some mumbo jumbo about ancient goddess religions.”¹⁶⁷ and depicting what he terms “hysterical misogyny”:

There’s this island, see, and it’s ruled by women. Goddesses! Most of them are blond, and a lot of them are twins, and they have all this honey, and these wild costumes. Porno? What are you talking about? It’s a horror movie. Don’t you get it?¹⁶⁸

In Andy Webster’s review, also in *The New York Times*, he describes the film as a “misogynistic remake,” and argues that the director, Neil LaBute, has “reimagined Summerisle as an enclave of emasculating women.”¹⁶⁹ The 2006 *Wicker Man* is—like *The Stepford Husbands*—an example where conducting a sex-swap and having women supplant men might be an *alternative* to the conservative gender roles undergirding the earlier film, but that doesn’t necessarily make for a *feminist* or, as explored in the next section, a *positive* narrative.

Also worth noting are remake examples that have been interpreted by critics as misandrist based on a literal interpretation of sex-swapping and the notion of women replacing men. Such a position advances David Brown’s criticism of *Ghostbusters* as politically correct to the detriment of film quality,

to argue that in diversifying the casts, something negative is being done *to* men. Byl Holte's *Mic* review of the remade *Lost in Space* series encapsulates this case:

In watching an old episode [of the 1965-1968 series] it was shocking to see how much male interaction took place in the story, as well as the family dynamic which managed to give each of its 7 characters something to do every week. In this new feminist version [2018-], John Robinson [Toby Stephens] is the only adult male lead on screen for the first third of the series, with young Will [Maxwell Jenkins] popping in from time to time. And even more distressing is the fact that all other previous incarnations of Will Robinson depicted him as a science prodigy, while this feminist version takes him down a peg by making him not smart enough to pass the test required for the mission. Indeed, it is his mother who must pull some strings to get her sub-par male son included.¹⁷⁰

Of the many issues Holte's piece raises, the question of "why do the men have to disappear or be marginalized in order for the accomplishments of women to shine?" summarizes his position and also the stance of critics of feminism more broadly, who take umbrage with the notion that for power to be redistributed those with power (read: men) need to share some with those without. For commentators such as Holte, such redistribution is not about equity, but, rather, about taking from and marginalizing men.

Positive Female Narratives

While settling on a definition of "positive presentation" as related to women is almost impossible—it's much easier to spotlight misogyny—for the purposes of this section, I examine "positive" remakes as those where the portrayal of women is at least *more modern*: that their depiction as related to things such as sex, work, and family is presented as more progressive than the predecessor. Just as there exists a range of films described as *feminist remakes*, some reviewers also spotlight characters that have received feminist makeovers. Discussed earlier was *Ever After*. In Robert Philpot's review, he contends that Drew Barrymore plays "a feminist version" of Cinderella.¹⁷¹ The protagonist in the live-action *Cinderella* (2015) was similarly described as the "feminist Cinderella."¹⁷² In an article about actress Margot Robbie, Elaine Lipworth refers to her role in *The Legend of*

Tarzan (2016) as “a feminist version of Jane”¹⁷³; media analyst Paul Dergarabedian similarly describes Robbie’s Jane as a typical “strong female character.”¹⁷⁴ (Robbie addresses this herself claiming of the role, “It was very evident that they were focusing on making her a strong female character.”)¹⁷⁵ In *Toy Story 4* (2019)—a reboot of the decades-old franchise—the Bo Peep character is reimagined, with pre-publicity focusing on how she has been given a “feminist makeover” and is now a “crook-wielding feminist.”¹⁷⁶ One commentator notes that Bo Peep “has literally turned her skirt into a cape and if that isn’t the symbolic transformation of female characters that we need right now then I don’t know what is.”¹⁷⁷ While “feminist version” is not defined in these discussions, a reasonable assumption is that the term describes a character with more agency, strength, and autonomy than her predecessors. Discussed earlier was the made-over Dorothy in *Return to Oz* where the protagonist was presented as more resourceful and braver than her 1939 predecessor. Maid Marian from the Robin Hood story provides another example of a character whose presentation has evolved across her portrayals, something Vanessa Thorpe discusses in *The Guardian*:

As versions of the Robin Hood tale have changed down the ages, the character of Marian has been one of the major variables. While Will Scarlet, Little John and Friar Tuck remain on roughly the same terms with each other, the heroine has regularly swapped backgrounds and personality. Sometimes she is portrayed as a haughty aristocrat, sometimes as a rebellious tomboy, and sometimes as an innocent young girl.¹⁷⁸

While the Robin Hood story has been filmed many times,¹⁷⁹ the idea of a *feminist* do-over of Marian is most clearly identifiable in the 1991 and 2010 adaptations.¹⁸⁰

In his discussion of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991)—a remake of *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938)—historian Dan Georgakas comments: “The entertainment genre romance of [Errol] Flynn is closer to historical truth and the myth than [Kevin] Costner’s politically correct version so many decades later.”¹⁸¹ While the diversity of the casting in the 1991 film—including black actor, Morgan Freeman, playing the new character, Azeem—constitutes one aspect of the film’s “political correctness,” several commentators have drawn attention to the modernizing of Marian (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio), describing her as a *feminist* character,¹⁸² albeit commonly without explaining precisely *how*. Feminist film

theorist Yvonne Tasker delves a little more deeply into this idea, describing 1991's "supposedly" feminist Marian as one who "ogles Robin and betrays an ability to fight."¹⁸³ While Tasker uses *supposedly*—hinting that perhaps the character isn't *completely* progressive—Georgakas expands on Tasker's cynicism, identifying the limitations of Marian's modernization:

While more verbally and sexually liberated (on the surface at least) than previous Marians, the 1991 Marian proves helpless before the sheriff's intrigues. Robin must literally catapult himself over a castle wall to rush to her rescue.¹⁸⁴

The idea of a feminist Marian was also debated in discourse surrounding Cate Blanchett's Marian in *Robin Hood* (2010). The character was described by critics as a "refreshingly tough, feminist Maid Marian,"¹⁸⁵ as "a proto-feminist who can out-shoot, out-ride and out-fight almost any guy,"¹⁸⁶ and as "a feisty, feminist treat."¹⁸⁷ Thorpe discusses the Blanchett character, noting:

Meet Maid Marian in a fresh and spirited, 21st century incarnation... Whether Blanchett's Marian is fighting her enemies or arguing with the male authority figures around her, the screenplay of this new take on the legend has deliberately set out to reinvent the passive beauty who first won Robin's heart.¹⁸⁸

The character was similarly lauded on *Feministing*:

She completely held it down at Nottingham for the ten years her husband was away at war, fighting against sexist and corrupt ass sheriffs and friars the whole time. I especially loved this quote she gave the night Robin Hood sleeps in her bed chamber for the first time: "I sleep with a dagger. If you ever move as to touch me, I will sever your manhood"... The clear and final marking of Cate's role in Robin Hood as feminist came when she marched into battle at the very end.¹⁸⁹

In interpreting the 1991 and 2010 Marians as modern(ized), often pointed to is the character's physical strength, sexual agency, and her verbal forthrightness, as contrasted with earlier incarnations. Such elements mirror observations made in discussions whereby screen remakes are construed as more progressive because of a female protagonist's possession of proactive, liberated qualities. James Francis Jr. discusses these

ideas in his analysis of the aforementioned 2003 *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake:

Most would agree that Erin's [Jessica Biel] character is a much more positive portrayal of women in horror, because she takes control of the situation and finds her own way out instead of luckily coming across a passing truck.¹⁹⁰

Similar ideas are apparent in the discourse around the thriller *Miss Bala* (2019), the US remake of the 2011 Mexican film. The remake's director, Catherine Hardwicke, contrasts her film with the 2011 version, arguing that her protagonist is far more *active*:

[The 2011 protagonist] is very passive. It came out in 2011 so this was before our whole empowerment movement... When I watched it, I was yelling at the screen like, "Do something! Kick him in the balls! Don't let that happen to you!"¹⁹¹

Rescuing oneself rather than waiting for a male savior is often considered key in progressive presentations. Feminist film theorist Allison Craven discusses these ideas as manifested in Disney live-action remakes including *Maleficent* (an update of *Sleeping Beauty*) and *Cinderella* (2015), both of which also use gender—and, specifically, female agency—to modernize the material:

The transformation of the heroine from passive to (relatively) empowered subject in *Cinderella*, and from villain to post-feminist heroine in *Maleficent*... Each film encloses and anchors a perspective of the Disney pre-text that contributes to the illusion that Disneyland is positively transformed.¹⁹²

Lily James, the titular star of *Cinderella* (2015)—akin to the film's director, Branagh, quoted earlier—similarly refers to these issues in her comments on her character's modernization:

She's not waiting around for a prince to rescue her, and she's dealing with life as best as she can... She's following what her parents taught her about having courage and being kind. And she's finding happiness and joy in her life despite the sort of horrible circumstances that she's in. When she meets the prince, they meet as equals.... I also love that in that moment she calls herself 'Cinderella'... She takes the name that was created to keep her down

and belittle her and uses that name as strength and power. ‘Yes, this is who I am. I’m this girl. Take me or leave me.’ It’s a moment that I feel she’s empowered, but at the same time that’s a moment that is hopelessly romantic and magical.¹⁹³

Perhaps unsurprisingly, more female protagonists appear in remakes that are construed as comparatively more feminist than their predecessors. Discussing the thriller *A Perfect Murder* (1998), for example—a remake of Hitchcock’s *Dial M For Murder* (1954)—feminist film theorist Karen Hollinger flags that the remake was a “female-affirmative revision of its source”¹⁹⁴:

Even at a cursory glance at *A Perfect Murder*’s revision of *Dial M for Murder*’s ending suggests the remake’s progressive gender politics. The remake gives its conclusion a distinct note of female triumph and transforms the conventionally passive female victim played by Grace Kelly in the earlier version into an accomplished, self-assertive heroine [Gwyneth Paltrow].¹⁹⁵

Women presented as more than victims—as perhaps even as *agents* who, on occasions, seek revenge—are additional ways that gender is used to modernize an older title. Discussing the military-drama *Courage Under Fire* (1996)—another remake of the Japanese *Rashômon*, introduced earlier—film theorist Dolores Martinez flags that “the woman fights back.”¹⁹⁶ While women’s revenge narratives, and, more specifically, *rape*-revenge films, have been closely examined by feminist film theorists¹⁹⁷—and rape-revenge films themselves have been remade, for example the Swedish film *Jungfrukällan* (*The Virgin Spring*) (1960) remade as *The Last House on the Left* (1972/2009), *Straw Dogs* (1971/2011), *Jackson County Jail* (1976) remade for television as *Outside Chance* (1978), and *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978/2010)—a range of remakes modernize originary material through both a sex-swap and an updated story focused on *female* revenge. The thriller *The Brave One* (2007), for example, has been described as “a feminist remake of Charles Bronson’s *Death Wish* [1974]”¹⁹⁸ and focuses on a woman (Jodie Foster) who channels her grief and anger about the murder of her fiancé into a vengeful killing spree.¹⁹⁹ The same plot transpires in *Peppermint* (2018)—also considered as an update of *Death Wish*²⁰⁰—with a mother (Jennifer Garner) seeking revenge for the deaths of her husband and daughter. *Double Jeopardy*, discussed earlier as a feminist remake of *The Fugitive*, also fits this category:

after being framed for murdering her husband, who is still alive, the protagonist seeks vengeance. Female revenge is also a modernizing technique used in *Shame* (1988; 1992), the aforementioned remake of the Western *Shane*. While in the first film the titular gunslinger saves the town from a mob of henchman, in both sex-swapped remakes a female lawyer protects a town's women by bringing charges against a gang of serial rapists. In these examples, modernization is achieved through female characters exerting increased autonomy over their own lives—by serving as *protectors* rather than just the *protected*—and as more than just products of what men do to and *for* them. Such modernization can also be achieved through progressive gender role portrayals.

Progressive Gender Roles

Gender roles are sometimes revisited in a remake to convey that even though a new film might retain the title and plot of an older movie, it's also aware of the zeitgeist. While this can be done via sex-swaps or through female characters displaying more brawn and agency as discussed, it also occurs through women occupying modern roles within the family. With women often being defined by their emotional labor and caretaking roles, contemporary depictions of family are a means to reimagine previously filmed material as modern.

One of the most successful American remakes of a French film was the comedy *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), a remake of *Trois hommes et un couffin* (*Three Men and a Cradle*) (1985). While comprehensive comparisons between the films have been undertaken elsewhere,²⁰¹ the American remake has been noted as providing an interesting insight into the liberal feminism—marked by hyper-individualism—that was transpiring in the US toward the end of the second-wave of feminism. In Mazdon's discussion of the films, she observes that while she is “sceptical of any reading which posits the remake as more ‘progressive’ than its French counterpart,”²⁰² nonetheless, she flags that the American film is more self-consciously feminist:

Three Men and a Baby draws upon American feminism and its discourse of equality. In other words, women are neither effaced nor replaced... they simply deny their ‘natural’ ability to mother and invite the men to carry out this role instead.²⁰³

While the American remake is arguably limited in its progressiveness—*Three Men and a Baby*, for example, goes to heavy-handed efforts to demonstrate that the three male characters are unequivocally masculine and heterosexual, as contrasted with the “more ambivalent construction of masculinity” apparent in the French film²⁰⁴—nonetheless, the idea of a mother “denying” the expectation that she raises her child and, instead, leaving it with its father can be construed as a feminist statement. While such a depiction of feminism might be narrow—and might even tap into the worst scaremongering about feminism causing women to leave their families²⁰⁵—it’s nonetheless also indicative of popular culture produced during this late 1980s and early 1990s period that made overt attempts to revisit gender roles in light of the previous two decades of second-wave feminism, notably so through single father portrayals.²⁰⁶ Such modern—and arguably *feminist*—takes on parenting can be observed in other remakes too.

Michael Katovich and Patrick Kinkade present these ideas in their discussion of the sci-fi film *The Fly* (1986), the remake of the 1958 title:

In the wake of an articulate feminist ideology the remake of *The Fly* presents a different view of women and their relation to the nuclear family. The importance of a traditional familial arrangement is not affirmed as was so fervently done in the original. In the remake, women are depicted as capable and autonomous even in the face of single parenthood.²⁰⁷

Similar observations were made in Bullock’s comparison of the 1976 and 2003 versions of the body-swap comedy *Freaky Friday*,²⁰⁸ where he notes that the remake “dumped the original’s chauvinistic portrayal of motherhood as being a ‘good little homemaker.’”²⁰⁹ Communications theorist Margaret Henderson offers a similar analysis in her discussion of the Australian television series *Puberty Blues* (2012–2014)—an adaptation of the film (1981), both based on the 1979 novel—observing the altered roles for the female characters in the remake:

Working women are a significant presence in the series and, like the trope of motherhood, refuses the typical postfeminist staging of working women as a crisis or as inhuman career obsessives.²¹⁰

Like parenting, paid employment has also been a way to modernize a story for a remake: *His Girl Friday*, introduced earlier, as well as its remake

Switching Channels are such examples. Mentioned earlier was *Diabolique*—the American remake of *Les diaboliques*—where the detective is played by a woman; in the first film, it was a man. The remake—produced over four decades after the French film—subtly reflects the labor market progress of women in the intervening years. In *Dr. Socrates* (1935), the small-town doctor who gets drawn into crime is male; by the time it was remade as *King of the Underworld* (1939), a female doctor was imaginable. This same career update was used in the *Lost in Space* series (1965–1968; 2018–): the nemesis, Dr. Smith, is male in the first series but female in the remake. In the romantic-drama *Sabrina* (1995)—a remake of the 1954 title—the plot stays largely the same with the title character, the daughter of the Larrabee family chauffeur, returning home after years abroad. The remake, however, is updated by showcasing women’s changing involvement in employment. In the 1954 film, Sabrina (Audrey Hepburn) had been abroad at culinary school. In the 1995 remake, the protagonist (Julia Ormond) had been overseas working for *Vogue* magazine. In the 1954 film, the Larrabee corporation was headed by patriarch Oliver (Walter Hampden); in the remake, matriarch Maude (Nancy Marchand) heads the company. Cultural theorist Julia Kim reflects on these updates, observing that “the politically correct remake insists upon showcasing strong, independent, and career-minded women.”²¹¹ The 2004 update of *The Stepford Wives* (1975) also uses employment to modernize the narrative. In the first film, Joanna (Katharine Ross) is an aspiring photographer. In the 2004 remake, Joanna (Nicole Kidman) is a successful reality television executive producer. Psychiatrist Sharon Packer similarly discusses the changed status of the mistress of the protagonist attorney in the thriller *Cape Fear* (1962/1991): “In the first version, the single woman is a secretary. In the postfeminist remake, the young lover is an attorney who works with the protagonist.”²¹² Such updates can be interpreted as reflective of a liberal feminist agenda: that rather than patriarchy or women’s preoccupation with romance being challenged, instead, the remake gets modernized through depictions of women’s progress in their careers; that their liberation comes from succeeding in a *man’s world*.

Gender roles are also revisited through the reimagining of gendered tropes. *A Star Is Born* provides a good illustration of this. While the 1937, 1954, and 1976 versions vary in their approach to gender politics, a central underpinning of the plot apparent in each is that the rise of the female “star” of the title comes at the perceived cost of her talented but substance-abusing partner: that with her fame comes his demise and death. While in

the 2018 version similar dynamics and the man's tragic end transpires, the most recent remake nonetheless tries to place *less* blame on the woman's success, in turn, actively resisting the trope that the success of a woman is emasculating. Producer of the 2018 film, Bill Gerber, addressed the gender politics, observing: "The difference between Jack [Bradley Cooper] and the other guys is, he doesn't resent her [Lady Gaga] success whatsoever... He's upset that she's not being true to her voice, and what he fell in love with, and the kind of music she wanted to create. It's her pop turn that starts the rift between them, not her success."²¹³ Just as the 1976 version updated the material by allowing the rising star to propose marriage and to combine her name with her husband's to reflect the second-wave feminist era, the 2018 version takes this further with one of the central gendered premises of the earlier versions being reconceptualized.

The incorporation of other distinctly gendered storylines can also update old material. In 2018, for example, the sitcom *Murphy Brown* (1988–1998) was rebooted for a one-off series. In the third episode of the reboot—titled #MurphyToo—the focus was on Murphy's (Candice Bergen) experience of sexual harassment in college and her efforts—decades later—to get justice. The subject matter (and episode title) positioned the episode as using the MeToo zeitgeist to give the decades-old series contemporary relevance (even if some critics felt it fell flat).²¹⁴ Something similar occurs in the sitcom *Will and Grace*. The show originally ran between 1998 and 2006, and in 2017 was rebooted. In a 2018 episode titled "Grace's Secret," akin to Murphy in *Murphy Brown*, Grace (Debra Messing) reflects on a sexual assault she experienced as a 15-year-old. The episode is another example of rebooted material speaking to the era's sexual politics.

The Australian women's prison television series *Wentworth* (2013)—a remake of the Australian series *Prisoner* (1979–1986)—presents another way feminist issues can modernize material. While *Prisoner* was considered cutting edge, if not "pretty radical television"²¹⁵ and "revolutionary"²¹⁶ for its time, being remade decades later meant updating the material to reflect the era and, notably, evolved gender roles. In Luke Sharp and Liz Giuffre's discussion on the remade series, they examine some of the updated storylines:

[In] *Wentworth*, Bea [Danielle Cormack] isn't behind bars for the manslaughter of her best friend (who was having an affair with her husband) but rather for the attempted murder of her husband who subjects her to domestic

violence... Even Franky's [Nicole da Silva] crime has been brought into 2013: instead of a bank robbery, she assaults a judge on a reality TV show... by throwing hot butter in his face. In each case, changes in how crime and its consequences are considered have been adapted for a contemporary audience.²¹⁷

The incorporation of a domestic violence storyline in place of the more clichéd infidelity motive is a notable modernizing device. The departure from the infidelity cliché is similarly detected in the most recent *A Star Is Born* (2018): in the 1976 film, Esther catches her husband in bed with a journalist, whereas there is no equivalent betrayal in the 2018 film (discussed further in Chap. 3).

In Tasker's discussion of Maid Marian from *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991), she notes that the character "ogles" Robin. This hints to another tool of modernization: the female gaze.

The Female Gaze

While film theorist Laura Mulvey pioneered the concept of the *male gaze* as related to cinema—coining the concept of women's to-be-looked-at-ness²¹⁸—more recent work has examined the possibility of a *female gaze* as a means to examine how the camera, and also female audiences, look at the women on screen, as well as the gaze of the female characters *within* the film itself.²¹⁹ While a contentious proposition, the idea posits that films can be made as more progressive—potentially even more *feminist* as Budowski notes—through incorporation of the female gaze. Brian De Palma's horror film *Carrie* (1976) opens with scenes of schoolgirls in various stages of undress in a locker room; the camera at one point lingers on the body of the title character (Sissy Spacek) as she showers. The distinctively voyeuristic male gaze of the film has been observed by several theorists.²²⁰ When *Carrie* was remade in 2013, it is unsurprising that the gaze would become a focal point of feminist revision. Whereas the first film was directed by De Palma—a filmmaker repeatedly accused of misogyny²²¹—the remake was made by a female director, Kimberly Peirce. (Peirce also happens to be queer and, thus, the capacity for her to also bring a *queer gaze* to the film is explored in Chap. 3.) While many discussions of the remake mention the absence of the male gaze, the new *Carrie* hasn't been hailed as revolutionary. In film writer Vadim Rizov's discussion of the 1976 and 2013 films, for example, he addresses the use of the gaze:

What might a feminist remake of *Carrie* [1976] look like? Kimberly Peirce's film doesn't answer that question, removing Brian De Palma's unrepentant male gaze but substituting nothing in its place.²²²

Julia Rhodes in her *Mic* discussion also identifies that while the male gaze might have been removed, the 2013 *Carrie* doesn't necessarily succeed as a film nor as a feminist remake:

The new *Carrie* [2013] doesn't rely on the male gaze, certainly. There's no lingering focus on sexy teenagers being sexy, and the relationships between women are more dynamic and nuanced. Though its heart is in the right place, its halfhearted attempts to update the material does it no favors.²²³

While neither Rizov nor Rhodes discusses *how* the female gaze precisely fails to overhaul the remake, equally, proving a negative is difficult and perhaps the sheer *absence* of any revolutionary scenes is the takeaway.

Coppola's *The Beguiled* (2017) is an example of a more popularly lauded remake that makes more explicit use of the female gaze. As noted earlier, the 2017 film has repeatedly been described as a feminist revision, a claim in no small part attributable to Coppola's direction: as Ryan Gilbey notes in *New Statesman*, "Coppola can't help but bring one refreshing element: a female eye."²²⁴ Coppola's direction means that her gaze—as a woman—is inevitably different to Siegel's, the latter whose oeuvre includes a range of Clint Eastwood films including *Coogan's Bluff* (1968), *Two Mules for Sister Sara* (1970), *Dirty Harry* (1971), and *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979) and who, like De Palma, has long had a reputation of hypermasculine—if not outright misogynistic—filmmaking.²²⁵ David Edelstein in his *New York* magazine article discusses the repositioned gaze apparent in the Coppola remake:

One of the most exciting things about more female-directed major movies is the prospect of women going back to stories that have already been told by men and reframing them, subjecting them to the "female gaze". Sofia Coppola has done that—probingly, powerfully.²²⁶

While the director's gaze shifts in the *Beguiled* remake, so too does the gaze within the narrative. Having the story told from the perspective of the girls chronicling their relationship with the soldier, McBurney (Colin Farrell), rather than—as in the first film—from the perspective of McBurney,

significantly alters the narrative. In the trailer for the 1971 film, audiences are told that McBurney has become “the prisoner of these man-depraved women, these man-eager girls,” and that he is “a man who must love to stay alive.” In the 2017 film, the women are framed as less overtly *man-deprived* and *man-eager*, and, instead, the possibility of McBurney actually manipulating the situation and exploiting the affections of his caretakers is amplified.

While *The Beguiled* is a successful remake—Coppola, for example, won the Best Director award at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival—there are some shortcomings in pronouncing it as a feminist film. The film is a remake of a title directed by a man, written by a man, based on a book written by a man, notably about a cast full of female characters who become *obsessed with a man*. Other production details—for example, Coppola asking star Kirsten Dunst to lose weight for her role²²⁷—also problematize the politics. The 2017 film certainly appears *more* progressive than the 1971 film, but a repositioned gaze is insufficient for a film to be lauded as a feminist triumph.

The Australian mystery mini-series *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (2018) is another remake that has received extensive attention for its repositioned gaze. A remake of the 1975 film—both based on the 1967 Joan Lindsay novel—the plot centers on a group of female students and their teacher on a picnic in the early 1900s. The 2018 remake was connected to the *Beguiled* remake in Wenlei Ma’s review, where she observes: “Canadian director Larysa Kondracki, who directed the first episode and two others, is channelling Sofia Coppola’s female gaze, particularly important in a story anchored by female characters.”²²⁸ Whereas the 1975 production was directed by Peter Weir, Kondracki directed the series, along with Amanda Brotchie and Michael Rymer. That four of the six episodes were directed by women creates the capacity to potentially *reinsert* the female gaze that had been apparent in the novel but downplayed in the 1975 adaptation; something John Anderson suggests in his *Wall Street Journal* review:

It’s in the visual treatment of the young women, doomed and otherwise, that Ms. Kondracki makes her most radical and pointed departure from Mr. Weir. Viewed now, the 1975 film seems a creepily voyeuristic exemplar of the male gaze, its teenage characters worshiped by the camera to an extent thoroughly objectifies and reduces them to not-so-subtly erotic décor. In Ms. Kondracki’s version, the women feel imperilled, or at least imposed on, by that gaze, and by a pervasive, predatory sexuality that’s

more than just implied—one of the women puts a pitchfork through a would-be rapist’s foot in the opening episode, which is, of course, a satisfying moment, but one that also sets a tone for an adaptation far starker than the Weir movie, with all its Impressionist compositions.²²⁹

The distinctly male gaze of the 1975 film has, in fact, been widely observed.²³⁰ Repositioning the gaze in the remake certainly appears to be something that the production team and screen talent were cognizant of. Describing her approach to the series, Kondracki spotlighted the repositioned gaze:

[The 1975 movie] is famous for its male gaze and the girls disappear in 20 minutes or whatever and then there you go... This [mini-series] really became about: Who are these girls? Why would they want to go in the first place? Not just what happened.²³¹

Jo Porter, one of the producers presents the same idea:

[T]he big difference [between film and series] is putting it through a feminist lens. Weir specifically pulled [English photographer] David Hamilton references in terms of the visual language he was using, and that is a very male gaze, deliberately. We’ve tried to change the gaze, in depictions of nudity in particular, and in making these much more empowered women.²³²

The remake’s cast also repeatedly references the repositioned gaze in interviews. Natalie Dormer, who plays Mrs. Appleyard, discusses the erotic appeals of the mini-series, cautioning that it is “sexiness not through the male gaze. It’s sexiness through female sexuality. It’s sensual,”²³³ and noting, “It’s the female gaze, by osmosis and not by manifesto”²³⁴:

God, it’s overdue to see that sort of storytelling, isn’t it? To see sex and sexuality through a female gaze—female producers, directors, writers—as opposed to coming from a male gaze. For me, for that reason alone, it’s refreshing.²³⁵

Madeleine Madden, who plays Marion, articulates similar points:

You’ve got all these women from different backgrounds and at different points in their lives and careers and we’re all coming together to tell this story through a feminist gaze about how strong women can be and what we can achieve when we come together.²³⁶

I realised recently that the majority of my favourite shows are seen through the feminist gaze and *Picnic* is so much a part of this movement because it is something that we still are talking about—inequality and women’s rights—and we really explore that in *Picnic*.²³⁷

While it is unsurprising that material about women, written, produced, and directed by a woman and starring women would be aware of the gaze, the MeToo zeitgeist also creates the capacity to construe the remake as a product of an era where gender and filmmaking are under intense scrutiny and where sexual politics is attracting greater attention.

Discussed earlier were remakes—notably sex-swap remakes—serving as star vehicles for female celebrities. A different way to think about celebrities modernizing a title is through them bringing their personal politics to a role.

The Feminist Talent

In Chap. 1, I discussed star vehicles whereby the hope is that an actor’s sex appeal established through other roles can transfer to a remake. This idea can also work on a political level: that the feminist politics of an earlier role—alternatively the feminism personally held by a star—can transfer to a remake. Media theorist Christopher Hogg discusses actors carrying with them a “background resonance” which he describes as “a reverberation of associations regarding their previous roles, as well as their real-life exploits and star personas transpires in a new role.”²³⁸ An actor’s background resonance as specifically related to gender and feminism is identifiable in several examples. In psychoanalyst Harvey Greenberg’s discussion of *Always*, introduced earlier, he explores the idea of casting as a way to reposition and modernize the remake:

[Director Steven] Spielberg nods to feminism by using [Holly] Hunter in a role that clearly means to reprise a feisty producer in *Broadcast News* (1987)... [I]n *Always*, whether due to direction or scripting, Hunter’s Dorinda has become a querulous tomboy.²³⁹

While Greenberg is critical of Hunter’s role in Spielberg’s film, he nonetheless highlights a casting move apparent in a range of remakes. In *Always*, the hope was, seemingly, to transfer characteristics of Hunter’s previous roles to the remake and, in turn, cultivate a reception similar to what the earlier, successful film received. In other examples, transference

centers on an actress' personal politics. *Maleficent*, introduced earlier, was a live-action remake of the Disney animation *Sleeping Beauty*. Like most Disney princess films, *Sleeping Beauty* has been subject to extensive feminist analysis,²⁴⁰ most recently in relation to depictions of consent (or lack thereof).²⁴¹ To justify an update therefore—to make it modern and to counter accusations that a 2014 revisit would be anachronistic—Angelina Jolie serves as producer and star: the hope, presumably, was that some of Jolie's feminist politics²⁴² would transfer to the new title to both modernize it and render it less politically problematic. Craven also hints to this idea, noting:

Jolie as Maleficent denotes the post-feminist spirit of the production and embodies a point of intersection in the enchanted and technical discourses of the film... Her mature celebrity and success is transferred to Maleficent's heroism.²⁴³

This tool of political transference is used widely. Discussed earlier was *The Brave One*, a sex-swap remake of *Death Wish*. Corliss's *Time* review of the film, for example, was titled "Jodie Foster, Feminist Avenger."²⁴⁴ While *avenger* references the film's revenge plot, it also nods to Foster's politics. While Corliss doesn't actually examine Foster's feminism (outside of observing that "she may be the only actress in Hollywood history who has built a two-decade star career without ever playing a traditional romantic lead"),²⁴⁵ her politics are nonetheless widely observed.²⁴⁶ By casting Foster in the remake of an ultra-macho film, the material gets modernized through not only a sex-swap but through Foster's progressive politics transferring to her character. Jennifer Garner, taking on the very similar role of vengeful survivor in *Peppermint* introduced earlier—another *Death Wish* remake—can arguably also be construed as utilizing Garner's personal feminist politics.²⁴⁷ *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), the live-action remake of the 1991 animation, provides another example of this. When Emma Watson was cast as protagonist Belle, the hope seemingly was that Watson's feminism—grounded in her work, for example, as a UN Women goodwill ambassador—would extend to perceptions of her in the new film, in turn helping to modernize it. In a range of interviews about the film, Watson made the claim that the remake was indeed revisionary:

[Belle is] absolutely a Disney princess, but she's not a passive character—she's in charge of her own destiny.²⁴⁸

[Belle] remains curious, compassionate and open-minded. And that's the kind of woman I would want to embody as a role model, given the choice... In a strange way, she challenges the status quo of the place she lives in, and I found that really inspiring. She manages to keep her integrity and have a completely independent point of view. She's not easily swayed by other people's perspective—not swayed by fear-mongering or scapegoating.²⁴⁹

Watson even solicited approval to take on the role from renowned feminist Gloria Steinem, who commented about Watson's performance, "It was fascinating that her activism could be so well mirrored by the film."²⁵⁰ Not all critics, however, were as laudatory. As Jean Hannah Edelstein identifies in *The Guardian*, while Watson might have been vocal in her defense of the remake, it doesn't make the new *Beauty and the Beast* progressive:

When questioned, Watson has insisted it's a feminist film – Belle is good at inventing things and in the early stages of the film she objects volubly to the Beast's cruel behaviour. But ultimately, it's a stretch to embrace a Stockholm Syndrome narrative as a romantic one.²⁵¹

As Edelstein highlights, just because a film is marketed as a modern feminist update—just because the star is a feminist and uses the F-word in pre-publicity interviews—doesn't guarantee that it will be consumed as such. Furthermore, the fact that the 2017 film is a near scene-for-scene remake of the 1991 animation raises additional questions about whether considering it as a *modern* presentation is even accurate; as Wardlow criticizes, the remake "dangles out little sparkly baubles of 'inclusivity' and 'feminism' to distract you from this fact [that it changes nothing of any substance]."²⁵² A similar criticism can be extended to the 2017 remake of *Dirty Dancing* (1987). In a scene from the remake, protagonist Baby (Abigail Breslin) is shown reading Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963); there is no equivalent scene in the 1987 film. Through this small modification, a heavy-handed point is made that the character is a burgeoning feminist, all the while not updating the material in any meaningful way: as Sarene Leeds criticizes in her *Mic* review, "Squeezing in a couple of brief mentions of *The Feminine Mystique* is not what I would call a worthwhile exploration of feminism."²⁵³

Modernizing a title through gender—notably through a sex-swap—is a way to distinguish a remake from an earlier title. Doing so, however, is not without complexity. In the sections that follow, some of the criticisms of remakes as related to modern approaches to gender are explained, beginning with a discussion of the backlash against sex-swaps.

THE BACKLASH

Perhaps the strongest takeaway from the sex-swapped *Ghostbusters* (2016) was the sheer volume of misogyny that followed the casting announcement (and which continued until the film's release).²⁵⁴ As John Gaudiosi observes in *Fortune*: "The all-female remake of *Ghostbusters* generated an inordinate amount of vitriol, with its first trailer becoming the most disliked movie trailer in the history of YouTube."²⁵⁵ While most of the outrage was expressed by men and "fanboys," they weren't the only critics. Writing for the *Daily Mail*, conservative columnist Jan Moir asks: "What next in this fem craze for women only reworkings? *Lady of The Rings*, *Hogan's Heroines*, *Reservoir Bitches*?"²⁵⁶ Here, Moir is reflective of *female* critics who condemned the sex-swap based on conservative, anti-feminist ideology.

In this section, I examine some of the ways that sex-swaps have been criticized including accusations of such films being doomed to fail, as being retrograde, gimmicky, and symptomatic of the stranglehold of political correctness.

No-Win Ventures

When the sex-swapped *Ghostbusters* was first announced in 2015, I wrote about the venture as a no-win reboot:

[A]ny *Ghostbusters* redux will exist in the shadow of the beloved originals. And here is where the danger lies. [Melissa] McCarthy and [Kristen] Wiig are going to get compared to the "comedy legends" that occupied the roles in the 80s. They are going to get compared and they, inevitably, are going to fail dismally because *Ghostbusters* is more than a film, but a legacy. The hazard here – and the hazard of any remake – is that decades of exaggerating and embellishing our love for something can only mean any new version will be perceived as an insipid forgery. Rather than giving women comics an entirely new project to make hilarious, instead, McCarthy and Wiig have been given a spectacular opportunity to fail. Fail not because they aren't funny or talented, but fail because audiences have a soft spot – even if a thoroughly deluded soft spot – for heritage.²⁵⁷

Following the release of the sex-swapped *Ocean's 8*, Angela Watercutter presents a similar argument in *Wired*:

The success of female-fronted movies is always measured against the boys who came before... The movie's critical and economic reception will forever be measured against those of the previous instalments... Will these films do as well as those from their male counterparts? Will critics like them? Will audiences go see them?... No matter how good *Ocean's 8* is—and it is—it will never be judged on its own merits.²⁵⁸

Elena Nicolaou also makes this point about *Ocean's 8* in *Refinery29*:

Women deserve to see themselves in wholly original, exciting roles that don't have the aura (and expectation) of Danny Ocean clinging to them like persistent cologne—because, no matter how dazzling and spectacular and full of gorgeous gowns the reboot is, the scent of Danny Ocean *will* cling.²⁵⁹

While Watercutter, Nicolaou, and I allude to a burden suffered by *all* remakes—to be compared to originary material and, invariably, to be condemned as lacking—there is also a distinctly gendered aspect to this too. The notion of Ginger Rogers having to do everything Fred Astaire did but “backwards in heels” is a useful way to think about the burdens that exist for the sex-swap: the film will be judged in all the ways that films—but especially *remakes*—are judged, but, because women are at the helm, there exists extra pressure for a film to prove its worth and profitability. Saner makes this point in *The Guardian*, noting that “*Ghostbusters* [2016] wasn't a bad film (it had largely warm reviews from professional critics), but it wasn't brilliant and, unjustly, it had to be.”²⁶⁰ The film's director, Paul Feig, made this same point more sharply:

It's unfair that women have to be put through litmus tests all the time. What if *Ghostbusters* [2016] doesn't work?... If a giant tentpole starring men doesn't do well, people don't go, ‘oh well, we can't have guys in movies anymore.’²⁶¹

Certain sex-swapped titles, of course, bear the brunt of such comparisons and criticisms more acutely. A range of research has analyzed the backlash against the sex-swapped *Ghostbusters*, positing that the extent to which male fans had invested in the 1984 film—and attached so many positive childhood memories—drove much of the vitriol: as the first film's director, Ivan Reitman, notes, “There was an enormous amount of love and protectiveness of the first movie... It was seen by many men in their ‘40s when they were 8 or 9 years old and it was a seminal film experience

that they took to heart.”²⁶² Any remake of such a title, therefore, potentially faces a range of unreasonable comparisons; as Sian Brett wrote in her *One Room with a View* review, “With complaints of the film ‘ruining’ people’s childhood memories of the first film, it was already off on a bad foot.”²⁶³ Mia Galuppo and Katie Kilkenny also address this idea, explaining why *Ocean’s 8* wasn’t subjected to the same kind of misogyny as the remade *Ghostbusters*:

Based on the 1960 Rat Pack movie, the *Ocean’s* franchise, directed by Steven Soderbergh with George Clooney and Brad Pitt as its leads, first hit theaters in 2001. The third installment in that series, 2007’s *Ocean’s Thirteen*, counted a moviegoing audience that was 71 percent over the age of 25. In other words, kids in the early 2000s weren’t dressing up as Danny Ocean or Rusty Ryan to go trick-or-treating for Halloween.²⁶⁴

The point made here is that the first *Oceans* films didn’t attract a youth audience the way that the first *Ghostbusters* did, thus moderating the extent to which adult fans were upset at the remake.

Hinted to in this section has been the notion of the ghosts of male characters from earlier films haunting remakes and, notably, viewers’ reception of them. This alludes to the argument that sex-swaps are retrograde based on men being all over them even if not always on screen.

Retrograde Remakes

A key component of sex-swap criticism is the specter of men and maleness. This can, as discussed earlier, transpire in the *absence* of an earlier film’s cast—that is, the ghost of Danny Ocean haunting *Ocean’s 8*—alternatively, in the fact that men are generally behind the scenes in nearly all of these productions.

In Olivia Ovenden’s *Esquire* sex-swap discussion, she observes, “Erasing men from films does nothing for genuine representation, especially when the strings are all still being pulled by men out of sight.”²⁶⁵ In *Man Repeller*, Haley Nahman also flags this problem: “The [*Ocean’s 11*] remake will be overseen by *Hunger Games* [2012] director Gary Ross, making it the latest installment of Feminist Remakes Directed By Men (following Paul Feig’s *Ghostbusters*).”²⁶⁶ Stacy Smith from the Media, Diversity and Social Change Initiative also criticized men’s dominance in film production:

When women write less than 15% of the top 100 films each year, and when they direct fewer than 5%, they're not being given the opportunity to help shape those narratives... They're often being written from a white male perspective and an audience can sense a lack of authenticity.²⁶⁷

While, as discussed earlier, a film like *Ocean's 8* might be construed as a modern-day women's picture, it's also one with lots of male fingerprints on it: the male cast from the earlier film who are always in the minds of audience members, alternatively, audience awareness that the new film is being consumed in the legacy of the male "original." Hess articulates a version of this argument in her discussion of *Ocean's 8*:

So as Debbie [Sandra Bullock] mounts her own fantastical heist – lifting \$150 million worth of Cartier diamonds off a celebrity neck at the Met Gala – she keeps one eye on her brother's [George Clooney] tomb, half-expecting him to crawl out. We spend the film anticipating his appearance, too. Even when Debbie is on screen, Danny is in the back of our minds. And even when a Hollywood franchise is retooled around women, it still revolves around men – the story lines they wrote, the characters they created, the worlds they built.²⁶⁸

Men still haunt the narratives of these films even if they aren't on screen, and equally—like the original women's picture melodramas of the 1940s and 1950s—men are still everywhere behind the scenes: producing them, directing them, and even writing *their* versions of a woman's point of view.

Remakes can also appear regressive when they are (re)masculinized through the casting of men. In a discussion of the comedy *The Opposite of Sex* (1956)—a remake of *The Women* (1939)—film writer John DiLeo discusses the remake's increased presence of men on screen:

George Cukor's high-comic/lowdown gem *The Women* (1939) famously features not a single man. The remake, besides adding color, a wide screen, and a few songs, includes male characters who, ironically, are less vivid than the men only talked about in 1939.²⁶⁹

While DiLeo is critical of the addition of men in the 1956 film, this appears less related to the remasculinization of the narrative and more so because he deems *The Opposite of Sex* as a lesser film. In other examples, remasculinization is discussed and critiqued more explicitly. In his analysis of the sci-fi *The Thing from Another World* (1951) and its remakes,

Knöppler observes that *The Thing* (1982) “cut down the number of women from two to none.”²⁷⁰ While Knöppler proposes that this might be in pursuance of fidelity to the originary novella (1938), he also suggests that it could be argued that in 1982 there simply wasn’t the burden of representing the sexes equally, something that became more of a concern in the next remake:

The 2011 film... introduces a new set of characters to better match the gender politics of its time. The adjustment seems slight, with just two women among more than a dozen men and oddly enough returns to the level of the 1951 film. As the undisputed protagonist, however, Kate [Mary Elizabeth Winstead] enjoys a much larger significance.²⁷¹

The 1982 production of *The Thing* and its *deletion* of women is an example of a remake that became less progressive than its predecessor, at least according to the measurement of female screen time. One key explanation for this is that the 1982 film was produced at the beginning of the backlash against feminism where part of society and, notably the media, became overtly hostile to the tenets of feminism.²⁷² Film theorist Bruce Kawin observes this same trend transpiring in the slasher films of the 1970s and 1980s, identifying that on-screen misogyny was “part of the backlash against the feminist movement.”²⁷³ Such films attempted to cater to an audience assumed to be fatigued by the “politically correct” films of the previous decades and who were ready to embrace a return to a more chauvinistic Hollywood.

It is also worth briefly spotlighting the kinds of films—notably, the kind of remakes—made after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that embraced a kind of machismo along with a heightened interest in themes of security, surveillance, and military might, and, in turn, the impact this had on reimagined gender presentations. Several scholars have noted a rise in hypermasculine narratives in the aftermath of the attacks. Producer Bill Gerber, for example, explains the post-9/11 socio-political climate as his rationale for revisiting the action-comedy television series *Dukes of Hazzard* (1979–1985) in the 2005 film: “After 9/11,” he says, “I wanted to come up with a real red-blooded Americana movie. And I thought, a movie about the Dukes of Hazzard is exactly what I’m talking about.”²⁷⁴ The hypermasculine Americana apparent in the 2005 *Hazzard* adaptation is also alluded to in cultural theorist Mark Wildermuth’s criticism of *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004), the remake of the 1962 film: “Although the misogynistic trope’s

vigor is evident in the first film, its renewal and intensity are equally clear in the second—a product of a new post-9/11 security regime.”²⁷⁵ As a result of a reembrace of hypermasculine themes, some remakes can end up appearing *regressive* as related to gender.

Political Correctness

In his discussion of adaptations of Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1838), historian Till Kinzel notes:

Remakes are particularly interesting objects of study in relation to cultural and political contexts and may be affected in their reception by what is deemed morally or politically correct at a given moment.²⁷⁶

While changing social mores regarding sexuality are explored further in Chap. 3, the notion of political correctness having relevance to modern remakes is worth exploring. First, the accusation of a remake being politically correct has been applied to a range of titles, invariably without definition or elaboration. In a review of the musical-drama *Footloose* (2011), for example, it was described as a “slightly more politically correct” remake of the 1984 film.²⁷⁷ The made-for-TV Western *The Cisco Kid* (1994)—a remake of the television series (1950–1956)—was similarly dubbed “politically correct.”²⁷⁸ The same accusation was made about *Miracle on 34th Street* (1994), the remake of the 1947 film.²⁷⁹ In these examples, neither definitions (nor even value judgments) are offered, but for this discussion I will use communications theorists Judith Hoover and Leigh Anne Howard’s explanation:

Political Correctness refers to matters of speech, advocacy of nonracist, non-ageist, nonsexist terminology, an insistence on affirmative action policies, avoidance of Eurocentrism as reflected in a ‘traditional’ canon of literature, acceptance of multiculturalism as a valued feature of American society and dismantling hierarchy as controlled by a white male power structure.²⁸⁰

Films being remade with a sex-swapped cast can therefore be construed as being part of this strategy of being more inclusive and progressive. Like the word *feminist*, however, *political correctness* can also be used as a term of derision to criticize attempts to fix social imbalances through popular media. Without a definition, it’s not always easy to determine whether this

label functions in a review as a compliment or condemnation although ultimately it doesn't matter: it's still about flagging that modernization—of the kinds outlined by Hoover and Howard—has been registered by a reviewer.

The notion of a new film being more progressive in relation to topics like gender—that is, of being comparatively politically correct—is well illustrated by the period-drama *Sommersby* (1993)—the American remake of the French film *Le retour de Martin Guerre* (*The Return of Martin Guerre*) (1982). In her comparison of the films, cultural theorist Brigitte Humbert argues that the remake's lead (Richard Gere) was endowed with “late 20th-century ‘politically correct’ goals such as racial emancipation and community support.” Humbert observes that “female emancipation and modernization, already noticeable in *Martin Guerre*, become even more prominent in the remake.”²⁸¹ In literature scholar Loraine Fletcher's discussion of the same films, she notes that *Sommersby* makes more of the “feminist joke” at the heart of the narrative: “The anxious impostor tries very hard to please the wife, which is how she recognizes the imposture.” Fletcher also flags that “unlike the Jodie Foster character [in *Sommersby*], Betrande [in *Martin Guerre*] is a woman of ‘timid temper’ and ‘weak understanding’ who is imposed on by everyone.”²⁸² The transformation of Betrande in *Martin Guerre* to Laurel in *Sommersby* was no accident. Prior to taking on the role, feminist Foster insisted on modernizations, remaking Laurel from a “naive, very weepy woman who was duped by an impostor” into “somebody who chose to deceive herself.”²⁸³ Here, not only does Foster again bring her own politics to the role, but the role gets remade for the appetites of a 1990s American audience.

While the notion of a politically correct remake fits into a discussion of a modernized, comparatively more feminist narrative, like many of the updates discussed in this chapter, political correctness undergirds criticism. Referenced earlier was Johnson's discussion of the 1976 *King Kong* that he described as having been given “a politically correct makeover.”²⁸⁴ In her work on the aforementioned *Diabolique*, Mazdon observes that the character Shirley is a “politically correct, breast cancer surviving” detective.²⁸⁵ In feminist theorists Elizabeth Ford and Deborah Mitchell's discussion of *Cinderella* (1997)—the live-action remake of the 1950 animation—they argue that the “dialogue screams political correctness.”²⁸⁶ Quoted earlier, Kim describes the 1995 *Sabrina* as being a politically correct remake. In Jackie Potts's review of the same film, she notes: “This remake limps into the politically correct '90s with seemingly clipped wings.”²⁸⁷ David

Cuthbert's review of the 1993 remake of *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* (1958) is titled "Attack of the politically correct remake."²⁸⁸ In Vincent Canby's *New York Times* review of the aforementioned *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, he argues: "The new movie is a mess, a big, long, joyless reconstruction of the Robin Hood legend that comes out firmly for civil rights, feminism, religious freedom and economic opportunity for all."²⁸⁹ In each of these examples, the films are derided as reflective of the entertainment industry's attempts to socially engineer, apparently to the detriment of film quality.

There is, of course, a chicken-and-egg argument worth identifying here. While films with more progressive presentations may have *normalized* a kind of political correctness, one could equally argue that modern cinema has *had* to respond to social mores and be more politically correct to appear acceptably contemporary. Mark Bechtel in his review of the sports comedy *Bad News Bears* (2005)—a remake of the 1976 film—hints to this:

Over the past three decades, mainstream cinema has become bawdier and more violent – and more PC. That much is clear in Richard Linklater's remake of 1976's *Bad News Bears*. The original's most memorable line (towheaded Tanner assessing his teammates with a string of racial and ethnic epithets) is missing, which is sort of like remaking *Gone with the Wind* [1939] without "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."²⁹⁰

Here, Bechtel notes that audience appetites regarding a range of presentations—from sex to violence to race to gender—are constantly evolving. Filmmakers arguably must keep up, particularly when remaking, else risk their new film be construed as an anachronism and lampooned as old fashioned.

The final criticism of sex-swaps discussed in this section lies in accusations that they are gimmicky.

The Sex-Swap Gimmick

Since the announcement of the sex-swapped *Ghostbusters* project in early 2015, on a semi-regular basis, news of all-female remake projects—such as the aforementioned all-girls *Lord of the Flies*—have been announced; Nicolaou goes so far as to argue, "The women-led, gender-swapped spin-off like *Ocean's 8* is to the current movie industry what the cronut was to the year 2014: ubiquitous."²⁹¹ Megan Angelo makes a similar point in

Business Insider: “It’s starting to feel like there’s a Black version or even an all-women version of an old film or TV show popping up all of the time now.”²⁹² Some of these announcements come to fruition and others end up on the ideas scrap heap.²⁹³

While being on trend is largely a good thing, often it leaves a film open to accusations of being gimmicky and trying too hard to be trendy and, in the process, neglecting to address ongoing gender disparities in favor of novelty and headline-grabbing. Dani Garavelli, writing for *The Scotsman*, discusses this as related to actress Jodie Whittaker, who, in 2017, was announced as the first woman to be cast in the historically male role of The Doctor in the British television series *Doctor Who* (1963–):

[T]he great unveiling felt a bit too gimmicky, a bit too superficial, a bit too let’s-pat-ourselves-on-the-back-for-being-so-enlightened to signify real change... Unless such hat-tips to the notion of gender equality are reflective of societal change, there’s a risk they merely set girls up for disappointment. If they are being used to communicate a message that runs in direct opposition to reality, they are at best cosmetic.²⁹⁴

Garavelli’s ambivalence about the “real change” possible from sex-swaps was illustrated through her flagging that at the very same time that the BBC were *patting themselves on the back*, the broadcaster was under scrutiny for enormous double standards as related to employee pay:

Shortly after Whittaker’s unveiling—and while misogynists were busy demonstrating the extent to which women are still trashed and objectified – the BBC released a list of 96 stars paid over £150,000, and a stark gender pay gap was exposed.²⁹⁵

Here, Garavelli argues that not only is the *Doctor Who* sex-swap gimmicky, but that it functions as a very superficial, window-dressing kind of progress while *institutionalized* disparities exist in the background. Kiang presents similar criticisms in her discussion on sex-swaps:

In the “reduce, reuse, recycle” Hollywood culture of today, recasting male roles as female is a simple way to repackage existing properties with a gloss of newness on them, and even take some credit for being progressive at the same time.²⁹⁶

Writing for *The Washington Post*, Soraya Nadia McDonald calls these sex-swaps “a fairly transparent gimmick, with the added gloss of female empowerment,”²⁹⁷ and Nahman goes further, dubbing them as a kind of publicity stunt:

When *Deadline Hollywood* broke the news last week that Warner Bros was working on the next *Ocean’s Eleven* movie, but this time the entire principal cast would be female, I understood that, as with the recent all-female *Ghostbusters* reboot, I was meant to be excited. I was fairly confident the people at Warner Bros (and the director named Gary [Ross] and the producer named Steven [Soderbergh]) hoped us womenfolk would feel empowered by the idea that they believed A-list vaginas could break into vaults just as stealthily as A-list penises. Because that’d be amazing PR—ahem, I mean—amazing for feminism.²⁹⁸

Ovenden goes so far as to identify feeling condescended to by sex-swaps: “Dragging up old classics and giving them an all female cast is at best a patronising gesture towards equality and at worst cynical commercialism dressed up as female empowerment.”²⁹⁹ Such views encapsulate the allegation that by conducting a sex-swap, studios get to benefit from looking woke and appearing abreast of the zeitgeist without actually taking any risks or doing anything of substance. Rather than delivering genuinely feminist films using the definition offered by Budowski earlier, audiences instead are still largely only given female versions of male titles in a nod to progress. Two obvious explanations for this include risk-aversion as already discussed, and laziness.

Laziness is a common criticism leveled against remakes.³⁰⁰ This accusation has specific applicability to sex-swap remakes whereby such films are called out for using politics to sell a reductive concept, a point Tomris Laffly makes in *Film School Rejects*:

I don’t intend to kill anyone’s joy or anticipation, as I’m proudly a member of the “The New *Ghostbusters* film can’t arrive fast enough” chorus. I am just taking note of being thrown the “All-Female” bone as a lazy remedy.³⁰¹

Brett articulates the same criticism:

Changing the gender of already-established male characters makes female characters out to be the afterthought. Instead of having our own characters written, we are lazily shoehorned into roles already culturally established, in

order to tick off a representation quota and cash in on the current mainstream trendiness of feminism... A woman doesn't need to be a female version of a male character in order to be smart, or to fight crime, or to be a hustler. We can already be all of those things.³⁰²

Such arguments again raise the opportunity cost issues flagged earlier: when studios are remaking and elongating franchises, new, purpose-built content is not being produced.

Thus far, I have focused on more progressive approaches to gender as a tool of modernization. Gender can also be used to make a remake *less* modern as observed in the aforementioned remasculinized films. The sections that follow focus on remakes where gender is used to make a *regressive* presentation.

THE POSTFEMINIST REMAKE

In reviews and academic discussions, a range of remakes have been described as *postfeminist*, for example:

- The thriller *Cape Fear* (1991) as a “postfeminist remake” of the 1962 film.³⁰³
- The crime-drama *Night and the City* (1992) as a “postfeminist remake” of the 1950 film.³⁰⁴
- The fantasy *13 Going on 30* (2004) as “little more than a post-feminist remake of *Big* [1988].”³⁰⁵
- *The Stepford Wives* (2004) as “a post-feminist remake of the 1975 thriller.”³⁰⁶
- The romcom *Just Like Heaven* (2005) as “a post-feminist remake of the classic film *Sleeping Beauty* [1959].”³⁰⁷
- The comedy *The Women* (2008) as a “postfeminist remake” of the 1939 film.³⁰⁸
- The Australian drama series *Puberty Blues* (2012–2014) as a “post-feminist television adaptation”³⁰⁹ of the 1981 film.
- The horror film *Carrie* (2013) as a “post-feminist, post-Internet” remake of the 1976 film.³¹⁰

While, as noted throughout this chapter, labels like *feminist*, *politically correct*, or even *postfeminist* are rarely defined in reviews—thus leaving it up to readers to speculate on what the author means—it’s worthwhile

examining some definitions to help understand these allegations. Feminist theorist Cristina Lucia Stasia, in her discussion of the short-lived 2011 *Charlie's Angels* television series—a remake of the 1976–1981 series—offers a useful introduction:

Postfeminism can be traced to the early 1990s, when the “daughters” of second-wave feminism began rejecting the feminism they grew up with in favor of neoliberal individualism... Postfeminism was mainstreamed and marketed via Girl Power, which maintained that all a girl or women had to do to achieve equality was exercise her Girl Power.³¹¹

Film theorist Sarah Projansky offers a definition that notably flags the *depoliticized* nature of the movement:

The postfeminist version of feminism the media offer is market-driven, using feminism because it has become – because they have helped it become – a valuable commodity that does not undermine the gender system that helps to maintain the media.³¹²

As distinct from the radical feminists who were focused on problematizing gender and dismantling the patriarchy—or even from liberal feminists who felt that liberation was there for the taking so long as women had equal access to power—postfeminism puts the focus on criticizing feminism itself—pointing to feminism as the source of unhappiness for women, something that communications scholars Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels outline:

Postfeminism, as a term, suggests that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism, but that feminism is now irrelevant and even undesirable because it has made millions of women unhappy, unfeminine, childless, lonely, and bitter, prompting them to fill their closets with combat boots and really bad India print skirts. Supposedly women have gotten all they could out of feminism, are now “equal,” and so can, by choice, embrace things we used to see as sexist.³¹³

How exactly a remake becomes *postfeminist* is generally not explained in reviews, although some authors do probe this idea a little more deeply. In Jeff Vice’s review of *13 Going on 30*, he describes the film as being a postfeminist remake of *Big*, spotlighting that the presentation is “complete with cutesy pink pastels and other girlie flourishes.”³¹⁴ Here, the

postfeminist accusation is seemingly centered on the remake's embrace of femininity. Henderson discusses remakes including *Charlie's Angels* (2000)—the first film adaptation of the 1976–1981 television series—and dubs it *postfeminist*, flagging, “A recurrent theme in the studies of post-feminist adaptations of popular feminist texts is the diminution at best, or gutting at worst, of feminist politics in the contemporary remakes.”³¹⁵ Henderson also compares the 1975 *Stepford Wives* to its 2004 remake, observing a heightened *individualism* (in line with the definition of post-feminism offered by Stasia):

A close comparison of these two versions of *The Stepford Wives* uncovers a significant shift in emphasis from the structural, social level of the first film, to the personal, individual level of the second.³¹⁶

Cultural theorist Kathryn Schweishelm presents similar findings in her comparison of the 1975 and 2004 *Stepford Wives*:

While its predecessor, in keeping with [Ira] Levin's novel, had used the second wave women's movement as the thematic backdrop for dark, gothic-tinted suspense, the new and improved *Stepford Wives* detached from this context, metamorphosed into frothy, kitschy comedy.³¹⁷

Both Henderson and Schweishelm argue that the 2004 *Stepford Wives* presents the experiences of the women as funny and outlandish, rather than frightening as in the 1975 film. Replacing women with robots, of course, can only be construed as humorous if audiences accept the idea that not only has feminism achieved its goals, but, rather, that perhaps things have even gone a little too far. Helford alludes to this idea in her discussion of the 2004 remake, notably analyzing the character Claire, the female architect of the robot program (as distinguished from the male mastermind in the 1975 film):

Rather than attacking patriarchal norms, she argues that modern career women were the problem, turning themselves into robots. This critique turns the tables on the message of both novel and original film, instead echoing 1980s and 90s anti-feminist rhetoric, as exemplified in such best-sellers as Christina Hoff Sommers' *Who Stole Feminism?* (1994) and decried by Susan Faludi in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991).

While the remake can be interpreted as premised on the anti-feminist rhetoric noted by Helford, the 2004 remake was, more simply, a film that largely sidelined the politics that were at the center of the 1975 film. In a wide range of remakes, the reduction or even *deletion* of the earlier film's sexual politics transpires. Discussed earlier was *Freaky Friday* (2003), the remake of the 1976 film. While the feminism in the first film was modest—Erb, for example, notes that in 1976 Jodie Foster's character was a tomboy and part of “a more self-conscious foregrounding of feminist ideals”³¹⁸—some of the criticism of the 2003 remake centered on gutting the film's modest political content: in Joe Baker's review of the same film for example, he notes: “In the original there is the slight air of a feminist critique at work, which the modern version of the film lacks.”³¹⁹ Such depoliticizing also transpires in sex-swap remakes. Media theorist Ryan Lizardi discusses this transpiring in the television series *Elementary* (2012–), another adaptation of the Sherlock Holmes stories, and one where, through a sex-swap the homoerotic subtext is removed.³²⁰ In *Elementary*, the character of Watson becomes *Joan* Watson (Lucy Liu), and Sherlock's nemesis, Moriarty, becomes *Jamie* Moriarty (Natalie Dormer). Discussing the two sex-swaps, Lizardi identifies that in the process a past text “that may have stood slightly outside the hegemonic norm” is brought “more in line with an ‘accepted’ history.”³²¹ He observes that a female Watson works to “heteronormaliz[e] the relationship between Watson and Holmes that has been the subject of homoerotic speculation in previous iterations.”³²² Watering down the homoerotic subtext of the Holmes/Watson relationship also extends to Holmes's relationship with the newly *female* Moriarty, who, in *Elementary*, is positioned as his “true love”:

Moriarty and Holmes do not share nearly the same levels of homosexual speculation that Holmes and Watson do – Moriarty and Holmes' possible romantic subject is mostly relegated to slash fan fiction – but *Elementary* takes any relationship that prior could have been considered subtextually homosexual – even if it was by a smaller subject of fans – and erases the possibility for that interpretation in the name of normalizing the relationship and shocking a loyal fan base.³²³

While the occasional elimination of queer content in remakes is explored further in Chap. 3, it is worth spotlighting that *Elementary* is an example of a sex-swap that advances a woman to a protagonist role but simultaneously becomes *less progressive* in other respects.

While an anti-feminist/backlash agenda may be one reason for the removal of political content in a remake, there are others. It is, for example, not uncommon for a remake to undergo a genre overhaul. Already discussed in this chapter is the Western *Shane*, which was remade as the drama *Shame*. The thriller *Rear Window* was remade as the romcom *Head Over Heels*, and the sci-fi *The Incredible Shrinking Man* was remade as the comedy *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*. As relevant for this discussion, the 1975 thriller *The Stepford Wives* was remade in 2004 as a comedy. In the process of changing the genre, the politics of an earlier film may simply not work in the context of a repositioned, regenred remake.

While deleting politics can be one way to modernize a film, going a step further and making an *anti-feminist* remake also sometimes occurs.

THE ANTI-FEMINIST REMAKE

Earlier I quoted Bechtel, who observes that in the last few decades films have become both more politically correct *and* more sexual and violent. Horror remakes are the obvious illustration of this whereby, to distinguish themselves from earlier titles, the level of gore escalates. A consequence of increasing the violence however, is that horror films—historically notorious for their cruelty to women³²⁴—can become even more misogynistic. Lizardi makes this point in his discussion of slasher films, observing that their redos often have a “hyperemphasis of the originals’ ideologies”³²⁵ and that these films are frequently “reaffirming patriarchy and misogynistic cultural roles.”³²⁶ Critics have identified a small number of remakes as *misogynistic* and *sexist*, for example:

- *Swept Away* (2002) as a “sado-masochistic-chauvinistic remake”³²⁷ of the Italian film *Travolti da un insolito destino nell’azzurro mare d’agosto* (*Swept Away*) (1974), a film itself criticized as sexist.³²⁸
- The action-drama *Chaos* (2005) as “an unsophisticated and misogynistic *The Last House on the Left* [1972].”³²⁹
- The horror film *The Wicker Man* (2006) as an “overtly misogynist remake” of the 1976 film.³³⁰
- The romcom *The Heartbreak Kid* (2007) as an “uncharacteristically malicious and sexist remake” of the 1972 film.³³¹
- The romcom *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past* (2009) as a “mind-bogglingly misogynistic remake of Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*.”³³²

Sex and violence are two ways that films often get modernized. Both are themes inextricably connected to gender and are two ways that a remake can be made anti-feminist or outright misogynist.

Sex

The romcom *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past*—one of many reimaginings of the Dickens’s story—is about Connor (Matthew McConaughey), a womanizer, who is visited by a series of ghosts. In Ebert’s criticism of the film, he calls out the remake for its regressive approach to gender:

The movie is apparently set in the present. I mention that because every woman Connor meets knows all about his reputation for having countless conquests, and yet is nevertheless eager to service him.³³³

Chris Tookey in the *Daily Mail* similarly observes Connor being “visited by the ghost of his sex-addict, lounge-lizard Uncle Wayne (Michael Douglas).”³³⁴ As noted earlier, Dickens’s story has been adapted for the screen many times. A way, therefore, that *Ghosts of Christmas Past* distinguishes itself is through the central character being updated as a playboy who needs to learn the error of his ways. The framing of such a character, however, is hinged upon a presentation of women whereby their value is limited to their fuckability and who became disposable across the course of Connor’s journey. In this example, women are thus relegated to being sexually used by Connor in his attempts to “find himself.”

Sex can also be a tool of modernization in the context of enticing an audience through sexier presentations. Discussed in Chap. 3 are films where marketing focuses on selling the sexiness of a new production. In examining the production of *Bad Girls*, for example, the desire to produce a sexier film led to the firing of a director. Meredith Berkman, writing for *Entertainment Weekly*, discusses *Bad Girls*’ original director, Tamra Davis, being removed from the project and replaced with Jonathan Kaplan: “There was speculation that Davis was mounting a feminist take on the Wild West while the studio wanted a sexier version of the \$43 million-grossing *Young Guns*.”³³⁵ Arguably, with Kaplan at the helm the studio got the film they had hoped for. The amplification of sex appeal in a sex-swap remake is not a new phenomenon. Discussing *A Thousand and One Nights* (1945)—a remake of *Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp* (1913), one of many screen adaptations of *The Tales of the Arabian*

Nights—Robert Nowlan and Gwendolyn Wright Nowlan note how the remade title plays up the sex appeal: “Columbia’s 1945 version took a great many liberties with the story including having the genie played by curvaceous red-head Evelyn Keyes.”³³⁶ In this example—and, arguably, also in *Bedazzled* (2000) mentioned earlier, where a sexy Elizabeth Hurley plays a *female* Satan—the sex-swap is less about progress or pursuing a feminist agenda, and instead is about using women’s sexuality as an enticement for audiences. In these examples, the new hook offered is the titillation offered by sexy casting. Placing such a strong emphasis on female sex appeal is indicative of a modern deployment of the male gaze, resulting in these remakes in some ways appearing contemporary but simultaneously being politically retrograde.

Discussed earlier was modernization transpiring through women portrayed as violent offenders: in this section, I examine the strengthened emphasis on women as *victims*.

Violence

As already discussed in this chapter, a range of films have been modernized by downplaying the misogyny apparent in the earlier title. Conversely, a range of films have been called out as being *more* misogynistic than their predecessor(s).

Mentioned earlier was the 1991 *Cape Fear*, a remake of the 1962 film and labeled as a postfeminist remake. In a *Philadelphia Inquirer* review, the film was criticized as being “extremely violent and profane.”³³⁷ Psychologist Jane Ussher spotlights the film’s heightened violence against women, describing it as:

a misogynistic remake of an earlier Hollywood classic, in which a crazed psychopath [Robert De Niro] convicted of rape takes his revenge on his defence lawyer, and his wife and daughter. The whole subtext of the film is the threat of sexual violence – as the rapist plans to exact the worst punishment he can imagine on his adversary – the sexual assault of his women. The more transgressive the woman, the more violent the attack.³³⁸

Comparing the two films, film theorist Robert Kolker also discusses the heightened sexualized violence apparent in the remake:

In 1962, [J. Lee] Thompson's Cady [Robert Mitchum] does the literally unspeakable and unseeable to the young woman he picks up in a bar. The act goes on behind closed doors... In [Martin] Scorsese's film... [t]he act does not go on behind closed doors. We are privy to Cady's [Robert De Niro] sadism: he breaks the woman's arm, bites out a chunk of her face, and spits it across the room. Scorsese, as is often his wont, throws representations of violence in our face because he likes to; because he knows a large part of the audience likes it.³³⁹

In this example, the *Cape Fear* remake is more explicit in its portrayal of violence against women, to the point of, arguably, being gratuitous. Increased sexualized violence is also apparent in other remake examples. In Lizardi's discussion of the rape-revenge horror *The Last House on the Left* (2009)—the remake of the 1972 film—he observes that “misogynistic torture... is not only present but hyperemphasized.”³⁴⁰ Lizardi contends that “the symbolic penetrations of the girls' bodies have become literal, and the scenes are shown in graphic detail and last excruciatingly long.”³⁴¹ He flags that “the graphic nature of the torture and rape in the remake, as well as the extended nature of the scenes, makes this an even more misogynistic film than the original.”³⁴² Lizardi makes the same point in his discussion of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003), the remake of the 1974 horror film: “As with the physical torture of the females, the psychological torture in the remake... is hyperemphasized.”³⁴³

The use of violence against women is nothing new in cinema: Hitchcock once claimed: “Blondes make the best victims. They're like virgin snow, which shows up the bloody footprints.”³⁴⁴ The violence in remakes extends this pattern of desecration of bodies popularly sexualized on screen: that is, women. One explanation is that this is part of modernization: to cater to the appetites of modern audiences and to be additionally shocking to distinguish a remake from its predecessor. Film theorist Thomas Leitch addresses this idea in his work on *Psycho* (1960) and its 1998 remake:

Time makes all scary movies less scary, of course, for three reasons: because films like *Psycho* [1960] whose initial effect depends on shock establish new standards for shock that swiftly become reassuring conventions of the horror genre; because an advancing sense of personal time rescues impressionable audiences from the moments of inescapable terror to which the film had originally pinned them; and because the very act of watching the same film repeatedly changes the nature of audiences' relation to it as previous viewings themselves become privileged intertexts.³⁴⁵

Kolker explores similar ideas in the context of the *Cape Fear* remake:

By 1991, few representations of sexuality and violence were still considered transgressive in cinema. The host of *Psycho* [1960] imitations during the intervening years had raised the ante of violence simulated and depicted to appalling levels.³⁴⁶

Leitch and Kolker highlight that not only does the passing of time make earlier films look less scary—thus necessitating that the remake must be more so to cater to audience expectations of genre films—but they hint to a kind of *desensitization* that comes from the many explicit films that we’ve likely seen in the time between a first film and its remake; therefore, the content needs to be more extreme to avoid looking dated.

Deborah Krieger writing for *The Axl* also flags that remaking content as grittier—through more violence or sex—is a way to make it additionally appealing to an *adult* audience: “If light and fluffy is designated for children, then the converse applies: adults (and, increasingly, millennials) apparently require more ‘serious’ (and more violent or sexual) entertainment.”³⁴⁷ Krieger, like a number of critics, observes that “grittier remake” has also become a cliché in Hollywood; Charles Bramesco, writing for *Rolling Stone*, terms this preoccupation as “grit-wave.”³⁴⁸ The underpinning here is that through the insertion of more sex and violence a remake can portray itself as not only cutting edge but as distinctly adult. In turn, *Riverdale* (2016–), for example, gets positioned as not your father’s Archie comics; *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018–), similarly, as not your mother’s *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* (1996–2003): these remade titles are distinctly repackaged for adults (or those aspiring to be). Such an analysis can even be extended to the live-action Disney updates. In Todd VanDerWerff’s *Vox* article on *Cinderella* (2015), for example, he discusses the very thin appearance of its star, Lily James, and argues that “this all seems part and parcel of Disney’s ongoing efforts to make its princesses sexier and more adult.”³⁴⁹ Following this reasoning, *Cinderella* attempts to do double duty in regards to audience expansion: to continue to appeal to children in the ways that Disney films always have, but to also entice their parents too.

Discussed earlier was the Dickens adaptation, *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past*. In fact, several modernizations of the Dickens story serve as postfeminist and anti-feminist remakes, notably as related to providing a critique on—in Helford’s words—the “career-driven superwoman.” Films like *Ebbie*,

Ms. Scrooge, *A Diva's Christmas Carol*, *A Carol Christmas*, *Barbie in A Christmas Carol*, *Three Wise Women*, *Christmas Cupid*, and *It's Christmas, Carol!* each reimagines Ebenezer Scrooge as a career woman. Of course, rather than celebrating women's success in the labor market, these films in fact criticize her career-driven workaholicism, putting the female protagonist on a journey of redemption through becoming more traditionally *feminine*, something I have examined elsewhere:

each [are] conservative narratives where women are workaholics and thus need to be tamed and domesticated and thus the [male characters] help return things to the natural order of women caring about the domestic at least as much as their careers.³⁵⁰

Such films criticize the idea of women being as success hungry as men through use of the clichéd Christmas motif of rebirth.

Discussed earlier was a heightened focus in some remakes on sex appeal. Such ideas relate more broadly to the strengthened emphasis on femininity as apparent in some new titles: women being more glamorous and more attractive is a way to modernize a title but, in turn, potentially also depoliticize it.

INSERT FEMINIZATION

Discussed earlier was the 1976 and 2003 *Freaky Friday* films. In a comparison of the films published in *The Age*, it is observed:

In the 2003 movie, the female body is more sexualised, and mother and daughter have more disconcerting physical discoveries about their new bodies. Jamie Lee Curtis learns, to her horror, that she (that is her daughter) has a pierced navel, while Lindsay Lohan finds out what it is like to have breasts.³⁵¹

In this example, the remake simply looks more modern because of its heightened emphasis on female bodies and sexiness. Just as hairstyles, makeup, and attire can date a film—alternatively, make it appear modern and cutting edge—so too can levels of erotic appeal: arguably, in 2003 a body-swap film that ignored female physical changes would be considered naff. In other examples, remakes update the material using a more conventionally attractive cast assumed to appeal to the targeted audience. Cultural

theorist Carissa Massey discusses the film *The Beverley Hillbillies* (1993)—a cinema remake of the 1962–1971 series—and describes it as a “more glamorous and normative” remake.³⁵² In Massey’s discussion of the film adaptation of the aforementioned *The Dukes of Hazzard*, she similarly notes that the bodies are “sexier and slimmer” than in the television series.³⁵³ The notion of slimmer characters is also illustrated well in the live-action *Cinderella* (2015) remake mentioned earlier. Among the criticisms was the slenderness of the star: VanDerWerff, for example, wrote, “What’s crazy about this version is that Cinderella ends up with a supernaturally thin waist, thanks to a corset that [Lily] James has complained wouldn’t let her swallow whole foods.”³⁵⁴ In these examples, it can be argued that the remakes offer a heightened emphasis on appearance, but in doing so, a more retrograde and, in turn, *less* diverse film is produced whereby a woman’s appearance is not only her central contribution to the remake (in line with Mulvey’s to-be-looked-at-ness) but that “attractive” has become defined ever more narrowly.

Feminization and sexualization can also be achieved in other ways. In 1997, Michael Haneke made the German-language thriller *Funny Games*. In 2007, his autoremake of the film was made in the US in English. Comparing the two films, cultural theorist Daniel Varndell observes: “In the remake, Naomi Watts is stripped to reveal a bra and panties, rather than the more conservative petticoat worn by Susan[ne] Lothar in the original.”³⁵⁵ Such an example is in line with the amplified sexiness already noted but can additionally be interpreted as indicative of how foreign titles are remade and updated for an American audience. Earlier I discussed the English language version of *Blue Angel*, produced as a star vehicle for Marlene Dietrich. Nowlan and Nowlan discuss the modifications made in the American version:

In Hollywood, von Sternberg, recognizing the potential international star he had under contract, shifted the story to make Dietrich the more important player. He even put her on a diet, realising that Americans wouldn’t care for the rather plump girl who appeared in the German version.³⁵⁶

Viva Laughlin (2007), the short-lived American remake of the successful British musical-mystery series *Blackpool* (2004), provides another example where the female sexiness quotient is amplified. Discussing the differences between the two productions, communications scholar Carlen Lavigne spotlights that “*Blackpool* lacks any marked predilection for showcasing the

female form... *Viva Laughlin's* first two episodes are both laden with superfluous, half-clothed young women."³⁵⁷ The sociologist Laura Grindstaff similarly discusses the crime-drama *Point of No Return* (1993), the American remake of the French film *La Femme Nikita* (1990), noting, "One of the key differences is that Maggie [Bridget Fonda], Nikita's American counterpart, is physically a more feminine character... Maggie wears shorter dresses and higher heels, has longer hair."³⁵⁸ Analyzing the differences, Grindstaff argues:

These markers of femininity can be read as either emphasizing the gender fluidity of Maggie's character in that they contrast starkly with her more 'masculine' qualities: or as heightening the to-be-looked-at qualities of Maggie as an object of the male gaze.³⁵⁹

In the horror film *The Omen* (2006)—the remake of the 1976—*more attractive* becomes synonymous with youth: in the original film, the mother's character, Katherine, was played by Lee Remick, who was in her early 50s at the time of the film's release. In the remake, Julia Stiles was cast in the role: Stiles was in her mid-20s at the time of the film's release, and as Francis observes in his analysis of the remake, "the biggest criticism was the casting, which some felt was too hodgepodge or too young for the roles of the parents."³⁶⁰ The same criticism has been applied to the character of Aunt May from the *Spider-Man* comics. In the comics, the character is an old woman—at one point, she spends time in a nursing home—and has thus been portrayed as such in screen adaptations: in *Spider-Man* (2002), Aunt May was played by Rosemary Harris, who was 75 at the time of the film's release, and in *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012), Aunt May was played by Sally Field, who was 66 at the time of the film's release. In *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017), May was played by Marissa Tomei, who was 53 at the time of production. Not only was Tomei distinctly younger than the other women who had occupied the role, but the character was presented as less of a dowdy grandma and reimagined as more cool, sexy aunty. When Tomei's casting was announced, it was met with criticism, as Hanna Flint outlines in *ScreenRant*:

Tomei's casting was announced in 2015 and many saw it as both "sexist and ageist" – seeing that every version of Aunt May onscreen has skewed increasingly younger (as a product of Hollywood's obsession with making female characters as young as possible).³⁶¹

The cliché of more conventionally attractive people being cast in American remakes is identifiable in other examples. Discussing the crime-drama *Life on Mars* (2008), for example—the US adaptation of the UK series (2006–2007)—communications scholar Heather Marcovitch compared the character of Annie (Liz White) from the British example, to the revamped character in the remake: “Gretchen Mol’s Annie Norris... on the other hand, is much more polemically feminist and also much more attractive by Hollywood standards.”³⁶² Something similar is identifiable in *Gracepoint* (2014), the US remake of the British crime-drama *Broadchurch* (2013–2017). In *Broadchurch*, the leads are played by David Tennant and Olivia Coleman. In *Gracepoint*, while Tennant continues in the male detective role, Coleman is replaced “with the tall, blonde, very-American Anna Gunn.”³⁶³ In an analysis of the sitcom *The Office* (2005–2013)—the American adaptation of the British television series (2001–2003)—communications theorists Janet Boseovski and Stuart Marcovitch observe: “American standards for physical attractiveness constitute another subtle difference in the two versions of the office.”³⁶⁴ Media theorist Jeffrey Griffin discusses the same two series, comparing their receptionists—Dawn (Lucy Davis) from the UK version and Pam (Jenna Fischer) from the US—noting, “Although each receptionist is attractive, Pam has a much slimmer figure than her British counterpart, thus conforming more to the American beauty ideal.”³⁶⁵ While these examples can each be interpreted as using sex appeal as a vehicle for modernization (explored further in Chap. 3), it is also worth observing the cultural contexts in which each was produced. Such updates can be construed as in compliance with stereotypes about not only American media but more specifically American *remakes*: film theorist Ginette Vincendeau, for example, identifies the “well-rehearsed dichotomy of Hollywood commerce versus European art.”³⁶⁶ The extension of this argument is that Hollywood is simply more concerned with superficiality, with gloss, and making money and that in the context of representations of women this means women are expected to primarily serve as an audience enticement. This point becomes distinctly *gendered*, however, because it is commonly *female* presentations that are the default eye candy. Arguably, remakes reflect the tendency for American films to be glossier and to be populated with (more comparatively) good-looking people. Cultural theorist Helena Goscilo presents this same cross-cultural comparison in her work on Polish cinema:

An additional “divider” between the cinematic traditions of America and Europe is the premium placed by Hollywood on performers’ physical endowments, to which acting skills are all too often secondary, while the latter are decisive in Europe, where actors and actresses look like “normal people” – absent the silicone implants, face-lifts, and sundry forms of cosmetic surgery – but are trained in the art of embodying an infinite array of onscreen characters.³⁶⁷

Put simply, Goscilo suggests that American audiences prefer a better-looking cast. Here, rather than Americans remaking the film with more skilled actors, it is about remaking a film with a more attractive and, thus, more bankable cast.

Hess also flags the burden on women to *look* feminine, and certainly some sex-swap remakes do make a point of giving characters feminizing makeovers, observing, “Ms. McCarthy [in *Life of the Party*] gets a makeover; in *Ocean’s 8*, the female oddballs slip into gowns to strut down the steps of the Met.”³⁶⁸ While feminist criticisms of makeover scenes in film have been well documented,³⁶⁹ such plots are also widely observed in the specific context of remakes. The George Bernard Shaw play *Pygmalion* (1913)—focusing on an arrogant professor who is convinced he can transform a Cockney girl into a cultured member of society—has been filmed numerous times, most famously as *My Fair Lady* (1964). A modern spin on the material was *She’s All That* (1999), where an arrogant high school jock (Freddie Prinze Jr.) is convinced he can turn geeky Laney (Rachael Leigh Cook) into a prom queen: as cultural theorist Sarah Gilligan argues, “Laney is transformed from an outdated, anti-fashion, feminist stereotype into an image of retro, pre-feminist woman.”³⁷⁰ Ford and Mitchell also examine makeovers in the aforementioned 1997 live-action *Cinderella*, noting that while the film makes efforts at being modern—the authors, for example, spotlight that it is “aggressively multi-cultural”³⁷¹—but when it comes to the central idea of the *Cinderella* story, the film stays true to the idea of dreams coming true only once an appearance is overhauled: “For all its good intentions and obsessive political correctness, the remake ignores larger issues of the tale.”³⁷² In Stasia’s work on the first *Charlie’s Angels* series and the 2011 reboot, she also examines the makeovers: “In the reboot, the Angels not only dress like they are going clubbing instead of crime fighting, but they receive makeovers.”³⁷³ Stasia argues, “While the promotion of the original series did not rely on, nor exploit, the sexuality of the stars, the promotion of the reboot offered nothing else.”³⁷⁴

The 1995 *Sabrina* remake continues with its predecessor's presentation of the title character returning to America after two years in Paris physically *transformed*. These examples not only underscore the critical importance of women's appearance, but each make the point that to be attractive—and, notably, to be found attractive by men—work is necessary: that women must engage in the beauty labor expected of their gender and pursue positive, feminine transformation.³⁷⁵ Such messages might be expected in older, ordinary material, but appear distinctly *regressive* when used as a tool to modernize a remake.

In her article on *Ocean's 8*, Hess expands the discussion beyond women's appearance to problematize the limited range of roles they are expected to occupy in modern remakes:

As much as these gender-swapped films free women from old Hollywood expectations, they box them into a new one: Their female protagonists must be admirable... For women, the demand often manifests itself as typically feminine behaviour – acting nice, and looking it.³⁷⁶

Here, Hess also highlights the idea of remakes becoming less progressive through their expectations on women needing to not only look nice but also *be* nice. In his *Rolling Stone* review of *Life of the Party* (2018), Peter Travers hints that the niceness imperative is part of its downfall:

Before you ask, “Say, doesn't this sound like Rodney Dangerfield's 1986 *Back to School* with a sex charge”, let us assure folks that *Life of the Party* is not even remotely in the same hilarious league. It has PG-13 marshmallows where its metaphorical balls should be.³⁷⁷

Travers dismisses *Life of the Party* as “bland.” While he doesn't spotlight specific reasons for this, one interpretation is that within the narrative McCarthy embodies a gendered burden of likability, of niceness, in a manner that Dangerfield simply did not, in turn sanitizing the content to accommodate its sex-changed protagonist. Michael Phillips in his *Chicago Tribune* critique of the film actually describes McCarthy's character as “a goodwill machine, improving the lives of everyone on campus.”³⁷⁸ In such an example, a sex-swap might help update material and make the new film appear more progressive, but often more than just a sex-swap transpires, and such films are often also “updated” to mirror our contemporary ideas about gender and, in turn, can become less progressive. Chetwynd, who wrote the script for the aforementioned sex-swapped *It Happened One*

Christmas—the remake of *It's a Wonderful Life*—identified having to make many changes to accommodate a female protagonist.³⁷⁹ Certainly, the sex-swapped *A Christmas Carol* remakes discussed earlier do this by making women's redemption contingent on them becoming nicer and more domestic. While this journey for a male Scrooge might be a progressive presentation, arguably it is *regressive* for female characters who have *always* had the burden of niceness and domesticity.

Earlier I discussed that in many sex-swaps the remake is still all about men. In the last section of this chapter, a more obvious example of this is explored whereby a film that was originally focused on women gets remade as a male sex-swap, a move again open to interpretation as regressive and indicative of remasculinization.

THE MALE SEX-SWAP

Discussed earlier was *The Stepford Husbands*, a remake of *The Stepford Wives*. The film exists as an example of a female-to-male sex-swap, something that happens in several examples:

- In the romcom *Nothing Sacred* (1937), Hazel (Carole Lombard) fakes radium poisoning in a ploy to get a trip to New York. When the film was remade as *Living It Up* (1954), the protagonist is reimagined as Harold (Jerry Lewis).
- In the romcom *The Major and the Minor* (1942), a woman (Ginger Rogers) disguises herself as a child for a discount train ride. The film was remade as *You're Never Too Young* (1955), where a man (Jerry Lewis) goes in disguise as a child.
- *Cinderfella* (1960) is the male answer to *Cinderella* (1950) whereby the title character (Jerry Lewis)—who is mistreated by his stepmother and evil stepbrothers—finds love with a princess (Anna Maria Alberghetti).
- The comedy-drama *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) centered on three women seeking to find millionaire husbands. The made-for-TV film *How to Marry a Billionaire* (2000) focused on three men seeking to marry rich women.
- As noted, the 1984 *Ghostbusters* focused on male title characters who were sex-swapped for the 2016 film. In the 1984 film, the receptionist is Janine (Annie Potts), who is smart and sarcastic. In the remake, the receptionist is sex-swapped to become Kevin (Chris Hemsworth), a kind of male bimbo.

While these examples are widely construed as remakes, in others—akin to the female examples discussed earlier—films are described as appearing *like* sex-swap remakes even if they aren't formally acknowledged as such (and, in fact, such comparisons may in fact be construed as reductive descriptions)³⁸⁰:

- The comedy-drama *The Best Man* (1999) as feeling “far more like a male version of a Terry McMillan potboiler like *Waiting to Exhale* (1995).”³⁸¹ The comedy *Diary of a Tired Black Man* (2008) was similarly described as trying to be “the black male version of *Waiting to Exhale* (1995),”³⁸² and the drama *Not Easily Broken* (2009) as “sort of a male version of the film *Waiting to Exhale*.”³⁸³
- The romcom *Made of Honor* (2008) as “either the male version of *27 Dresses* (2008) or a straight-up rip-off of *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997).”³⁸⁴
- The romcom *(500) Days of Summer* (2009) as “sort of a male version of *He's Just Not That into You* (2009).”³⁸⁵
- The thriller *Takers* (2010) as “a male version of 1996's *Set It Off*.”³⁸⁶
- The romcom *A Few Best Men* (2011) as “the male version of *Bridesmaids* [2011].”³⁸⁷
- The romcom *This Means War* (2012) as “basically the male version of *Charlie's Angels* (1976–1981; 2000; 2011).”³⁸⁸
- The sci-fi romance *The Giver* (2014) as “a gender flip of *Divergent* [2014] which is a copycat of *The Hunger Games* [2012].”³⁸⁹

Also worth flagging are films that received a female sex-swap but in further remakes revert to an all-male cast. Earlier, for example, I mentioned *The Charm School*, a film where a man inherits a girls' boarding school. When the film was remade as *Sweetie*, a woman inherits a boys' boarding school. When the material was remade again—as *Someone to Love* (1928) and then as *Collegiate* (1936)—men once again inherit girls' schools.

It is worth examining the why of such male sex-swap remakes. The most obvious explanation is that the swap transpires as a gimmick: that just as the female sex-swaps provide justification for revisiting a title and drawing extra attention to a remake, the same thing can transpire in reverse. (A mooted all-male *Golden Girls* (1985–1992) reboot, for example, has also been given much attention, although not yet eventuated.)³⁹⁰ An extension of this lies in audience expansion: that recasting men makes the film more broadly

appealing in an industry that still assumes that male protagonists sell the most tickets. It is noteworthy that three of the male sex-swap examples I listed earlier starred Jerry Lewis. While Lewis often starred in remakes—and many of his own films have also again been remade³⁹¹—arguably, his zany, sometimes hysterical persona can be interpreted as somewhat childlike or even *feminine*, thus making him suited to reprising a female role. (Risk-aversion also plays a part here whereby such remakes become a *star vehicle* for an actor like Lewis via material already tested in the market.)

Politics, of course, also explains the male sex-swap films. In her discussion of the aforementioned television take on *Puberty Blues*, Henderson observes that the heightened role of men in the adaptation exemplifies “the postfeminist trait of men returning to centre stage”³⁹²:

[I]ts diversity of and emphasis on male characters and masculinity (read, giving them equal time), simultaneously complicates and deromanticizes masculinity. The result is preservation and deepening, through softening of the feminist critique of masculinity found in the novel and the film.³⁹³

In a backlash/postfeminist environment, arguably if all the world’s gender disparities have been solved, reinserting men and downplaying the feminism is not only perfectly acceptable but potentially even *necessary* as a remedy to political correctness.

In this chapter, I examined the use of gender to modernize (or not so) a narrative for a remake. In Chap. 3, I extend this discussion to an examination of how presentations of sexuality are utilized similarly.

NOTES

1. Bildhauer (2011) and Klein and Daphinoff (1997).
2. It is difficult to unequivocally dub *Hamlet* (1921) as the first Shakespeare sex-swap on screen: Alexander Huang and Charles Ross note, “Around the time Asta Nielsen’s cross-dressed *Hamlet* (1921) was filmed, gender-bender silent film adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* were being made in Shanghai” (Huang and Ross 2009, 1).
3. Klett (2009), Power (2016) and Walter (2016).
4. Eberwein (1998, 30).
5. Shapiro (2015, 262).
6. Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer observe: “The dialectic between ‘new’ and ‘old’ in film and media production answers the industry’s need

- for both regularity (the auditorium seats that must be filled and refilled in order for a studio to stay afloat...) and originality (viewers always desire the yet unseen...)" (Klein and Palmer 2016, 4).
7. Discussing the sex-swap trend, Jessica Kiang argues, "Anything that increases the number of women in diverse, complex and interesting roles in Hollywood movies (that is, movies that will benefit from the marketing and distribution push that only a major studio can marshal) must surely be a good thing" (Kiang 2015).
 8. Knöppler (2017, 84).
 9. Arguably, the sex-swap can also be considered as related to postmodernism and the idea of gender being "something flexible rather than fixed, it is one more Truth that postmodernism can dismantle" (Fischer 1998, 206).
 10. In Kiang (2015). This example can be contrasted with *It Happened One Christmas* (1977), the sex-swap remake of *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). Lionel Chetwynd, who wrote the script for the remake, identified having to make many alterations to accommodate the sex-swap (Scheer 1980, 30).
 11. Performance scholar Brandi Wilkins Catanese defines blind casting as where actors are cast without regard to their race, ethnicity, gender, or physical capability (Catanese 2011, 12).
 12. In Wood (2006, 66).
 13. In McBride (2013, 97).
 14. "With a few notable exceptions (*His Girl Friday* [1940], *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* [1953], *Ball of Fire* [1941], etc.), women in Hawks's films are entirely marginal to the operative reality except as attractions or diversions to the heroes" (Penley et al. 2006, 102).
 15. Douchet (1996, 79).
 16. Rosewarne (2018, 77 n. 5). See also Guida (2000).
 17. Brown (2011, 51).
 18. Another US remake of *Fawltly Towers* (1975)—*Payne* (1999)—was made with a man (John Larroquette) at the helm.
 19. The island name and its spelling slightly alter between the two titles.
 20. Shmith (2002).
 21. Billson (2014).
 22. Singer (n.d.).
 23. Hellman (2017).
 24. Broderick (2017).
 25. Guzmán (2017).
 26. Simon (2017).
 27. Ebert (1994).
 28. Stricker (1996) and Warmbold (2000, 53).
 29. Dalton (2003).
 30. Murray (2000).

31. Zeier (2005).
32. del Mar Azcona (2010, 94).
33. Bailey (2010).
34. “Holly Holm, Miesha Tate to appear in upcoming film described as the ‘female version of Fight Club’” (2015).
35. Rule (2017).
36. Tartaglione (2015).
37. “‘Whiskey Cavalier’ serves up spy games as Oscars chaser” (2019).
38. Allon et al. (2001, 307).
39. In Willistein (1994).
40. “Gemma Arterton calls Byzantium ‘a female version of Interview With The Vampire’” (2013).
41. Wardlow (2017).
42. Mazdon (2000, 41–42).
43. Brown (2015).
44. Hess (2018).
45. Braudy (2002, 115).
46. Lofgren (2016, 285).
47. Delamater (1998, 90–91).
48. Keegan (2018).
49. Johnson (2005).
50. Erb (2009, 178).
51. Chocano (2017).
52. *King Kong* was revisited again in 2005. Media theorist Stan Jones discusses the 2005 remake, noting, “In 2005, the original love story is turned upside down, when Ann rescues Driscoll in New York by going with Kong” (Jones 2009, 190).
53. Rosenberg (2016), de Leon (2018), Rose (2018), Bramescio (2018) and Byrd (n.d.).
54. Director Paul Feig spoke of this burden as related to the production of *Ghostbusters* (2016): “I think it kind of hampered us a little bit because the movie became so much of a cause. I think for some of our audience, they were like, ‘What the fuck? We don’t wanna go to a cause. We just wanna watch a fuckin’ movie’” (in Evangelista 2017).
55. Corliss (2005).
56. Saner (2017).
57. Oddi (2018).
58. Morris (2016).
59. In Elena Nicolaou’s article on *Ocean’s 8* (2018), she notes, while these films “provide essential opportunities for big-budget ensemble movies starring women, they shouldn’t be the only big-budget ensemble movies starring women” (Nicolaou 2018).
60. In Saner (2017).

61. Cills (2018).
62. Mel Brooks produced and starred in *To Be or Not to Be* (1983), a remake of the 1942 film. Steve Martin produced and starred in *Roxanne* (1987), another version of the oft-filmed Cyrano de Bergerac story. Pierce Brosnan produced and starred in *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999), a remake of the 1968 film. Ryan Phillippe produced and starred in the television series *Shooter* (2016–), a series remake of the film *Shooter* (2007). Eugenio Derbez produced and starred in *Overboard* (2018), the remake of the 1987 film. Bradley Cooper produced and starred in *A Star Is Born* (2018), a title made several times previously.
63. It's worth noting that while Marlo Thomas created a sex-swap remake star vehicle for herself, she was determined not to do so with a political agenda. Cultural theorist Ronald Scheer notes that Thomas “did not want it to be a vehicle for feminist polemic. As a result, the remake gave no evidence that attitudes towards women’s roles had changed between 1946 and 1977” (Scheer 1980, 31–32).
64. While this section focuses on “star vehicles” as related to on-screen talent, remakes can also serve in this capacity for female directors whereby remaking a film gives them an opportunity to showcase their talents through a risk-averse production, something that occurs in many examples. Nora Ephron, for example, wrote and directed the comedy *Mixed Nuts* (1994), the remake of French film *Le père Noël est une ordure* (*Santa Claus is a Stinker*) (1982). Ephron also directed the romcoms *You’ve Got Mail* (1998), a remake of *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), and *Bewitched* (2005), an adaptation of the television series (1964–1972). Penelope Spheeris directed *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1993), the cinema adaptation of the television series (1962–1971). The romance *Endless Love* (2014)—the remake of the 1981 film—was directed and co-written by Shana Feste. Feste also directed the family-drama *The Greatest* (2009), the sex-swapped remake of *Moonlight Mile* (2002). The family-comedy *The Parent Trap* (1998)—the remake of the 1961 film—was directed and co-written by Nancy Meyers. The Christmas-drama *The Preacher’s Wife* (1996)—a remake of *The Bishop’s Wife* (1947)—was directed by Penny Marshall. The period-drama *Little Women* (1994)—another version of material filmed many times previously—was directed by Gillian Armstrong. The family-comedy *Freaky Friday* (1995)—the television remake of the 1976 film—was directed by Melanie Mayron. The drama *A Thousand Acres* (1997)—a contemporary version of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (first filmed in 1910)—was directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse. The period-drama *Mansfield Park* (1999)—first filmed in 1983—was directed by Patricia Rozema. The comedy *The Producers* (2005)—the remake of the 1967 film—was directed by Susan Stroman. The comedy-drama *The Women* (2008)—the remake of the 1939 film—was

written and directed by Diane English. The horror film *Carrie* (2013)—a remake of material previously filmed in 1976 and 2002—was directed by Kimberly Peirce. The made-for-television melodrama *Beaches* (2017)—the remake of the 1988 film—was directed by Allison Anders. The comedy *Furlough* (2018)—a sex-swapped remake of *The Defiant Ones* (1958)—was directed by Laurie Collyer. The crime-comedy *Hot Pursuit* (2015)—another sex-swapped remake of *The Defiant Ones*—was directed by Anne Fletcher. The 2011 *Wuthering Heights* film was directed and co-written by Andrea Arnold. The romance *Ophelia* (2018)—the feminist retelling of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*—was directed by Claire McCarthy. The drama *The Kindergarten Teacher* (2018)—the remake of the Israeli film *Haganenet* (*The Kindergarten Teacher*) (2014)—was written and directed by Sara Colangelo. The thriller *Miss Bala* (2019)—the remake of the 2011 Mexican film—was directed by Catherine Hardwicke. The made-for-television horror movie *Mother, May I Sleep with Danger?* (2016)—the remake of the 1996 film—was directed by Melanie Aitkenhead. The romcom *And Then Came Lola* (2009)—a lesbian remake of the German film *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*) (1998)—was written and directed by Ellen Seidler and Megan Siler. The romcom *Who’s Afraid of Vagina Wolf* (2013)—the lesbian retelling of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966)—was directed by Anna Margarita Albelo.

65. Lang (2018).
66. Desta (2017).
67. Kiang (2015).
68. Mendelson (2016) and McClintock (2016).
69. Cook (1991, 248).
70. Cook (1991, 252).
71. Rose (2018).
72. McClintock (2018).
73. Lang (2016).
74. Director Paul Feig described—and lamented—the framing of *Ghostbusters* (2016) as a “chick flick”: “We still get called in the press as a ‘chick flick.’ We are always referred to as the all-female ‘Ghostbusters.’ It’s just an uphill battle and I can’t believe we are having to deal with it” (In Nordine 2016). *Ocean’s 8* (2018) was similarly described this way in reviews (“Ocean’s 8 is a great film, let alone great chick flick” 2018; Kapur 2018).
75. Berg (2000, 222).
76. Mera (2008, 7).
77. Forrest (2002, 170).
78. Desta (2017).
79. In Saner (2017).

80. Feminist writer Roxane Gay certainly alluded to this in her dismissal of the all-women *Lord of the Flies*, claiming, “An all women remake of *Lord of the Flies* makes no sense because... the plot of that book wouldn’t happen with all women” (in Harmon 2017).
81. Scheer (1980, 31).
82. “Kirsten Dunst & Sofia Coppola Discuss ‘The Beguiled’” (2017).
83. Kelleter (2012).
84. Kelleter (2012, 31).
85. Kelleter (2012, 31).
86. In Salzberg (2013, 226).
87. In Druxman (1975, 191).
88. Nowlan and Wright Nowlan (1989, 93).
89. Knöppler (2017, 131).
90. Paproth (2014, 105).
91. Seltzer (2011, 195).
92. Gullion (2016).
93. McCarthy (1994).
94. Radloff (2017).
95. Genzlinger argues, “The remake teases out a few story lines, especially one involving Baby’s mother, Marjorie, played by Debra Messing, who gets to complain a lot that she and her husband (Bruce Greenwood) never have sex anymore. It’s apparently an effort to turn Marjorie into something more than a cardboard housewife; this tale, like the original, takes place in 1963. Under other circumstances that might be commendable, but here it undercuts Ms. Breslin, who is already having enough trouble making Baby something other than bland. The appeal of the original *Dirty Dancing* for its many ardent female fans was that it was the story of Baby’s awakening, not Mom’s” (Genzlinger 2017).
96. Judah (2014, 18).
97. Mulvey (1985).
98. In Barlow (2018).
99. In “Why ScarJo was cast in *The Jungle Book*” (2015, 6).
100. Craven (2017).
101. Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013, 29).
102. Singh (2010).
103. Stavreva (2018, 70).
104. In Stavreva (2018, 69).
105. Ebert (1981).
106. Budowski (2018) and Reardon (2017).
107. Budowski (2018) and Christian (2010).
108. Budowski (2018).
109. O’Connor (1977).

110. Willistein (1994).
111. Judah (2015, 81).
112. Dove-Viebahn (2016), Klawans (2016a, b) and O’Hara (2016).
113. Giardina (2017).
114. Simon (2017).
115. Dirks (n.d.).
116. Harper (2002).
117. Hicks (1992).
118. Jubera (1993).
119. Anderson (2003).
120. Kottler (2015, 67).
121. Ressler (2001).
122. Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013, 152).
123. “Revenge tastes sweet for Ashley” (2000).
124. In “Mona Lisa Smile; Hit or hype?” (2004).
125. Chan (2017, 99).
126. Muir (2013).
127. Mitchell (2013) and Coykendall (2000).
128. MacNab (2015).
129. Starkey (2006).
130. Carlin (2017), Moran (2017b) and Chang (2017).
131. Thomas (2017).
132. Telfer (2018).
133. Yamato (2018).
134. Carney (2018).
135. “Charmed reboot casts sisters trio” (2018).
136. Brown (2016).
137. “Whenever a non-white character is played by a white actor in a movie such as *Ghost in the Shell* [2017], critics call it ‘whitewashing.’ What should we call the recent trend of taking roles made famous by men and recasting them with women? Womanwashing?” (“‘Womanwashing’ entertainment trend continues” 2017).
138. In Nordine (2016).
139. In Ford (n.d.).
140. In Raftery (2016).
141. In Miller (2015).
142. Bullock (2012).
143. McDowell (1999, 16).
144. Howell (2008, 147).
145. Cross (2008, 156).
146. Mitchell (2000).
147. Ebert (2000).

148. Maltin (2014).
149. Kermode (2004).
150. Brown (2012).
151. Kermode (2004).
152. White (2004).
153. Shager (2004).
154. Pitman (2005, 111).
155. Hammerle (2011).
156. In “Law defends ‘too charming’ Alfie” (2004).
157. White (2004).
158. In “Shaft shifts despite sexual shortcomings” (2000).
159. Shail (2004, 72).
160. “Kitchen tables turned in ‘Stepford Husbands’” (1996).
161. Horst (1996).
162. Helford (2015).
163. Vint (2007, 161).
164. Knöppler (2017, 202).
165. Knöppler (2017, 202).
166. Adney (2012, 115).
167. Scott (2006).
168. Scott (2006).
169. Webster (2014).
170. Holte (2018).
171. Philpot (1998).
172. Fallon (2015).
173. Lipworth (2016).
174. In Mandell (2016).
175. In Mandell (2016).
176. Frizzell (2019).
177. Giles (2019).
178. Thorpe (2010).
179. Nollen (1999) and Hahn (2000).
180. Other screen examples have attempted to update the Robin Hood story through more a progressive Marian. *Maid Marian and Her Merry Men* (1989–1994), for example, is a British comedy series offering “a revisionist (and feminist) account of the outlaws’ struggles, with Maid Marian as the brains of the outfit” (“Maid Marian and Her Merry Men” 2014).
181. In Horton and McDougal (1998, 7).
182. Ebert (1991) and Johnston (2001, 53).
183. Tasker (1998, 82).
184. Georgakas (1998, 77).
185. Yellesetty (2010).

186. Wente (2010).
187. O’Sullivan (2010).
188. Thorpe (2010).
189. “Cate Blanchett & Feminism in Robin Hood” (n.d.).
190. Francis (2013, 124).
191. In Bucksbaum (2019).
192. Craven (2017, 178).
193. In Fallon (2015).
194. Hollinger (2006, 218).
195. Hollinger (2006, 218).
196. Martinez (2009, 91).
197. Henry (2014), Heller-Nicholas (2010) and Read (2000).
198. Tucker and Svetkey (2008).
199. In Peter Feldman’s review of the revenge-themed *Lila & Eve* (2015), he similarly observes, “It’s similar to Charles Bronson’s *Death Wish* [1974] theme, but with a female twist” (Feldman 2015).
200. Roeper (2018).
201. Durham (1998) and Mazdon (2000).
202. Mazdon (2000, 57).
203. Mazdon (2000, 57).
204. Mazdon (2000, 59).
205. Televangelist, Pat Robertson, for example, criticized feminism claiming: “The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians” (in Schwartz 1992).
206. Obvious examples from this period are those where single men are portrayed as primary caregivers, for example sitcoms *Diff’rent Strokes* (1978–1986), *Punky Brewster* (1984–1988), *Full House* (1987–1995), *My Two Dads* (1987–1990), and *Blossom* (1990–1995).
207. Katovich and Kinkade (1993, 631).
208. Made-for-television versions of *Freaky Friday* were also made in 1995 and 2018. In a *Variety* review of the 1995 film, Susan Shields notes that the film is “silly and delightful but also infused with a decidedly feminist voice and ‘90s sensibility” (Shields 1995). Neither concept however, is explained.
209. Bullock (2012).
210. Henderson (2016, 330).
211. Kim (2006).
212. Packer (2007, 97).
213. In Keegan (2018).
214. Framke (2018) and Garber (2018).

215. Roberts (2013).
216. Turnbull (2018).
217. Sharp and Giuffre (2013, 25).
218. Mulvey (1985).
219. Gamman and Marshment (1994) and Dotterer and Bowers (1992).
220. Mitchell (2013) and Coykendall (2000).
221. MacKinnon (1990).
222. Rizov (2014).
223. Rhodes (2013).
224. Gilbey (2017, 52).
225. In her review of *The Beguiled* (1971), Karyn Kay argues “Don Siegel hates women – and fears them” (Kay 1975, 32).
226. Edelstein (2017a, 106–108).
227. Desta (2017).
228. Ma (2018).
229. Anderson (2018).
230. Ferber (2018), Oh (2017), Leonard (2009) and Schaffer (1988).
231. In Ferber (2018).
232. In Quinn (2018).
233. In Meza (2018).
234. In Stanley (2017).
235. In Mellor (2018).
236. In “All you need to know about Picnic at Hanging Rock” (2018).
237. In Moran (2017a).
238. Hogg (2013, 127–128).
239. Greenberg (1998, 117–118).
240. Craven (2017).
241. Wright (2017), Merritt (2017) and Brech (n.d.).
242. Stein (2009) and Zaslow (2009).
243. Craven (2017, 180).
244. Corliss (2007).
245. Corliss (2007).
246. Stahl (2016), Johnson (2014), Hollinger (2012) and Kramer (2003).
247. Beaumont-Thomas (2014) and Semigran (2014).
248. In Blasberg (2017).
249. In Khoo (2017).
250. In Prakash (2017).
251. Edelstein (2017b).
252. Wardlow (2017).
253. Leeds (2017).
254. Millward et al. (2017, 185).
255. Gaudiosi (2016).

256. Moir (2016, 36).
257. Rosewarne (2015).
258. Watercutter (2018).
259. Nicolaou (2018).
260. Saner (2017).
261. In Saner (2017).
262. In Gaudiosi (2016).
263. Brett (2016).
264. Galuppo and Kilkenny (2018).
265. Ovenden (2017).
266. Kanayama (2016).
267. In Saner (2017).
268. Hess (2018).
269. DiLeo (2017).
270. Knöppler (2017, 84).
271. Knöppler (2017, 84).
272. Faludi (1992).
273. Kawin (1987, 109).
274. In Corliss (2005).
275. Wildermuth (2007, 121).
276. Kinzel (2015, 125–216).
277. “Must see” (2011).
278. Meisler (1994).
279. McCormick (1994).
280. Hoover and Howard (1995, 964).
281. Humbert (2001, 14).
282. Fletcher (1998, 85).
283. In Harris (1993).
284. Johnson (2005).
285. Mazdon (2000, 116).
286. Ford and Mitchell (2004, 46).
287. Potts (1995).
288. Cuthbert (1993).
289. Canby (1991).
290. Bechtel (2005, 27).
291. Nicolaou (2018).
292. Angelo (2011).
293. Proposed, for example, was *What About Barb?* (2017) a sex-swap series based on the comedy *What About Bob?* (1991). The pilot was not picked up (Ausiello 2017).
294. Garavelli (2017).

295. Garavelli (2017). A similar point is made by Hazel Cills in *Jezebel*, who notes, “Frankly, all the gender-bending of movies originally starring men, while it may seem progressive on the surface, seems like a distraction from the more deep-rooted problems regarding sexism in the movie and TV industry” (Cills 2018).
296. Kiang (2015).
297. McDonald (2015).
298. Nahman (2016).
299. Ovenden (2017).
300. Communications theorist Alex Bevan observes that “remakes are popularly dismissed as creative laziness and a postmodern death of new ideas” (Bevan 2013, 307). Cultural theorist Joyce Goggin similarly notes that “remakes and sequels remain a much-maligned category, invariably criticised as a form of lassitude on the part of directors and producers who opt out for a known commodity, banking on viewer familiarity with the ‘original’ to guarantee a presold product” (Goggin 2010, 105).
301. Laffly (2016).
302. Brett (2016).
303. Packer (2007, 97).
304. Hirsch (1999, 60).
305. Vice (2004).
306. Strauss (2005).
307. “Feminism in Chick Flicks” (n.d.).
308. Carlson (2018).
309. Henderson (2016).
310. Johnson (2013).
311. Stasia (2014, 115–116).
312. Projansky (2001, 120).
313. Douglas and Michaels (2004, 203).
314. Vice (2004).
315. Henderson (2016, 326).
316. Schweishelm (2012, 120).
317. Schweishelm (2012, 107).
318. Erb (2010, 86).
319. Baker (2003).
320. Another sex-swapped Sherlock Holmes transpires in the Canadian series *The Adventures of Shirley Holmes* (1996–2000), where Shirley (Meredith Henderson), the grand-niece of Sherlock Holmes, is the detective.
321. Lizardi (2014, 40–41).
322. Lizardi (2014, 41).
323. Lizardi (2014, 41).
324. Kristeva (1982), Clover (1992), Creed (1993), Berenstein (1996) and Pinedo (1997).

325. Lizardi (2010, 114).
326. Lizardi (2010, 117).
327. McLean (2008).
328. Haskell (1979).
329. Heller-Nicholas (2010, 90).
330. Adams (2014).
331. Dargis (2011).
332. Tookey (2009).
333. Ebert (2010, 157).
334. Tookey (2009).
335. Berkman (1993).
336. Nowlan and Wright Nowlan (1989, 14).
337. "Violent remake of '62 'Cape Fear'" (1992).
338. Ussher (1997, 133).
339. Kolker (1998, 42).
340. Lizardi (2010, 118).
341. Lizardi (2010, 118).
342. Lizardi (2010, 118–119).
343. Lizardi (2010, 119).
344. In White (1998, 109).
345. Leitch (2003, 256).
346. Kolker (1998, 42–43).
347. Krieger (2017).
348. Bramesco (2016).
349. VanDerWerff (2015).
350. Rosewarne (2018, 160).
351. "The body politics" (2003).
352. Massey (2007, 139).
353. Massey (2007, 139).
354. VanDerWerff (2015).
355. Varndell (2014, 17).
356. Nowlan and Wright Nowlan (1989, 93).
357. Lavigne (2011, 62).
358. Grindstaff (2002, 295).
359. Grindstaff (2002, 295).
360. Francis (2013, 127).
361. Flint (2017).
362. Marcovitch (2011, 179).
363. Saporito (2016).
364. Boseovski and Marcovitch (2011, 146).
365. Griffin (2008, 157).
366. Vincendeau (1993, 23).
367. Goscilo (2014, 59).

368. Hess (2018).
369. Gwynne (2013) and Ford and Mitchell (2004).
370. Gilligan (2011, 168).
371. Ford and Mitchell (2004, 45).
372. Ford and Mitchell (2004, 47).
373. Stasia (2014, 125).
374. Stasia (2014, 117).
375. Radical feminist Sheila Jeffreys proposes a concept called the “sexual corvée” describing “the unpaid labour that women are required to perform to make themselves sexually exciting to men, both inside and outside the home” (Jeffreys 2012, 126).
376. Hess (2018).
377. Travers (2018).
378. Phillips (2018).
379. Scheer (1980).
380. The fact, for example, that *The Best Man*, *Diary of a Tired Black Man*, and *Not Easily Broken* are each described as a sex-swapped riff of *Waiting to Exhale* is likely less an argument of these films being *remakes* and more so flagging the films’ shared black cast and focus on romantic relationships.
381. Johnson (1999).
382. Milam (2009).
383. Phillips (2009).
384. Patterson (2008).
385. Janusonis (2009).
386. Jemison (2010).
387. Mutton (2012).
388. Chase (2012).
389. Chase (2014).
390. Necessary (2018) and Wong (2018).
391. Nashawaty (2011).
392. Henderson (2016, 329).
393. Henderson (2016, 330).

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CHAPTER 3

Sexing the Remake: The Sexy, Less Sexy, Queer, and Not-So Screen Do-Overs

In conservative columnist L. Brent Bozell III's *Washington Times* article on remakes, he outlines what he sees as trends in Hollywood moviemaking:

The easiest way to get a “green light” for a movie in Hollywood these days is to steal someone else’s old idea. That old idea, however, must be updated. With Hollywood there’s just one formula: cinematic remakes of vintage TV shows or old movies are almost always made sleazier – more sexual, more violent, more obscene and more cynical – than the original. According to Hollywood’s calculations, today’s young audiences will be disappointed if there isn’t an over-the-top raunchy moment every two minutes or so. This is the mandate to be “modern,” to avoid the stench of appearing – watch Hollywood squirm here – *wholesome*.¹

While his rebuke is scathing—“Hollywood is not only peddling raunch to children, it is disguising the raunch in its parental advisories”²—Bozell nonetheless helps to introduce a key mode of modernization in remaking: sex. Writing for *Macleans*, Brian Johnson observes that remakes “like to up the ante,”³ and just as narratives get *upped* through new technology, or modern approaches to topics like gender (Chap. 2), sexy content can also achieve this. Film theorist Robert Eberwein, in his taxonomy of remakes, lists one category as, “A remake that reworks more explicitly the sexual relations of a film.”⁴ This chapter, in part, focuses on this category, exploring film and television that has been remade with a higher sexual quotient. While this book predominantly focuses on mainstream screen presentations,

in this chapter I also briefly discuss pornographic do-overs whereby a pre-made title is given an explicitly erotic spin.

Another key component of this chapter is queer content used as a modernizing device. Films disproportionately focus on heterosexual relations and thus sexier remakes commonly involve steamier takes on male/female interactions. On occasions, however, the content is remade as queer. This can involve a kind of *queer-swap* where—akin to the sex-swaps discussed in Chap. 2—a character or cast is reimagined as queer: commonly homosexual or, occasionally, as gender non-conforming. This can also be accomplished by reintroducing queer content that appeared in an original play or novel but was eliminated from early screen adaptations; alternatively, it can involve the insertion of entirely new queer content.

While there are many examples of remakes that are, as Bozell outlines, made more raunchy, contrary to his claim there actually isn't only *one formula* in remaking. Also explored in this chapter are instances where a film is remade as *less sexy*. The Hays Code—the set of moral guidelines driving film production in the US from 1934 until the late 1960s—meant that films made during this period were often quite chaste. Remakes produced in compliance with the Code therefore—for example, new takes on silent and black-and-white features from the earliest days of cinema—commonly had *less* sexual content than pre-Code ordinary material. On occasions, even *post-Code* remakes sometimes tone down the sexiness. Explanations for this are proposed in this chapter. Also examined are instances where a remake becomes *less* sexually progressive: just as a remake might occasionally have less sex or nudity, a new version can also *reduce* the queer content.

I begin this chapter by problematizing the notion of a sexier remake and provide an overview of the discourse surrounding such titles.

A MODERN REWORKING OF SEX

In reviews and academic analyses of remakes, oftentimes a new film is described as being more erotic via the use of adjectives such as *steamier*, *sexier*, or *sexed-up*:

- The drama *The Blue Lagoon* (1949)—a remake of *The Blue Lagoon* (1923)—as an “inferentially salacious remake.”⁵ The 1980 version was similarly described as a “steamy remake.”⁶
- The romance *Mogambo* (1953) as “a lusty remake,”⁷ and a “steamy”⁸ take on *Red Dust* (1932).

- The biblical epic *The Ten Commandments* (1956)—Cecil B. DeMille’s autoremake of his 1923 film—as “a carnival sideshow of devilry and debauchery, swathed in the protective blanket of being based on the Bible.”⁹
- The horror film *Dracula* (1958)—yet another retelling of the much-adapted Bram Stoker story (1897), first thought to have been filmed in 1921 in Hungary—as a “much sexier version of Dracula.”¹⁰ *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992) has similarly been described as a “sensuous remake.”¹¹
- The mystery *Farewell, My Lovely* (1975) as a “sexy adaptation” of the Raymond Chandler novel (1940), filmed previously as *The Falcon Takes Over* (1942), and *Murder, My Sweet* (1944).¹²
- The horror film *Demon Seed* (1977) as an “erotic remake” of the sci-fi *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).¹³
- The crime-drama *Body Heat* (1981) as a “steamy remake” of *Double Indemnity* (1944),¹⁴ and as “Chandler’s *Double Indemnity*... with explicit sex scenes.”¹⁵
- The drama *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981) as a “super-sexy remake,”¹⁶ a “steamy remake,”¹⁷ and a “violently erotic remake”¹⁸ of the 1946 film, both being adaptations of the 1941 James Cain novel.
- The horror film *Cat People* (1982) as a “sexy remake,”¹⁹ a “sensuous remake,”²⁰ a “sexually explicit remake,”²¹ and an “erotic remake”²² of the 1942 film.
- The crime-drama *Against All Odds* (1984) as a “steamy, sensuous remake,”²³ and a “sexy remake”²⁴ of *Out of the Past* (1947).
- The British horror film *Edge of Sanity* (1989) as a “kinky, quirky update,”²⁵ as a “sexed-up remake of the Jekyll/Hyde legend,”²⁶ and as a kind of a “horror stag movie.”²⁷
- The crime-drama *The Getaway* (1994) as a “hot”²⁸ and “hotter”²⁹ remake of the 1972 film.
- The made-for-television drama *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1995) as a “steamy adaptation” of the Tennessee Williams play (1947), most famously filmed in 1951.³⁰
- The romance *Othello* (1995) as a “sexy adaptation” of the Shakespeare play,³¹ first filmed in 1906.
- The British mini-series *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) as a “sexy adaptation”³² and a “sexed-up adaptation”³³ of the Jane Austen (1813) novel, filmed previously in 1940 and 1980.

- The drama *Showgirls* (1995) as a “borderline-pornographic remake” of *All About Eve* (1950),³⁴ as a “soft-porn version” of the earlier film,³⁵ and as “*All About Eve* with a G-string.”³⁶
- The action film *Barb Wire* (1996) as a “sexed-up remake” of *Casablanca* (1942).³⁷
- Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) as a “sexed-up adaptation,”³⁸ and as “a sexy, violent and almost psychedelic interpretation”³⁹ of the Shakespeare play, first filmed in 1900.
- The British period-drama *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders* (1996) as a “raunchy adaptation” of the Daniel Defoe novel (1722), first filmed in 1965.⁴⁰
- The drama *Lolita* (1997) as a “steamy remake”⁴¹ and an “erotically-charged, sensual remake”⁴² of the 1962 film, both adapted from Vladimir Nabokov’s 1955 novel.
- The romance *Great Expectations* (1998) as a “steamy remake”⁴³ and a “sexy adaptation”⁴⁴ of the 1861 Charles Dickens novel, first filmed in 1917.
- The romance *Cruel Intentions* (1999) as a “sexy remake” of the French film *Les liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous Liaisons*) (1959).⁴⁵
- The heist film *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999) as a “steamy remake,”⁴⁶ as “superbly sexy,”⁴⁷ and as “an enjoyably adult, sexy remake”⁴⁸ of the 1968 film.
- The drama *Coyote Ugly* (2000) as an “explosively salacious remake of *Cocktail* [1988].”⁴⁹
- The sci-fi film *Hollow Man* (2000) as a “gritty, sexy remake” of *The Invisible Man* (1933).⁵⁰
- The mini-series drama *Doctor Zhivago* (2002) as an “erotic *Doctor Zhivago* [1965] remake,”⁵¹ and a “steamy remake.”⁵²
- The romantic-comedy *Swept Away* (2002) as a “steamy remake” of the Italian film *Travolti da un insolito destino nell’azzurro mare d’agosto* (*Swept Away*) (1974).⁵³
- The horror film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) as a “sexy remake” and a “sexed-up remake”⁵⁴ of the 1974 film.
- The adventure-comedy *The Dukes of Hazzard* (2005) as a “raunchy remake” of the television series (1979–1985).⁵⁵
- The crime-drama *Miami Vice* (2006) as a “steamy remake of the old TV show” (1984–1990).⁵⁶

- The British mini-series *Fanny Hill* (2007) as a “steamy adaptation”⁵⁷ and a “raunchy adaptation”⁵⁸ of John Cleland’s 1768 novel *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, first filmed in 1964.
- The romcom *The Heartbreak Kid* (2007) as a “raunchy remake” of the 1972 film.⁵⁹
- The romcom *I Think I Love My Wife* (2007) as a “raunchy remake” of the French film *L’amour l’après-midi (Love in the Afternoon)* (1972).⁶⁰
- The drama *Chloe* (2009) as an “erotic remake”⁶¹ and a “steamy remake”⁶² of the French thriller *Nathalie... (2003)*.
- The British period-drama *Brideshead Revisited* (2008) as a “sexed-up remake” of the 1981 film.⁶³
- The British series *Little Dorrit* (2008) as a “steamy adaptation” of Dickens’s 1857 novel, first filmed in 1913.⁶⁴
- The British mini-series *Sense and Sensibility* (2008) as a “sexy adaptation” of the 1811 Jane Austen novel, first filmed in 1971.
- The horror film *Sorority Row* (2009) as a “suspenseful, hip and sexy remake” of *The House on Sorority Row* (1983).⁶⁵
- The musical *Footloose* (2011) as a “sexed-up remake”⁶⁶ and as a sexier,⁶⁷ dirtier,⁶⁸ and bolder take⁶⁹ on the 1984 film.
- The horror film *Fright Night* (2011) as a “sexier, bloodier” remake of the 1985 film.⁷⁰
- The romance *The Deep Blue Sea* (2011) as a “steamy remake” of the 1955 film.⁷¹
- The crime-drama *The Mechanic* (2011) as a “gored-up/sexed up” remake of the 1972 film.⁷²
- The horror series *Teen Wolf* (2011–2017) as a “darker, scarier, sexier” remake of the 1985 film.⁷³
- The period-drama *Wuthering Heights* (2011) as a “sexed-up adaptation” of Emily Brontë’s novel (1847), first filmed in 1920.⁷⁴
- The period-drama *Anna Karenina* (2012) as a “steamy remake” of the 1878 Leo Tolstoy novel,⁷⁵ first filmed in 1910.
- The comedy-drama *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012) as a “sultry adaptation” of the Shakespeare play,⁷⁶ first filmed in 1913.
- The period-drama *Parade’s End* (2012) as a “steamy remake” of the Ford Madox Ford novels (1923, 1925, 1926, 1928), previously filmed for television in 1964.⁷⁷
- The comedy *The Three Stooges* (2012) as a “sexy adaptation” of the work of the famous American comedy trio.⁷⁸

- The romcom *About Last Night* (2014) as a “raunchy remake” of the 1986 film.⁷⁹
- The romance *Endless Love* (2014) as a “sexy remake” of the 1981 film,⁸⁰ both adapted from Scott Spencer’s 1979 novel.
- The British drama *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (2015) as a “steamy adaptation” of D.H. Lawrence’s novel (1928), first filmed in 1955 in France.⁸¹ (Film theorist Catherine Wheatley notes, incidentally, that both the 1955 and 1981 screen adaptations were each marketed “as a sexy adaptation of a scandalous book.”)⁸²
- The action-drama *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (2015) as “a funny and sexy adaptation” of the television series (1964–1968).⁸³
- The fantasy series *Emerald City* (2016–2017) as a “sexy spin” on *The Wizard of Oz* (1925/1939).⁸⁴
- The crime-drama *Riverdale* (2016–) as a “dark and sexy,”⁸⁵ and a “violent, sexed-up adaptation”⁸⁶ of the Archie comics which first appeared on screen as *The Archie Show* (1968–1969).
- The British mini-series *War and Peace* (2016) as a “sexed-up adaptation,”⁸⁷ a “steamy adaptation,”⁸⁸ a “raunchy adaptation,”⁸⁹ and a “confident and sexy adaptation”⁹⁰ of the Tolstoy novel (1867), first filmed in 1915 in Russia.
- The action-comedy *Baywatch* (2017) as a “raunchy adaptation” of the television series (1989–2001).⁹¹
- The period-drama *The Beguiled* (2017) as a “steamy remake,”⁹² and a “sexy spin”⁹³ on the 1971 film, both based on Thomas Cullinan’s 1966 novel.
- The period-drama mini-series *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (2018) as having a “sexy sheen” and as “way hornier” than the 1975 film,⁹⁴ based on Joan Lindsay’s 1967 novel.
- The thriller *Miss Bala* (2019) as a “slicker and sexier” remake of the 2011 Mexican film.⁹⁵

In my Chap. 2 discussion of the use of reviewer descriptions like *feminist* or *politically correct*, I observe that such terms are rarely defined by the writers who deploy them. A similar observation applies to this discussion: what actually makes a film *sexier* or *raunchier* isn’t normally explained in a review, and such phrases might simply be adjectives taken from studio marketing material. For this chapter, however, I use *sexier* to describe remakes with more sexual content than the first film(s). While sometimes those films might be *sexier* as defined as more arousing, my

focus is less on audience reception and more simply on the presence of more erotic material. An important point, of course, needs to be made that sexiness—even when viewed primarily in a quantitative sense—is not clear-cut. The inherent subjectivity of sexy content is illustrated well by the discourse surrounding the aforementioned *Endless Love* (2014), the remake of Franco Zeffirelli's 1981 film. As noted, the 2014 film has been described as a “sexy remake.”⁹⁶ The very same film, however, has been criticized as a “tepid remake,”⁹⁷ and as “awfully tasteful.”⁹⁸ A review of the remake published in *The Columbus Dispatch* lamented that “[t]here’s no showcase sex scene,” unlike in the 1981 film.⁹⁹ Such conflicting commentary is identifiable in the discourse around other supposedly sexier remakes. *Mogambo*, also mentioned earlier, has been described as “a lusty remake,”¹⁰⁰ and as a “steamy remake”¹⁰¹ of *Red Dust*. Michael Druxman, however, in his book *Make It Again Sam: A Survey of Movie Remakes*, claims that in *Mogambo* “the love scenes... were toned down considerably.”¹⁰² Film writer John DiLeo similarly notes that “[r]emaking the pre-code *Red Dust* (1932) also meant cleaning it up,” and argues that “[y]ou’ll miss the racy carnal openness of *Red Dust*.”¹⁰³ A third example of this divergence is detectable in discourse around the French film drama *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*) (1960) and its US remake *Breathless* (1983). The sexiness of the first film—from the “sexy” performance of actor Jean-Paul Belmondo,¹⁰⁴ or actress Jean Seberg’s “sexy cropped [hair] cut”¹⁰⁵—has been well documented. The first film, however, wasn’t explicit in its portrayal of sex, unlike the US version, something cultural theorist Jonathan Evans discusses:

An important difference between the two movies is in the representation of sex, which takes place beneath a sheet with the music turned up loud in [Jean-Luc] Godard’s film. There is a more graphic depiction, including full frontal nudity in the American version... [T]he French film is more playful in its depiction of sex, allowing the viewer to imagine what is happening in a way that the American movie in its explicitness was not.¹⁰⁶

While the American *Breathless* includes more sex and nudity, this doesn’t necessarily mean that the presentation is more arousing: some audiences, like Evans, seemingly prefer subtlety over explicitness. Such a notion in fact, has been written about previously: film theorist Heidi Dawidoff discusses *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) and its 1981 remake and contends that the “visible sex lessens the sexiness of the atmosphere.”¹⁰⁷ Just because something has more explicit content doesn’t

mean it will necessarily be interpreted as *sexier*¹⁰⁸ or, for that matter, that added sexual content will improve a film. Paul Whittington, in his *Independent* review, for example, describes *Swept Away* as a “steamy remake.” In the same review, he criticized the film as a “passionless bore.”¹⁰⁹ *Swept Away* had more sex—was arguably a *sexier* film—but was still poorly received. Film critic Leslie Halliwell makes a similar point in his review of the drama *Rich and Famous* (1981), drawing attention to the film being an “unattractively sexed-up remake of *Old Acquaintance* [1943].”¹¹⁰ The romcom *The Heartbreak Kid* (2007) is another example, described as a “raunchy remake”¹¹¹ of the 1972 film, but also criticized as “unpleasantly vulgar.”¹¹² Film critic Roger Ebert alludes to this same disconnect in his review of the comparatively explicit 1998 remake of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) whereby among the differences between the two films was the remake’s insertion of a masturbation scene. For Ebert, this addition was *not* an improvement:

Even if Hitchcock was hinting at sexual voyeurism in his 1960 version, it is better not to represent it literally, since the jiggling of Norman’s [Vince Vaughn] head and the damp offscreen sound effects inspire a laugh at the precise moment when one is not wanted.¹¹³

Rob Young in his *Cinelinx* review of the remake presents a similar critique: “The masturbation scene is unintentionally funny because of the squishy sound effects.”¹¹⁴ While masturbation is a sex act and thus its inclusion is, theoretically, a *sexier* insertion, as I argue elsewhere, male masturbation is generally not commonly framed in mainstream film or television as erotic¹¹⁵; thus, Norman’s self-stimulation can be interpreted as an *unsexy* sexual addition. References to, and scenes of, masturbation, in fact, are used in a range of remakes to modernize the material via the insertion of sexual material that wasn’t apparent in the earlier material. My book on masturbation in popular culture chronicled several of these examples. In *Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999)—the *Taming of the Shrew* update—Michael (David Krumholtz) encourages his friend Cameron (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) to stop obsessing about a classmate deemed out of his league and to just put her in his “spank bank.” In the Western *Paint Your Wagon* (1969)—a remake of the 1954 television movie—Horton (Tom Ligon) confesses that he has never “been” with a woman and Ben (Lee Marvin) sympathizes, “That’s terrible! Did you know you could go blind?” Masturbatory blindness is also mentioned in the romcom *Love Don’t Cost*

a Thing (2003)—a remake of *Can't Buy Me Love* (1987)—when Paris (Christina Milian) suggests to Alvin (Nick Cannon) that he might be “feeling himself a little too much”: he denied this, claiming that his mother told him it would make him go blind. In *The Stepford Wives* (2004)—the remake of the 1975 film—Bobbie (Bette Midler) interrupts a boring conversation about Christmas decorations by saying, “I’m going to attach a pinecone to my vibrator and have a really merry Christmas.” In the comedy *Delivery Man* (2013)—the American remake of the French film *Starbuck* (2011)—several jokes about masturbation are made: comedian Jay Leno comments about masturbating to *Baywatch* (1989–2001) and talk show host Bill Maher jokes about self-stimulation being “a hobby.” In the crime-drama *Gone in Sixty Seconds* (2000)—a remake of the 1974 film—Tumbler (Scott Caan) describes his new favored masturbation technique:

Tumbler: Yo, so check out my new move. I call it “the Stranger.” What I do is, I sit on my hand for, like, 15, 20 minutes, until it goes numb. No feeling at all. And then I rub one out.

In *Tromeo & Juliet* (1996)—a modernization of the Shakespeare play—Tromeo (Will Keenan) masturbates to porn. In the drama series *Puberty Blues* (2012–2014)—the television adaptation of the 1981 film and 1979 novel—Martin (Jeremy Lindsay Taylor) is caught masturbating in her car by his wife (Claudia Karvan). In an episode of the drama series *Crash* (2008–2009)—the television adaptation of the 2004 film—Bo (Jake McLaughlin) and Lily (Ellen Woglom) masturbate in front of each other in lieu of intercourse. In the romcom *The Truth About Cats & Dogs* (1996)—an update of the *Cyrano de Bergerac* story—Abby (Janeane Garofalo) and Brian (Ben Chaplin) have phone sex. In *Unfaithful* (2002), the American remake of the French drama *La Femme Infidèle* (*The Unfaithful Wife*) (1969), Connie (Diane Lane) masturbates in front of her affair partner, Paul (Olivier Martinez). In a brief scene in the aforementioned *Chloe*—the remake of *Nathalie...*—Catherine (Julianne Moore) masturbates with a handheld showerhead. In the thriller *Mata Hari* (1985)—based on material first filmed in 1920—the title character (Sylvia Kristel) masturbates in a hotel room. In the Canadian romance *Les amours imaginaires* (*Heartbeats*) (2010)—a queer remake of *Jules et Jim* (*Jules and Jim*) (1962)—Francis (Xavier Dolan) masturbates while sniffing Nicolas’s (Niels Schneider) T-shirt. In the road trip comedy *Due Date*

(2010)—the remade *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* (1987)—Peter (Robert Downey Jr.) is woken by the shuffling sound of Ethan’s (Zach Galifianakis) masturbation. In a more recent example, *Holmes & Watson* (2018)—yet another take on the Arthur Conan Doyle stories—an entire courtroom scene is devoted to describing a character as an “onanist” using a variety of euphemisms. In each of these examples, sexual content—specifically masturbation—is used to update older material. Such scenes, while *sexual*, aren’t necessarily *sexy*, but nonetheless dare to present historically taboo content. Masturbation in a remake can be a way to frame the production as abreast of evolving attitudes toward sexuality, alternatively appearing a little bit titillating or shocking as a new lure for audiences.

Another aspect of the subjectivity of sex appeal is when a remake is explicitly promoted as being sexier but fails to be received as such, in turn countering the “sex sells” maxim. Feminist theorist Cristina Lucia Stasia provides a good illustration of this in her discussion of the short-lived 2011 *Charlie’s Angels* television series remake: “Despite the reboot’s increased focus on the sex appeal of the stars, both in the promotion of the series and in the series itself, the reboot still failed to find an audience.”¹¹⁶ The hot young cast was insufficient to cajole an audience into revisiting decades-old material and the series was quickly canceled. *Showgirls* is another example of a “failed” sexy remake. The promotion of *Showgirls*—a remake of *All About Eve*—was wholly premised on high-level erotic content. While the film had a successful afterlife in DVD sales,¹¹⁷ it was a box office failure and was widely panned in reviews. The film’s director, Paul Verhoeven, suggests that the critical savaging was a consequence of the marketing: “The trouble was, audiences went looking for thrills and emerged unaroused and that made them hate the film.”¹¹⁸ Here, Verhoeven alludes to one of the downsides of overhyping sexual content: audiences may judge the film as they would pornography—that is, to the extent that it makes them horny—as opposed to its merits as a movie.¹¹⁹

The subjectivity of sexiness is also relevant in the context of change over time: a film that appears “steamy” to one audience simply won’t look the same decades on. This is well-illustrated by changes in film classification. Film theorist Kevin Sandler discusses the loosening of standards transpiring in the very late 1960s and into the early 1970s, noting that “Films like *M*A*S*H** [1970], *Women in Love* [1969], and *The Boys in the Band* [1970] earned R ratings when a year earlier they may have been rated X.”¹²⁰ Some films were in fact retrospectively reclassified during this period: Sandler notes that the drama *The Killing of Sister George* (1968)

had originally been given an X rating but was revised to an R in 1972. Such relaxing of classifications also has relevance to film distribution and, in turn, box office: Sandler quotes James Edwards, Sr. of Edwards Theatres who screened *Showgirls* in his cinemas and noted that while he might have refused to do so years prior, he recognizes that “times change... and if we want to stay in business, we have to change.”¹²¹ Megan McArdle addresses such evolving standards in her 2008 article for *The Atlantic*:

I just watched *Blue Lagoon* [1980] for the first time. It’s hard to believe that it was controversial when it came out – [today] the thing could be broadcast on the Hallmark Channel without raising many eyebrows. A modern teenager would probably be more fascinated by the way Brooke Shields’ hair stays firmly planted over her breasts whenever she goes topless than the nudity.¹²²

At the time of its release, *Blue Lagoon* (1980) was criticized as “smutty,”¹²³ “kiddie porn,”¹²⁴ and “Disney nature porn.”¹²⁵ In a 1980 *Washington Post* article, Patricia Goldstone listed the film among a slew of titles made in the 1970s and 1980s “in which the marketable age for sex objects hit the playground level.”¹²⁶ Yet, as McArdle observes, when viewed decades on—notably so in an era where real pornography is effortlessly accessible—*Blue Lagoon* appears comparatively tame.

These examples each spotlight the subjectivity of sexiness—what arouses one person, in one era, is tame or a turn-off for another—but also flag the importance of not presuming that more sex or nudity necessarily makes for a better, more enjoyable or even necessarily more arousing film. Equally, while I operate from the premise that sex is a notable tool of modernization, it’s worth identifying that this is complex and that, on occasions, rather than a more explicit film appearing modern, it can in fact look anachronistic or even tone deaf. The use of female nudity is one illustration of this: that in a MeToo zeitgeist where audiences have become more conscious of, and arguably more sensitive to the treatment of women—particularly so in the film and television industries—objectifying them to sex up a narrative may be construed as anachronistic or even misogynistic. A remake that fails to consider the zeitgeist can also create controversy and suffer at the box office. Such was the case for the aforementioned *Lolita* (1997)—the remake of the 1962 film. In Paul Valley’s review of the remake, he observes that the film can’t be separated from the zeitgeist, thus leading to its box office failure:

You cannot divorce a work of art from the cultural climate in which it locates itself. And today child sex abuse is not the sad perversion of a handful of obscure individuals but a national obsession. The dead children of Belgium, the children's home scandals of Wales and the kidnapped children of Florida remain with us. Child pornography on the Internet is said to be a \$5 billion industry.¹²⁷

While the newer *Lolita* might be steamier and more sensual than the 1962 film, arguably in the 1990s these factors worked to render the remake more problematic at a time of heightened awareness of, and concerns about the sexual abuse of children and, thus, ultimately resulted in a substantially *less sexy* remake.¹²⁸ Equally, over a decade on from McArdle's comments, while the on-screen images of *Blue Lagoon* might no longer "raise many eyebrows," the fact that Brooke Shields was 14 years old at the time of filming might have delivered different kinds of controversy had it been released today. (The same could be said for the appearance of a naked 15-year-old Olivia Hussey in *Romeo and Juliet* [1968], or a naked 16-year-old Claire Danes in *Romeo + Juliet* [1996], discussed later in this chapter.)

While, as noted, most critics don't define terms like *steamier* or *raunchier*, in the sections that follow I examine examples of films remade as sexier through three techniques: sexy talent, more nudity, and more sex.

THE SEXY TALENT

As discussed throughout this book, remakes frequently capitalize on the past success(es) of an actor in the hope that a new title can benefit from their established stardom and fan base. As related to sexier remakes, the hope is that a new film can exploit an actor's sex appeal, in turn imbuing a new title with reflected erotic enticements. In a discussion of Rita Hayworth's casting in *Miss Sadie Thompson* (1953)—a remake of *Sadie Thompson* (1928)—cultural theorist Jennifer Forrest notes that in the film "Hayworth draws upon the heritage of her seductive singing roles in *Gilda* [1946] and *Affair in Trinidad* [1952]."¹²⁹ Stephen Dalton in *The Times* posits a similar idea regarding *One Million Years B.C.* (1966)—a remake of *One Million B.C.* (1940)—describing it as "largely a vehicle for... Raquel Welch's busty charms."¹³⁰ Film theorist Roy Kinnard also flags Welch's contribution to the remake: "The 1966 color remake... was a huge success when the canny publicity department at 20th Century-Fox

promoted rising starlet Raquel Welch's physique."¹³¹ In a discussion of *The Outlaw* (1943)—previously filmed as *Billy the Kid* (1930)—the marketing campaign centered squarely on Jane Russell's sex appeal, something Kristin Hunt discusses in *Vulture*:

Howard Hughes mounted the most boob-forward publicity campaign in history for *The Outlaw*, the Billy the Kid western that was really about Jane Russell's eye-popping cleavage. Ads featured Russell reclining on a bale of hay in low-cut peasant blouses, with copy asking, "How would you like to tussle with Russell?" and, "What are the two greatest reasons for Jane Russell's rise to stardom?" But the most notorious advertisement didn't appear in a newspaper. It was in the clouds. Hughes hired a skywriter to spell out "The Outlaw" over Los Angeles—and punctuate it with two circles, each with a dot in its center.¹³²

This idea of a remake becoming sexier through the casting of an actor with established sex appeal in fact, transpires widely. Brooke Shields was already considered a sex symbol prior to her casting in *Blue Lagoon* (1980): in 1975, at ten-years-old, she had been photographed for a *Playboy* publication called *Sugar and Spice*, and in 1978 she starred as the protagonist prostitute in the period-drama *Pretty Baby*. By the time she appeared in *Blue Lagoon*—a title already filmed twice previously—Shields had a reputation "as a young vamp and a harlot, a seasoned sexual veteran, a provocative child-woman, an erotic and sensual sex symbol, the Lolita of her generation."¹³³ Such qualities, therefore, would transfer to *Blue Lagoon*, freshening and sexualizing the material for a new audience. *Blue Lagoon*, incidentally, would then further undergird Shields's sex appeal, something she would later transfer to another remake: as the protagonist in the rom-com *Brenda Starr* (1989), a remake of *Brenda Starr, Reporter* (1945). Casting an established bombshell to imbue a remake with erotic appeal is identifiable widely:

- Jean Harlow's role in the romcom *Personal Property* (1937)—a remake of *The Man in Possession* (1931)—capitalized on the sexiness she established through *Red Dust* and *Dinner at Eight* (1933).
- Betty Grable was a popular World War I pin-up model and cultivated her sex appeal in the musicals *Pin Up Girl* (1944) and *Sweet Rosie O'Grady* (1943), the latter a remake of *Love Is News* (1937). Grable later deployed her appeals to musical remakes, including *How to Be*

- Very, Very Popular* (1955), a remake of *She Loves Me Not* (1934); *Three for the Show* (1955), a remake of *Too Many Husbands* (1940); *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), a remake of *The Greeks Had a Word for Them* (1932); *The Farmer Takes a Wife* (1953), a remake of the 1935 film; *Meet Me After the Show* (1951), a remake of *He Married His Wife* (1940); and *Wabash Avenue* (1950), a remake of *Coney Island* (1943), both which starred Grable.
- Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot* (1959)—a remake of the German film *Fanfaren der Liebe* (*Fanfares of Love*) (1951)—took advantage of the bombshell status she earned in titles like *How to Marry a Millionaire*, *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953).
 - Elizabeth Taylor in the period-drama *Cleopatra* (1963)—another telling of a story filmed several times since 1912—capitalized on her sexy appearances in titles like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) and *BUTterfield 8* (1960).
 - Lana Turner was a sexy addition to many remakes, for example the dramas *Madame X* (1966), a remake of material first filmed in 1916; *Imitation of Life* (1959), a remake of the 1934 film; *The Rains of Ranchipur* (1955), a remake of *The Rains Came* (1939); and *Flame and the Flesh* (1954), a remake of the French film *Naples au baiser de feu* (*The Kiss of Fire*) (1925). Each role built upon her seductive appearances in earlier titles like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) and *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952).
 - Andie MacDowell had a career as a model and then a breakthrough role in the drama *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989). She then channeled her erotic appeal into the Western *Bad Girls* (1994), a title that was discussed in Chap. 2 as a sex-swapped *Young Guns* (1998).
 - Jessica Lange's role as a seductress in two remakes—*King Kong* (1976), the remake of the 1933 title, and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981), the remake of the 1946 film—established her as a sex symbol, a status that she would draw on in additional remakes, including the drama *Men Don't Leave* (1990), a remake of the French film *La vie continue* (*Life Goes On*) (1981); the thriller *Cape Fear* (1991), the remake of the 1962 film; the crime-drama *Night and the City* (1992), the remake of the 1950 film; the television remake *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1995); and the drama *A Thousand Acres* (1997), a contemporary version of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, first filmed in 1910.

- Sharon Stone, whose role in the crime-drama *Basic Instinct* (1992) established her as a sex symbol, parlayed her appeal into remakes including the drama *Intersection* (1994), the remake of the French film *Les choses de la vie* (*These Things Happen*) (1970); the thriller *Diabolique* (1996), the remake of the French film *Les diaboliques* (1955); and the crime-drama *Gloria* (1999), a remake of the 1980 film.
- Cameron Diaz had a career as a model and then built upon her sex appeal in comedies like *The Mask* (1994) and *There's Something About Mary* (1998). She then channeled her sexiness into *Charlie's Angels* (2000), the first film adaptation of the television series (1976–1981), and the drama *Vanilla Sky* (2001), a remake of the Spanish film *Abre los ojos* (*Open Your Eyes*) (1997).
- Pamela Anderson starred in the aforementioned *Barb Wire*—a remake of *Casablanca*—and, in doing so, capitalized on the bombshell appeal she had established through appearances in *Playboy* and her recurring role in *Baywatch* (1989–2001).
- Angelina Jolie's sex symbol status was solidified in the biopic *Gia* (1998) and the action film *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001). Her appeal was then channeled into remakes, including the fairytale *Maleficent* (2014), a live-action remake of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959); the crime-drama *The Tourist* (2010), a remake of the French film *Anthony Zimmer* (2005); and the drama *Original Sin* (2001), a remake of *La sirène du Mississippi* (*Mississippi Mermaid*) (1969).
- Scarlett Johansson in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017)—the American live-action remake of the Japanese animation *Kôkaku Kidôtai* (*Ghost in the Shell*) (1995)—capitalized on the erotic appeal she had established through titles like the sci-fi *Lucy* (2014) and the drama *Don Jon* (2013). Arguably Johansson's earlier casting in the crime-drama *The Black Dahlia* (2006)—based on a story filmed previously as *The Blue Dahlia* (1946) and *Who is the Black Dahlia?* (1975)—also, similarly, took advantage of the appeal she established through the drama *Lost in Translation* (2003).

Sexy remakes can also capitalize on hype surrounding a particular performer in a specific role. While casting “sexy” talent can always attract attention, such buzz is amplified when there is a perceived juxtaposition between the performer and their character. Film theorist Robert Sickels discusses the *Showgirls*'s pre-release furore, notably the casting of Elizabeth Berkley, who,

at the time, was primarily known to audiences as the star of the teen television series *Saved by the Bell* (1989–1992).¹³⁴ In this example, an actress who had become famous playing a high schooler was “jarringly” cast as an erotic dancer. The idea of former child stars sexing up their image has become a cliché,¹³⁵ and remakes can provide vehicles to do this. Former Disney star Miley Cyrus arguably accomplishes this through the comedy-drama *LOL* (2012), the US remake of the French film *Lol* (2008). Cyrus had become famous playing the title character in the youth-oriented *Hannah Montana* (2006–2011). At the conclusion of the series, Cyrus attempted to reinvent herself as a sex symbol¹³⁶: her appearance in *LOL* can be viewed as part of her personal brand transformation. Disney star Vanessa Hudgens’s role in the drama *Beastly* (2011), a modern, sexy spin on the *Beauty and the Beast* story, could similarly be construed as part of her transition into adult stardom.

Casting is also relevant to this discussion via the use of sexy teen stars as a conscious way to entice a new generation of filmgoers: pre-publicity for *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), for example, repeatedly drew attention to it being a film “for the MTV generation,”¹³⁷ and flagging that the film consciously cast actors that were the same age as the intended generation of viewers. While sexiness is commonly used as a drawcard in film marketing (explored later in this chapter), in some genres freshening material with contemporary sexy stars is disproportionately used to modernize. Mentioned earlier was Betty Grable, who brought her bombshell appeal to a range of musical remakes. In the 1940s and 1950s, freshening old material with music and celebrity was commonplace: Druxman, for example, observes: “[Twentieth Century Fox’s Darryl] Zanuck found that the ‘old switcheroo’ was a good way to supply *all* his musical talent – Alice Faye and the Misses Grable and [June] Haver – with stories for their films.”¹³⁸ In more recent years, James Francis in his book *Remaking Horror: Hollywood’s New Reliance on Scares of Old* discusses this same tactic used in horror remaking, observing that casting young, sexy talent works to update material to deliver it contemporary appeal. Francis spotlights the casting of socialite heiress Paris Hilton in *House of Wax* (2005)—a remake of *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933)/*House of Wax* (1953)—as such an example.

While it is typical to think of sex and sex appeal as something distinctly *feminine*—after all, the gaze of most filmmakers is male—there are certainly examples where leading men, matinee idols, and male heartthrobs channel their appeals into a remake to boost its sexual quotient (and, presumably, also box office). Film scholar David Meuel discusses *Mogambo* as instrumental in resurrecting the career of Clark Gable:

Conceived by MGM executives as a comeback vehicle for an aging Clark Gable (who hadn't made a good film in years), [*Mogambo* is] an unabashed remake of *Red Dust*, another Gable-centered love triangle made all the way back in 1932.¹³⁹

Gable, an actor who had honed his desirability through films like the period-drama *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and the screwball comedy *It Happened One Night* (1934), transferred his appeals to *Mogambo*. Other leading men have been cast in remakes to utilize similar appeals:

- Cary Grant had been established as a debonair leading man in the screwball comedies *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) and *His Girl Friday* (1940), the latter a remake of *The Front Page* (1931). Grant redirected his charisma to a range of other roles, including appearances in remakes like the thriller *Notorious* (1946), a remake of *Convoy* (1927); the romcom *People Will Talk* (1951), a remake of the German drama *Frauenarzt Dr. Prätorius* (*Doctor Praetorius*) (1950); the romance *An Affair to Remember* (1957), a remake of *Love Affair* (1939); and the romcom *Walk Don't Run* (1966), a remake of *The More the Merrier* (1943).
- Humphrey Bogart became a sex symbol through roles in *Casablanca* and the film-noir *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), itself a remake of the 1931 film. Bogart jockeyed his handsome-leading-man status into further films, including the war-drama *Sahara* (1943), a remake of the Soviet Union film *Trinadtsat* (1937).
- Elvis Presley in the musical-drama *Kid Galahad* (1962), a remake of the 1937 title, capitalized on his erotic appeal as both a hip-shaking musician and star of films like *Jailhouse Rock* (1957) and *Blue Hawaii* (1961).
- Paul Newman became known as a sex symbol through titles like *The Hustler* (1961), *The Long, Hot Summer* (1958), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958). He parlayed that appeal into the Western *The Outrage* (1964), a remake of the Japanese film *Rashômon* (1950).
- Pierce Brosnan was established as a handsome leading man in the mystery television series *Remington Steele* (1982–1987). His appeal was then channeled into a range of remakes including the mini-series *Around the World in 80 Days* (1989)—based on Jules Verne's 1873 novel, first filmed in Germany in 1919; *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999), a remake of the 1968 film; and the drama *The Greatest* (2009), discussed in Chap. 2 as a sex-swapped remake of *Moonlight Mile* (2002).

- Richard Gere's roles in romantic-dramas *American Gigolo* (1980) and *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982) established him as a desirable leading man. Gere then channeled his sex appeal into remakes including the aforementioned *Breathless*, *Intersection*, and *Unfaithful*, as well as the period-drama *Sommersby* (1993), a remake of the French film *Le retour de Martin Guerre* (*The Return of Martin Guerre*) (1982), and *Shall We Dance?* (2004), a remake of the Japanese film *Shall we dansu?* (*Shall We Dance?*) (1996).
- George Clooney achieved sex symbol status in the television series *ER* (1994–2009). His appeal was then channeled into remakes, including the heist film *Ocean's 11* (2001), a remake of the 1960 film; the sci-fi film *Solaris* (2002), a remake of the 1971 film; and also the mini-series *Catch-22* (2019–), another adaptation of the Joseph Heller novel (1961), first filmed in 1970.
- Johnny Depp became a heartthrob through the television series *21 Jump Street* (1987–1990). His appeals were then directed into a range of remakes including the aforementioned *The Tourist*, as well as new adaptations of previously filmed material like the horror film *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) (based on a short story first filmed in 1922 as *The Headless Horseman*); the horror-musical *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) (first filmed in 1926); the live-action features *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) (first filmed in 1903); and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2016) (first filmed in 1928). Depp also starred in the fantasy-horror *Dark Shadows* (2012), a film adaptation of the television series (1966–1971).
- Jeremy Irons honed a dark sex appeal through films like the thriller *Dead Ringers* (1988) and the drama *Damage* (1992). His appeal was then channeled into remakes such as *Lolita* (1997), as well as adaptations of literature such as *The Man in the Iron Mask* (1998) (first filmed in 1939), *The Merchant of Venice* (2004) (first filmed in 1914), and *Casanova* (2005) (first filmed in 1919).
- Mark Wahlberg, who had performed as a musician under the name Marky Mark—and fronted a famous Calvin Klein underwear campaign in 1992—channeled his sex appeal into starring roles in numerous crime-drama remakes, including *The Gambler* (2014), a remake of the 1974 film; *The Departed* (2006), a remake of the Hong Kong film *Mou gaan dou* (*Infernal Affairs*) (2002); *Four Brothers* (2005), a remake of *The Sons of Katie Elder* (1965); *The Italian Job* (2003), a remake of the 1969 film; and *The Truth About Charlie* (2002), a remake of *Charade* (1963).

- Brad Pitt honed his sex appeal in films like the crime-dramas *Thelma & Louise* (1991) and *Kalifornia* (1993) and transferred it to roles in remakes like the aforementioned *Ocean's 11* (2001), as well as the drama *Meet Joe Black* (1998), a remake of *Death Takes a Holiday* (1934), and the sci-fi *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), a remake of the short film *La Jetée (The Pier)* (1962).
- Tom Cruise became a teen heartthrob in films like *The Outsiders* (1983) and *Risky Business* (1983). His appeal was then channeled into remake roles in the aforementioned *Vanilla Sky*, the war-drama *Valkyrie* (2008), a remake of the German film *Es geschah am 20. Juli (It Happened on July 20th)* (1955), and the horror film *The Mummy* (2017), previously filmed in 1932 and 1999.
- John Travolta became a sex symbol in the musicals *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and *Grease* (1978). His appeal was later channeled into remakes, including *Boris and Natasha* (1992), a live-action spin on the television series *Rocky and His Friends* (1959–1961); the musical *Hairspray* (2007), the remake of the 1988 film; and the thriller *The Taking of Pelham 123* (2009), a remake of the 1974 film.
- Robert Downey Jr. earned bad-boy heartthrob status in the drama *Less Than Zero* (1987) and the action-comedy *Air America* (1990). His appeal was then shared in remakes including *Richard III* (1995), a contemporary update of the Shakespeare play (first filmed in 1939 as *Tower of London*); the comedy-fantasy *The Shaggy Dog* (2006), the remake of the 1959 film; *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), another reprisal of the Arthur Conan Doyle character; and the aforementioned comedy *Due Date*.

Directors of sexy remakes can also capitalize on their association with erotic content: marketing material often uses phrases like “from the people who brought you” or “from the director of” as a prompt to audiences to recall an older, successful title and be tempted back into the cinema. Sandler discusses this in the context of the *Showgirls* marketing:

Capitalizing on the notoriety of the Verhoeven/[Joe] Ezsterhas team from *Basic Instinct*, this trailer promised that “last time they took you to the edge; this time, they’re taking you all the way.”¹⁴⁰

Like every film, remakes have a remit to build an audience, but they also have the extra burden of luring filmgoers into a movie they’ve already

seen: when a director of earlier sexy material leads a new (and possibly sexy) remake project, new erotic enticements are created:

- Verhoeven directed *Basic Instinct* (1992) and would go onto direct the remake *Showgirls*. In *Showgirls*, he again collaborated with writer Joe Ezsterhas, leading to the duo being described as “the Barnum and Bailey of cinematic psychosex.”¹⁴¹
- Gus Van Sant had honed a reputation for both sexy and queer filmmaking through titles like the crime-drama *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989) and the *Henry IV* modernization *My Own Private Idaho* (1991). Van Sant would go onto channel his reputation into the remake *Psycho* (1998).
- Adrian Lyne established a reputation for directing sexually explicit content via the drama *9½ Weeks* (1986). He would then direct a range of erotic remakes including the drama *Fatal Attraction* (1987), a remake of the British film *Diversion* (1980), the aforementioned *Unfaithful*, and also *Lolita* (1997).
- Paul Schrader honed his craft directing sexy films like *American Gigolo* and the thriller *Hardcore* (1979). He would go on to direct the sexed-up remake *Cat People* (1982).
- Brian De Palma had become famous directing films with confronting erotic content like the horror film *Carrie* (1976). He would go onto direct the aforementioned *The Black Dahlia* (2006), as well as the drama *Passion* (2012), the US remake of the French film *Crime d’amour* (*Love Crime*) (2010).

In each of these examples, an attempt is made to capitalize on the sexiness of personnel via a remake project. In the next two sections two other means of positioning a remake as sexier are explored: more nudity and more sex.

NOW WITH MORE NUDITY!

Nudity on screen is disproportionately female and, thus, attempts to use sex to modernize material is often highly reliant on *women’s bodies*. The *sexiness* and *raunchiness* of the remakes already discussed, therefore, is disproportionately achieved via the display of women: *women’s* nudity is, invariably, a metonym for sexuality and sexiness. While such presentations are often illustrative of the male gaze and thus can be demonstrative of

objectification (Chap. 2), for the purposes of this discussion such films are also attempts to cater to an audience that has increased comfort with—and perhaps is even expecting of—more explicit content.

In Chap. 2, I discussed *Viva Laughlin* (2007), the short-lived American television remake of the successful British series *Blackpool* (2004): in the US adaptation, the sexual quotient was amplified via “superfluous, half-clothed young women.”¹⁴² I also discussed Michael Haneke’s thriller *Funny Games* (2007), an autoremake of his 1997 German-language film. While Haneke’s remake was—like *Psycho* (1998)—almost a shot-for-shot reproduction, a notable alteration in the remake was that the female torture victim (Naomi Watts) appeared in her underwear, in turn *sexualizing* the violence in a way not apparent in the earlier film. Exposing more flesh to modernize content has been used across many decades of film (re)making. Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) was one of the first screen adaptations of Shakespeare to update the material with nudity: the film provides brief shots of a naked 15-year-old Olivia Hussey; Luhrmann would use a similar technique in *Romeo + Juliet* (1996). In Druxman’s discussion of *Macbeth* (1971)—the Roman Polanski-directed and Hugh Hefner-produced Shakespeare adaptation—he also observes the use of nudity to deliver the Shakespeare project contemporary relevance:

As might be expected with such a highly publicized film from *Playboy*, the expensive Technicolor epic had its fair share of nudity, with not only witches romping around in the buff, but also Lady Macbeth (Francesca Annis) doing her famous sleepwalking scene sans a nightgown.¹⁴³

The use of nudity to modernize old material occurs widely. In their book on remakes, Robert Nowlan and Gwendolyn Wright Nowlan compared the 1980 *Blue Lagoon* to its 1923 and 1949 predecessors, the earlier titles being, comparatively, chaste: “Such was not the case for the 1980 remake, where nudity and passion were frankly displayed by Brooke Shields (or at least her double) and Christopher Atkins.”¹⁴⁴ Mentioned earlier was *Body Heat*. Several factors distinguished the film from its predecessor, *Double Indemnity*, notably Matty’s (Kathleen Turner) nudity. Similarly, while, as discussed in the next section, the sex scenes in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981) updated the material to make the film memorable decades on, so too does the nudity: Cora’s (Jessica Lange) breasts are exposed and a glimpse of her pubic hair is provided. Nudity also modernized *The Getaway* (1994), a title that showcased the bodies of

both its stars—Kim Basinger and Alec Baldwin—although revealed substantially more of Basinger, including shots of her breasts. In Max Allan Collins and James Traylor’s work on screen adaptations of Mickey Spillane novels, they discuss the crime-drama *I, The Jury* (1982), the remake of the 1953 film-noir title, also spotlighting the remake’s extensive nudity.¹⁴⁵ A *Sunday Mercury* review similarly observes how the nudity in *Great Expectations* (1998), distinguished the production from earlier screen adaptations of the Dickens story:

Unless I’m very much mistaken, Estella never took her kit off, Miss Havisham rarely chugged down dry martinis and Magwitch didn’t use the F-word. But otherwise, you might just recognise this movie as *Great Expectations*.¹⁴⁶

While the nudity in the 1998 film is brief—in a scene where Finn (Ethan Hawke) paints Estella’s (Gwyneth Paltrow) portrait—nevertheless, a seemingly nude Paltrow appears on the movie poster, demonstrating that the studio believed her sexiness to be a selling point. Nudity was even more pronounced in the promotion of *Showgirls*. The poster featured a naked Elizabeth Berkley and nudity was played up in pre-publicity interviews. In a 1995 interview on *The Late Show with David Letterman* (1993–2015), for example, Berkley teased that in making the film “I’ve spent the last four and a half months naked.”¹⁴⁷

As noted, modernization is commonly connected to female nudity, but there are examples where male nudity is used similarly. Van Sant identified some of the differences between his *Psycho* and Hitchcock’s 1960 version, flagging, “It’s very similar to the original, but... there’s more nudity and blood.”¹⁴⁸ Van Sant, in fact, utilizes *male* nudity, best illustrated in a scene displaying the buttocks of Sam (Viggo Mortensen). Similarly, among the ways that the American *Breathless* differs from its French predecessor is, again, nudity: both Jesse (Richard Gere) and Monica (Valérie Kaprisky) appear naked. The aforementioned *War and Peace* (2016) also offered a full-frontal nude scene of Lieutenant Colonel (Oscar Pearce), considered as a distinctly controversial spectacle for BBC audiences.¹⁴⁹ Even without a penis display, remakes still occasionally make strong use of male sexuality. In a discussion of *A Star Is Born* (1976), for example—a film that had previously been made in 1937 and 1954—Rebecca Keegan, writing for *Vanity Fair*, observes that throughout the 1976 film “[Kris] Kristofferson’s shirt is rarely buttoned above the navel—a selling point for the film then and now.”¹⁵⁰

Before exploring the whys of the insertion of nudity, in the next section I provide a survey of remakes boasting more sex scenes: nudity and sex are commonly included for similar reasons and thus will be analyzed together. It's important first thought, to reiterate the point made earlier about the subjectivity of sexiness, specifically as related to nudity. In Jennifer Wood's *Complex* article about this topic, she cautions, "As titillating as the phrase 'full frontal nudity' may sound, baring it all on screen is not always a sexy endeavor."¹⁵¹ In my own research on full-frontal male nudity, I analyzed a range of thoroughly *unsexy* presentations of penises in film and television whereby male nudity is depicted for reasons other than to titillate, including for comedy, to convey vulnerability, or to connote madness.¹⁵² Equally, even nudity presented as erotic isn't always construed as such. Discussing *Showgirls*, for example, Wood describes the film as "[b]oasting nudity for the sake of nudity."¹⁵³ In Geoff Brown's review for *The Times*, he contends that *Showgirls* "shows how unsexy wall-to-wall nudity can be."¹⁵⁴ Janet Maslin in *The New York Times* even goes so far as to dub *Showgirls* a "bare-buttred bore."¹⁵⁵ While there is no ability to make definitive statements about whether a film is sexy or not, the *Showgirls* reviews hint to the idea that high-level nudity won't necessarily lead to a remake being perceived as sexier.

NOW WITH MORE SEX!

While nudity might serve as a metonym for sexuality—and certainly in many of the scenes discussed in the previous section skin was indeed exposed during a sex scene—this isn't always the case: some presentations include more sex and more *sexiness* without necessarily more flesh. In this section, I provide examples of both.

Discussed already in this chapter is the small but significant tweaks made to the 1998 *Psycho* that position it as more overtly sexual: the inserted masturbation scene being the obvious example. Film theorist Fernando Canet compared the film to its 1960 predecessor, identifying some of the differences and observing that in the remake "[t]he dialogue between the lovers at the beginning is... a little bit spicier,"¹⁵⁶ and flagging the insertion of "the noise of a couple's sexual activity in an adjacent room."¹⁵⁷ Film theorist Thomas Leitch lists over 100 ways that the two films differ; one related to sex is that: "Sam touches Lila [Julianne Moore] more often than in Hitchcock's."¹⁵⁸ In the 1998 film, a line of sexy dialogue also appears that is absent from Hitchcock's: Cassidy (Chad Everett),

the Texas oilman, says to Marion (Anne Heche), “Bed? Only playground that beats Las Vegas.” Sex as a tool of modernization transpires in a range of remakes.

In his *Independent* article about change over time in the representations of sex in cinema, David Thomson compares the 1946 and 1981 versions of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*:

Sex, in American movies anyway, was Lana Turner appearing in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [1946] in a dazzlingly white, radiantly new sun-suit, as if to say to John Garfield, “That shouldn’t be so hard to remove, should it?” Thirty-five years later, in the remake, Jessica Lange hauled Jack Nicholson up on the table, slapped his hand into her crotch, and filled the soundtrack with orgasm.¹⁵⁹

While Thomson—like Dawidoff quoted earlier—alludes to the subtle sexiness of the 1946 film as contrasted with the more brazen tendencies of modern cinema, nonetheless the amplified sex in the remake is indeed part of the reason why the film got so much attention and remains so memorable. The 1981 film—described in a *New York Times* review as “far more sexually explicit than the 1946 film and, for that matter, more explicit than the book”¹⁶⁰—has become renown for several sex scenes, most notably Cora and Frank (Jack Nicholson) on the kitchen counter: a scene that reads as aggressive, if not *violent*, decodes on (although even at the time a reviewer drew attention to how Nicholson’s character “subdues Lange” in this scene).¹⁶¹ The 1981 film also has a cunnilingus scene not present in the first film, a sex act that has historically been a screen taboo.¹⁶² Such increased sex and sexiness in remakes is identifiable widely. Discussing Fritz Lang’s film-noir *Human Desire* (1954)—the US adaptation of the French film *La Bête Humaine* (1938) (itself a version of the silent German film *Die Bestie im Menschen* [1920])—film theorist R. Barton Palmer writes that Lang “emphasises the illicit eroticism of the scenes between Glenn Ford and Gloria Grahame, including an elaborate seduction sequence early on that has no counterpart in [Jean] Renoir’s version.”¹⁶³ Something similar is apparent in the discourse surrounding the aforementioned 1982 *Cat People*. In a lament mirroring Dawidoff’s and Thomson’s, John Kenneth Muir—in his book on horror—analyzes the differences between the 1942 and 1982 films, noting, “In keeping with a more free cinema in the 1980s, transformation occurs at the moment of an orgasm, not a kiss. Sign of the times, I guess.”¹⁶⁴ In David Denby’s *New York* magazine review of the same film, he similarly observes:

Everything that was hinted at in the original [1942] is spelled out, and various atrocities have been added on.... In the original *Cat People* the notion that sex could turn the heroine into a beast was a witty metaphor for men's fears of being overwhelmed by sexually ravenous women. Now that the whole notion is worked out *literally*, and applied to men too, it looks like a pretentiously macho way of making sex dangerous.¹⁶⁵

When *Double Indemnity* was updated as *Body Heat*, “sex is at the center,” observes Amayra Rivera in her *Pop Matters* analysis.¹⁶⁶ Leitch also explores the central role of sex in the update:

Sex is what marks *Body Heat*'s distance from *Double Indemnity*. It is a difference registered at every point from Ned's [William Hurt] first meeting with Matty, in which she challenges him to lick off the cherry ice she has spilled on her dress. Unlike [Billy] Wilder, who has co-written and directed one of the coldest films in Hollywood history, [Lawrence] Kasdan chooses heat as his leading metaphor for pent-up desire... Unlike *Double Indemnity*, whose representations of sex are limited to a few fatal kisses, a possibly postcoital cigarette in Walter's [Fred MacMurray] apartment... *Body Heat* wastes no opportunity for its attractive leads to make love on camera or just off.¹⁶⁷

Sex is similarly what distinguishes the 1994 *The Getaway* from its predecessor: there was sex in the first film, but it is more explicit in the remake, illustrated, for example, through the insertion of a cunnilingus scene. The presence of a cunnilingus scene was also part of the sexy modernization techniques used in *Mary Queen of Scots* (2018), helping the film distinguish itself from previous screen iterations of the life of the sixteenth-century monarch.

In 2011, director Todd Haynes made the mini-series *Mildred Pierce*, a remake of the 1945 film noir. In cultural theorist Linda Belau and Ed Cameron's analysis, they observe that “Haynes returns to the novel with a vengeance, exceeding even [writer James] Cain in his explicit depiction of sexual imagery.”¹⁶⁸ One example the authors draw on is the remake's depiction of an affair that was not included in the first film: “[Michael] Curtiz's [1945] film version, for example, could not reveal Mildred's [Joan Crawford] pre-divorce adulterous flip with Wally [Jack Carson].”¹⁶⁹

Before examining the why of all the nudity and sex in remakes, it's worth reiterating the point that more sex—like more nudity—doesn't always mean a film is perceived as sexier. *Showgirls*, for example, is famous for a swimming pool sex scene between Nomi (Elizabeth Berkley) and

Zack (Kyle MacLachlan). A decade on from its release, *Empire* magazine listed the sex scene as the worst in film history: “It’s supposed to be the best sex in the world but, as Berkley thrashes around in the water, it looks more like the first 10 minutes of *Jaws* [1975].”¹⁷⁰ In Ebert’s review, he describes *Showgirls* as “[a] waste of a perfectly good NC-17 rating.”¹⁷¹ Such remarks again underscore that sexiness is notoriously subjective.

THE SEXINESS WHYS AND WHEREFORES

In this section, I propose explanations as to why sex symbol personnel, nudity, and sex scenes are inserted into remakes, including to create hype around a film, to earn a higher classification rating, to grow an audience, to reflect the zeitgeist, and to present a more definitive film.

The Tease and the Buzz

The notion that “sex sells” has long been a maxim in advertising. Given the centrality of marketing to movies, it’s no surprise that the promise of sex is often key in film promotion. A naked Gwyneth Paltrow on the poster for *Great Expectations* (1998) is a good illustration of this; a naked Elizabeth Berkley on the *Showgirls* poster accompanied by the tagline “leave your inhibitions at the door”—a poster that Jack Mathews describes in *Newsday* as “one of the most sensually striking images to adorn a movie ad in some time”¹⁷²—serves a similar purpose. Movie poster titillation of this kind is nothing new: a sexy Rita Hayworth on the poster for the remake *Miss Sadie Thompson*, and Jane Russell on the poster for the remake *The French Line* (1953)—a remake of *The Richest Girl in the World* (1934)—with advertisements showing Russell in a low-cut swimsuit with the text “J.R. in 3D” illustrate this well. The promotion of *One Million Years B.C.* with its strategic use of Raquel Welch, and the campaign around *The Outlaw* discussed earlier, each put titillation front and center. When *A Star Is Born* was remade in 1976, sex was used again to modernize a decades-old title: the 1976 poster showed a seemingly naked Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson in an erotic embrace, framing the new title as modern through its sexiness. The rationale behind such marketing is that audiences will be enticed by erotic promise, regardless of whether the film is actually particularly sexy.¹⁷³

In his discussion of *Body Heat*, Leitch discusses the centrality of sex in the film’s marketing:

Body Heat... echoes the powerful impact of '40s *film noir* melodramas like *Double Indemnity* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [1946] – but with energy, irony and passion that could only flare out of the '80s.¹⁷⁴

Both *Showgirls* and *Body Heat* were promoted as *too hot to handle*, in turn creating buzz and tapping into the assumed voyeuristic interests of the audience, notably in a pre-Internet era. Michael Ferguson examines these issues as related to the huge marketing budget of *The Blue Lagoon* (1980): while the film only cost \$4.5 million to make, \$6.3 million was spent on advertising with sex playing a key role: “Brooke Shields had been shamelessly sold as a teen (and pre-teen) sexpot... With *The Blue Lagoon*, prurience played a major role in the film’s marketing and box office.”¹⁷⁵ Similarly, while *The Getaway* (1972) had been “marketed as a sexy action blockbuster, with added heat provided by the offscreen relationship of [Steve] McQueen and [Ali] MacGraw”¹⁷⁶—the poster for the first film used the unambiguous tagline “they’re hot”—when the film was remade in 1994, the same marketing techniques were used: the stars Baldwin and Basinger were a newly married celebrity couple, and thus the film’s marketing exploited celebrity-couple voyeurism and amplified the titillating themes that had been used in promoting the 1972 film.

Movie posters and associated marketing create anticipation for a title and frame the feel of a film in advance of its release. Another way this is achieved is by courting pre-release controversy: as relevant to this chapter, the aforementioned *too hot to handle* content as transpired with the *Showgirls*’s “we can’t show you a thing” theatrical teaser provides an example of an attempt to court pre-release controversy. Commentary in advance of the film’s release certainly bought into the hype, speculating on just how far the hot content might be taken:

Just how far can a mainstream film go in sexual content? That’s what director Paul Verhoeven vowed to find out with *Showgirls*, his latest collaboration with *Basic Instinct* mega-priced writer Joe Eszterhas. And with about two weeks to go on the \$40 million movie’s production, it appears Verhoeven has done his utmost to push the edge of the erotic envelope.¹⁷⁷

Two theater chains in southern states of the US refused to screen the film, underscoring the *too hot to handle* image and further framing *Showgirls* as an illicit thrill.¹⁷⁸ (The live-action *Beauty and the Beast* [2017] remake benefited from similar bans, discussed later in this chapter.)

The centrality of not only sex but *censor-rankling sex* to the 1981 *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was flagged well in advance of its release: director Bob Rafelson, for example, chimed in interviews that he “would shoot as an X but cut to an R,”¹⁷⁹ seemingly wanting to be seen as making as explicit a film as he could get away with. Star of the film, Jack Nicholson, also spoke about wanting to push boundaries, claiming to have wanted to expose mainstream cinema’s first erection (although ultimately this didn’t happen).¹⁸⁰

Controversy about a film can sell tickets but, occasionally, can also prove more memorable than the film itself, again alluding to the notion that more sex doesn’t necessarily sell, nor make for a better, more enjoyable, or even more memorable film. Eleanor Ringel addresses this in her *Austin-American Statesman* discussion:

[S]omething arrives in theaters amid a storm of controversy – it’s too sexy, too violent, sacrilegious – then, after all the noise has died down and the movie has long since gone to video, you realize you remember the fuss more than you do the film.¹⁸¹

Ringel lists the aforementioned *Lolita* (1997) as such an example: before it was released, the film was hounded by controversy about whether it would ever get released: reports, for example, repeatedly flagged that it *was too hot to handle* for American distributors.¹⁸² Ultimately, *Lolita* was released, was a flop, and, indeed, was largely forgotten. One could argue though that the controversy helped the film make the modest amount of revenue that it did.

Boosting the Classification

In my book *American Taboo*, I explore the politics of film classifications:

While some theorists have contended that a film with a less restricted rating is able to be marketed in more places—and, therefore, is more likely to fare better at the box office—others have noted that a somewhat restricted rating actually helps with ticket sales... [Seemingly there is] an apparent “sweet spot” in regard to ratings: there is sense in inserting just enough raunchy material to have the film’s audience somewhat restricted, but not so much as to prohibitively limit distribution and revenue.¹⁸³

As relevant to this chapter on sex, in *American Taboo* I specifically discussed classification as related to full-frontal male nudity:

While making a film slightly raunchy—without making it too much so—likely explains the brief glimpse and incidental nudity offered, it also alludes to why showing much more than this could be problematic.¹⁸⁴

Creating buzz about risqué content can be part of a marketing strategy whereby a film actively wants a (slightly) higher rating. Guinevere Turner, screenwriter and actress, discusses this idea:

People want to see R-rated movies, adults and children alike, and an easy way to get an R-rating is to have sex scenes or nudity. We'd be fooling ourselves if we didn't think teenagers wanted to see sex. And in creating the taboo, we create frenzy around it.¹⁸⁵

Such a frenzy was certainly part of the *Showgirls* publicity: Ezsterhas suggested to several reporters that underage teens should use their “fake IDs” to get into the film,¹⁸⁶ again contributing to the idea of the film being an illicit thrill: a thrill that wouldn't be achieved with a less restrictive rating or wider theatrical distribution.

Classification is also relevant if a remake wants to maintain its predecessor's rating. If old titles are remade—intact—decades on, they would unlikely be able to secure their original adult classification, nor benefit from a *too hot to handle* controversy. Resultantly, new content—more nudity, more sex—might need to be added to retain an adult classification and to appear at least as cutting edge as the first film.

Audience Expansion

An obvious reason both to remake a film and, more specifically, to do so via the use of more sex, is to build an audience, hopefully at a scale greater than the earlier film. Such sexual enticements can be used to target-specific demographics who have shown disproportionate interest in risqué material. Earlier I quoted Turner, who claims that sexy content explicitly targets teen audiences. The wide variety of teen-oriented spins on Shakespeare—*Romeo and Juliet* repackaged as *Tromeo and Juliet*, as well as *West Side Story* (1961), *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), *China Girl* (1987), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *Romeo Must Die* (2000), and *Warm Bodies* (2013);

Henry IV as *My Own Private Idaho*; *Taming of the Shrew* as *Ten Things I Hate About You*; *Hamlet* as *Hamlet* (2000), *Hamlet 2* (2008), and *Ophelia* (2018); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as *A Midsummer Night's Rave* (2002) and *Get Over It* (2001); *Othello* as *Othello* (1995) and *O* (2001); *Twelfth Night* as *She's The Man* (2006) and *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993, 2012)—are each attempts to freshen centuries-old material for the lucrative youth market. Attempts to secure this demographic specifically through the inclusion of sex are widely identifiable. Mentioned earlier was Zeffirelli's 1968 take on *Romeo and Juliet*. Druxman discusses the impact of the film on the post-Code filmmaking landscape, notably as related to creating a trend for sexy spins on classic literature. He notes, for example, that because of Zeffirelli's success, "the time was right for another remake of *Wuthering Heights* – one that would appeal to the youth market."¹⁸⁷ Like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights* was a story tailor-made for a youth audience, centered squarely on the themes of adolescence and forbidden sex. Compared to earlier screen versions, the 1970 *Wuthering Heights* was substantially more sexual. In cultural theorist Amy Martin's discussion of the film, she notes, "The changes in society by 1970 and the fully British understanding of the production led to a more aggressive and explicit... interpretation of the novel."¹⁸⁸ Later adaptations would similarly use sex to modernize the material and each time the sexiness would be spotlighted in commentary. Film theorist Ben Kooyman, for example, discusses the 1992 adaptation as being:

produced in the permissive 1990s without the severe restrictions of the Hays Code hanging over production. As such, it had greater liberty to translate the more taboo content of Brontë's novel to film.¹⁸⁹

In literary theorist Hila Shachar's discussion of the 2009 mini-series, she similarly spotlights the insertion of explicit sex scenes, noting that they "modernize the story for a contemporary audience,"¹⁹⁰ and flagging that "there are numerous, quite showy, sex scenes in this adaptation, between Catherine [Charlotte Riley] and Heathcliff [Tom Hardy], and Catherine and Edgar [Andrew Lincoln]."¹⁹¹ The 2011 adaptation was also described as "sexed-up" and possessing "what could be the hottest cast in a *Wuthering Heights* film yet."¹⁹² While I have thus far discussed *post-Code* adaptations of *Wuthering Heights*, even the 1939 version—made under such conditions—tried its hand at sexiness, something Martin examines:

[Film producer Samuel] Goldwyn also approved the change of period by around half a century for the purely aesthetic reason that the costumes of the regency period would look more sumptuous and show off Merle Oberon's shoulders to their best advantage.¹⁹³

In this example, while *Wuthering Heights* (1939) was still working within the Code's rigid parameters, sex appeal was inserted to give it modern eroticism and to distinguish it from previous versions. Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) is another good example of a remake overtly courting a teen audience. Madeleine Davies wrote about the 20th anniversary of the film for *Jezebel*, observing that the film was specifically "targeted at the MTV generation":

On November 1, 1996, young people across America began packing movie theaters—not to see an action movie or a teen comedy, but to watch Baz Luhrmann's adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (spelled *Romeo + Juliet* for those in the know). And to get very, very horny, possibly for the first time ever. The soundtrack was sultry, Luhrmann's camera movements were manic, and the leads were almost too pretty to look at.¹⁹⁴

Davies spotlights the deployment of several modernization tools like fast editing and contemporary music as well as themes specific to this chapter: a hot young cast and sexier presentations. Peter Travers in *Rolling Stone* review praised the film, noting that "Shakespeare has never been this sexy onscreen."¹⁹⁵ Literature scholar Robert York similarly observes that the film "drew teenagers toward Shakespeare as no film had attempted before."¹⁹⁶ A range of remakes, in fact, have similarly attempted to court a youth audience, and have been explicitly described in commentary as *teen remakes*:

- The aforementioned *Love Don't Cost a Thing* as an "urban teen remake of 1987's *Can't Buy Me Love*."¹⁹⁷
- The drama *Sorority Girl* (1957) as "a teen remake of *The Strange One* (also 1957)."¹⁹⁸
- The romcom *Where the Boys Are* (1960) as a "sort of teen remake of *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953)."¹⁹⁹
- The romcom *Just One of the Guys* (1985) as "sort of like a teen remake of *Yentl* (1983)."²⁰⁰

- The romcom *The Sure Thing* (1985) as a “teen remake of *It Happened One Night*.”²⁰¹
- The drama *Cruel Intentions* (1999) as “the teen remake of *Dangerous Liaisons* [1988],”²⁰² itself a remake of the French film *Les liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous Liaisons*) (1959).
- The romcom *She’s All That* (1999) as a “teen remake of *Pygmalion*, better known as *My Fair Lady* [1964].”²⁰³
- The sci-fi action film *Rollerball* (2002) as a “teen remake” of the 1975 film.²⁰⁴
- The thriller *Swimfan* (2002) “as a plodding teen remake” of *Fatal Attraction* (1987).²⁰⁵
- The family-comedy *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* (2003) as a “teen remake of *Roman Holiday* [1953].”²⁰⁶
- The aforementioned horror film *House of Wax* (2005) as a “screaming-teen remake of the 1953 Vincent Price shocker.”²⁰⁷
- The horror film *The Fog* (2005) as “a hip teen remake of John Carpenter’s classic chiller [1980].”²⁰⁸
- The horror *Black Christmas* (2006) as a “teen remake of [the] 1974 slasher film.”²⁰⁹
- The thriller *Disturbia* (2007) as “essentially a teen remake of the classic *Rear Window* [1954].”²¹⁰
- The aforementioned comedy-drama *LOL* as a “teen-speak romcom remake of a French comedy of the same name” (2008).²¹¹

The youth casts and teen sex and angst apparent in these films update the material and repackage it as more modern (and seemingly more relevant) than its predecessor. While using sex to attract a teen audience makes sense—young people buy most cinema tickets, and sex is new and still likely a little bit forbidden fruit to many young people—similar techniques have also been used to specifically target adult male and female audiences.

In her discussion on Rita Hayworth’s appearance in *Miss Sadie Thompson*, Forrest notes that she provided “yet another boost for male attendance.”²¹² Here, the author identifies that at a time when films were predominantly targeting women, the use of the sexy Hayworth—notably so in 3D—functions as a specific draw for *male* audiences. Arguably, naked female stars—particularly so in literary adaptations like *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), and *Great Expectations* (1998) which are commonly viewed as *women’s stories*—are other examples of attempts to

lure men into a film that they may not normally pay to see. I have discussed this idea elsewhere in the context of the heightened sexiness of *Mary Queen of Scots*: “Having sexy celebrities in erotic situations adds sexual intrigue for viewers who likely otherwise wouldn’t be interested in yet another costume drama.”²¹³

While, as already noted in this chapter, sexiness is commonly conveyed through the bodies of women, attempts to court a *female* audience through sexy *male* performances are also identifiable. In her *USA Today* article about *The Legend of Tarzan* (2016), for example, Andrea Mandell flags that “part of the studio’s challenge is explaining this isn’t your grandfather’s Tarzan.”²¹⁴ She spotlights that sex was key in the film’s marketing: “In a gender flip, it’s [Alexander] Skarsgård’s bod bared on billboards, not [Margot] Robbie’s.” Actress Margot Robbie is quoted by Mandell supporting this position and observing, “Hey, it’s Marketing 101... Tarzan shirtless is going to get us movie tickets.”²¹⁵ Mandel also quotes media analyst Paul Dergarabedian, who addresses *Tarzan*’s deliberate attempts to attract a female audience:

On the surface, it seems easy—it’s Tarzan, it’s an action movie—but it seems like they’re courting the female audience in a big way... If you can get women going to see it because of Skarsgård but also because there’s a strong female character, that’s a smart marketing move.²¹⁶

While contemporary films like *Magic Mike* (2012) and *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015) have specifically used sex—and, notably, *male* sexiness—to target a female audience, *The Legend of Tarzan* (2016) is an example of a similar technique used in a remake.

Reflecting the Zeitgeist

An overarching theme of this book is material remade to cater to the appetites of a contemporary audience. While Bozell’s claim—that Hollywood believes “young audiences will be disappointed if there isn’t an over-the-top raunchy moment every two minutes or so”—is an exaggeration, certainly a higher amount of erotic content has, in the post-Hays Code era, been a way to modernize material, to give it new relevance and new timeliness, and, notably, to reflect where a culture is at as related to sexual mores, something Rachael Bletchly examines in her *Mirror* article on sex in British television:

Aren't raunchy new series, such as *Bodyguard* [2018-], just a natural progression, reflecting changing attitudes to sex? A recent Ofcom survey even showed that viewers are far more offended by swearing on TV than sex scenes.²¹⁷

Changing attitudes toward sex—as related to both audiences and policymakers—is distinctly detectable in content that has been made numerous times—think Stoker's *Dracula* mentioned earlier, that was modernized through distinctly sexier presentations in 1958 and 1992—whereby each new incarnation provides insight into the values and evolving sexual mores of its era. The various adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* discussed earlier help illustrate this, as do the many screen adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*. Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon discusses this in relation to the 1968 *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation:

[I]n adapting Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Franco Zeffirelli made his lovers' affection more physical and cut out parts that slowed down the action to satisfy what he perceived as the demands of his audience in 1968.²¹⁸

A review of Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996)—titled “This ‘Romeo and Juliet’ not for the ages, but it is for now”—made a similar point, flagging that the film tapped into the specific wants of the mid-1990s zeitgeist.²¹⁹ Such ideas relate to literary scholar Anat Zanger's work on remakes, where it is observed, “The production of cultural goods... is always organized according to demands present in the given society.”²²⁰ The notion of all films mirroring sexual attitudes might be an overstatement—every era produces both films that appear sexually chaste and others that appear sexually subversive—nonetheless, decade-stereotypes are certainly evident in the discourse surrounding sexier remakes.

Noted earlier was the “more free” cinema of the 1980s when *Body Heat* was made. Certainly, this was the explanation provided by Evans for the higher sex content in *Breathless*, the US adaptation of *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*): “One reason for the more graphic depiction in the American film may simply be that by 1983 it was permissible to show more on screen.”²²¹ The “more free” description can also be applied to other sexier remakes from the 1980s, including *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981), *Cat People* (1982), *Against All Odds* (1984), and *Edge of Sanity* (1989).

Akin to the 1980s being discussed as more free, so too was the next decade. The “permissive 1990s” discussed by Kooyman frames his discussion of the 1992 *Wuthering Heights* adaptation and also relates to other sexier remakes from this decade, including the aforementioned *The Getaway* (1994), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1995), *Othello* (1995), *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), *Showgirls* (1995), *Barb Wire* (1996), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders* (1996), *Lolita* (1997), *Great Expectations* (1998), and *Cruel Intentions* (1999). In Saxon Bullock’s discussion of remakes, he draws specific attention to *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1999), highlighting how it too distinguishes itself from its predecessor by utilizing the decade’s evolved attitudes to sex:

[Taking] advantage of relaxed attitudes about on-screen sex to replace the 1968 original’s suggestive “pawn-stroking” chess match with a genuinely saucy bout of rumpy-pumpy between stars Pierce Brosnan and Renee Russo.²²²

The apparent permissiveness of the 1990s is also alluded to in discourse surrounding Van Sant’s *Psycho* (1998). Canet, for example, observes that the film demonstrates that “in 1998 the remake industry was not as concerned as it used to be about sexual references.”²²³ Francis makes a similar point, noting that the more risqué insertions in the 1998 *Psycho* were indicative of “a freer moral code permitting nudity in the latter part of the 20th century.”²²⁴

That the 1980s and 1990s were freer eras in the context of sex can be explained by factors beyond the demise of the Hays Code. Arguably, with the rise of cable television, the Internet, and streaming services, tolerance of, if not also *appetite* for risqué content has only increased and, well into the twenty-first century, remakes continue to exhibit a greater permissiveness regarding erotic content.

It’s important to note that high-level sex and nudity aren’t always necessary to convey modern social mores, and can also be achieved with more subtle displays. Cultural theorist Ronald Scheer, for example, discusses the made-for-television *It Happened One Christmas* (1977), a remake of *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946), and observes the smaller differences that 30 years had on the interactions between the married Bailey couple at the center of the narrative:

A major shift in American attitudes is reflected in the 1977 version... Mary [Marlo Thomas] and her husband [Wayne Rogers] are more at ease with their sexuality. Neither of them is a sex object; each fondles and caresses the other in a bedroom scene that takes place on the morning after their wedding. The scene's frankness about scarcely clothed married people in bed together would have kept it out of any Production Code Hollywood movie, yet it easily avoids any element of the sensational or prurient, by our standards. Its presence in a film intended for family viewing is an indication of how American sensibilities on this subject have changed in thirty years.²²⁵

While *It Happened One Christmas* isn't a *sexy* film, its production happened in an era without the constraints of the Code: by 1977 audiences simply expected to see more physical intimacy between partners even if the content is still relatively tame.

A More Definitive Film

(Re)inserting previously censored content to a script can help frame a remake as telling a truer, more definitive story. Such ideas are relevant to this chapter because the return of previously sidelined or censored content can, on occasions, result in a sexier remake. In their book *Flickipedia*, for example, Michael Atkinson and Laurel Shifrin discuss the beach party comedy *Where the Boys Are* (1984), describing it as a “[h]opeless remake of the 1960 stinker; the sex that was left out of the original is put back in here, but barely.”²²⁶ Here, the authors hint that the remake was (somewhat) better at representing the sex that was apparent in the 1960 novel that both films were based on. Other examples are more explicit in their reintroduction of previously taboo content. Discussed earlier was *Mildred Pierce* (2011) whereby the film was able to portray infidelity in a manner that the 1945 film couldn't. The sexy dialogue between Cassidy and Marion in *Psycho* (1998) quoted earlier is another example: the dialogue had in fact been present in the original's script but had been “red-pencilled” by censors in advance of Hitchcock's shoot.²²⁷ Collins and Traylor, in their discussion of the 1982 adaptation of *I, The Jury*, similarly note that the remake was able to deliver a truer adaptation of the novel than the 1953 film, observing: “The nudity of the remake was a welcome return to the novel's original intention.”²²⁸ The idea of a remake being more definitive can be a key justification for a remake and, also, a central component of a marketing campaign. Film theorist Constantine Verevis provides an example of this in his discussion of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981), noting that the

“pre-publicity for the film focused on its being a ‘corrective’ to MGM’s watered-down 1946 adaptation.”²²⁹ Leitch also spotlights this noting that the 1981 film “presents the notorious sex scenes in Cain’s novel [that] the earlier film had omitted.”²³⁰ Leitch extends this analysis to *Body Heat*, the remake of *Double Indemnity*, as an example of both a corrective remake and one that liberates content that had been oppressed by the era:

Body Heat does not, on its own accounting, add new material to an old story but liberates values that were present in the story all along but were obscured by the circumstances of its earlier incarnation.²³¹

Leitch observes that the marketing of *Body Heat* was premised on the notion of a definitive story and the restoration of “its repressed material.”²³² Here, the notion of liberating material potentially extends to (re)inserting content that had perhaps been *self-censored* from original material.

The Welsh writer Andrew Davies has written for-television adaptations of many classic novels and, according to a *Telegraph* profile, “has never adapted a great novel without adding a dollop of rumpy pumpy and gratuitous nudity for good measure.”²³³ In a *Daily Record* discussion of Davies’s aforementioned adaptation of *Little Dorrit*, the writer is noted as specializing “in exposing the repressed sexuality hidden in the works of classic novels by the likes of Austen and Dickens.”²³⁴ It is no surprise, therefore, that a range of Davies’s adaptations—including *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), *Doctor Zhivago* (2002), *Fanny Hill* (2007), *Little Dorrit* (2008), *Sense and Sensibility* (2008), and *War and Peace* (2016)—have been flagged in reviews as *sexier* incarnations. Leitch contends that *Body Heat* was made from the perspective of imagining what *Double Indemnity* might have looked like if produced in a freer culture; it could, therefore be argued, that Davies has done something similar across his catalogue of literary adaptations.

While every period envisages itself as progressive and as better able to introduce content that had been sidelined in previous eras—or repressed in originary materials—this isn’t always the case. In his 1994 *Los Angeles Times* article, for example, Richard Natale discusses why making a more definitive *Lolita* would actually be impossible in the modern era:

[O]ne studio executive was considering a remake of *Lolita*, arguing that the 1962 Stanley Kubrick adaptation did not fully explore the obsessive pedophilia in Vladimir Nabokov’s novel. But, in tackling the material more honestly, “we

would have made a movie that could be seen as morally repugnant, so we passed,” says the executive.²³⁵

While *Lolita* was, as discussed earlier, indeed remade in 1997—albeit perhaps not as “honest” (read: explicit) a portrayal as Natale had pictured—nonetheless, the reality that even three decades on from the first film, the material was not only considered as still too sensitive for audiences, but as noted earlier, *new sensitivities* have arisen in the intervening years highlighting that perceptions of what constitutes sexy are always in flux.

While thus far I have discussed films that reinsert sexual content, it’s also worth expanding on the behavior of writers like Davies who insert *new* sexual content, taking things further than the author of the originary material ever did. Discussing the 2011 *Mildred Pierce* for example, Belau and Cameron observe that Haynes “exceed[ed] even Cain in his explicit depiction of sexual imagery.”²³⁶ The insertion of entirely new sexual content is identifiable in a range of remakes. In an *Atlantic* article about Davies’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Sophie Gilbert discusses Davies’s invention of the most memorable scene from that series:

Fitzwilliam Darcy (Colin Firth), a wealthy landowner in Derbyshire, returns home to his estate, Pemberley, after a long journey, and decides to take a swim to cool off in the unseasonably warm English sunshine. He removes his cravat, then his waistcoat—all while, unbeknownst to him, Elizabeth Bennet (Jennifer Ehle) is touring Pemberley with her aunt and uncle, pausing in the portrait gallery to gaze up at his likeness. Wearing only his undershirt and breeches, Darcy dives gracefully into the lake, emerges, and heads toward the house, walking through a field of wildflowers right into the path of an unsuspecting Lizzy.²³⁷

As Gilbert observes, “the scene was entirely Davies’s creation, inserted into the fourth episode to ramp up sexual tension between the two characters.”²³⁸ This iconic scene was completely invented for the 1995 screen adaptation of the Austen novel: something that occurs in a range of other remakes. In a discussion of the aforementioned British mini-series *Parade’s End* (2012), Chris Hastings and Emily Hill observe in the *Daily Mail*: “with two sex scenes in the first few minutes, it’s certainly a steamy adaptation... the most graphic description in the original novels are of a kiss that doesn’t actually happen!”²³⁹ Addressing the adaptation’s steaminess, Alan Judd, biographer of Ford Madox Ford, alludes to the aforementioned idea of modern adapters *imagining* a freer sexuality in the *Parade’s End* adaptation:

The BBC has sexed things up a little because Ford didn't do overt sex scenes... But it is in keeping with the novel in the sense that in those days you closed the bedroom door.²⁴⁰

The British and American *House of Cards* series were both based on the book by Michael Dobbs (1989). While in the book the affair between Frank (Ian Richardson) and Mattie (Susannah Harker) is central to the plot, in the British screen adaptation Mattie calling Frank “Daddy” and the ensuing erotic age-play/incest subtext was added by the writer—again, Andrew Davies—and was a subtext that continued in the American series. Discussing his addition, Davies notes: “It was really transgressive and exciting and it really worked – especially given the casting because Susannah Harker looked so sweet. It gave it quite a frisson.”²⁴¹ The 1970 *Wuthering Heights* also got attention for invented erotic content. Patrick Tilley, screenwriter of the production, discusses the insertion of new sexual material via the presentation of a risqué backstory for Heathcliff (Timothy Dalton):

[W]e hinted in the script, as Somerset Maugham, Thomas Moser and other literary authorities have done, that Heathcliff was probably Earnshaw's [Harry Andrews] illegitimate son... [I]t would make Heathcliff the half-brother of Catherine [Anna Calder-Marshall], and thus would put their love on an incestuous footing. It would also account for the strange intensity of their relationship, and, more importantly, explain why their ill-fated love has built-in factors for its own destruction.²⁴²

The insertion of incest into an adaptation similarly got extensive attention in the 2016 *War and Peace* production.²⁴³ While Tolstoy presents an ambiguous relationship between Hélène and her brother, Anatole, Davies's rewrite includes an unambiguous display of incest, something he addressed in interviews:

Occasionally I have written one or two things that Tolstoy forgot to write... As you can see in episode one, the brother and sister relationship was something I made more of... It's subtly referenced in the book, absolutely.²⁴⁴

Incest incidentally, also made an appearance in *Tromeo & Juliet*, a modernization *Romeo and Juliet*, something discussed by Jonathan Peltz in *Vice*:

Tromeo (Will Keenan) is a sex-obsessed horndog who masturbates to porn on a CD-rom. There's incest, S&M, and decapitations, and the film is also replete with Troma's legendary house smorgasbord of gore, sex, violence, and a torrent of non-PC one-liners.²⁴⁵

Here, incest is a kinky insertion used to update centuries-old material and to provide audiences with new, prurient enticements. Inserted kink, in fact, is detected in a range of remakes. Sadomasochism made an appearance in *Tromeo & Juliet* and is also used to update other previously filmed stories. In the modern spin on the Sherlock Holmes stories, *Elementary* (2012–) for example, Sherlock (Jonny Lee Miller) has a keen interest in bondage. In the British series *Sherlock* (2010–), Irene Adler (Lara Pulver)—the protagonist's (Benedict Cumberbatch) love interest—is presented as a dominatrix. The Australian prison-drama series *Wentworth* (2013–)—the Australian remake of the series *Prisoner* (1979–1986)—also incorporated sadomasochism and bondage as part of its updates (explored later in this chapter).

Thus far, I have discussed remakes that are made more sexual through increased sexual content centered on heterosexual storylines. *The Children's Hour* (1961)—the remake of *These Three* (1936)—provides a homosexual-themed example whereby a lesbian plot that had been sidelined in the 1936 film was reintroduced. In the next section, I expand on this example, examining material that is made more sexual through queer content. I begin with an overview of the concept of a queer remake.

THE QUEER REMAKE

In several reviews, the notion of a film being a *queer remake* or a *queer version* is flagged:

- The aforementioned *Les amours imaginaires* (*Heartbeats*) as “a queer remake of *Jules et Jim* (*Jules and Jim*).”²⁴⁶
- The drama *The Hours and Times* (1991) as “a consciously intended queer remake of [Ingmar] Bergman’s film [*Tystnaden* (*The Silence*) (1963)].”²⁴⁷
- The Swedish horror film *När mörkret faller* (*When Darkness Falls*) (2006) as “like a queer version of The Duplass Brothers’ *Baghead* [2008].”²⁴⁸
- The comedy-drama *Looking* (2014–2015) as “the queer version of *Girls* (2012–2017).”²⁴⁹

- The indie Christmas film *Tangerine* (2015) “as a queer remake of *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946).”²⁵⁰
- The Irish comedy-drama *Handsome Devil* (2016) as “a queer version of Wes Anderson’s *Rushmore* [1998].”²⁵¹

In each of these examples, the idea of a film being a *queer interpretation* is less so a documentation of an actual remake in any definitive sense and, more so, a way to couple films via shared thematics.

Other reviewers describe particular remakes as *camp*. While camp has a variety of meanings—ostentatious, effeminate, exaggerated, affected, theatrical, or even makeshift and cheap as related to production values—it’s also a word often linked to homosexuality, thus having relevance to this discussion and offering another means for a remake to be positioned as queer:

- The comedy-Western *Sergeants 3* (1962) as “[a] supposedly high-camp remake of *Gunga Din* [1939] to accommodate Frank Sinatra and his buddies.”²⁵²
- The thriller *Dead Ringer* (1964) as a “lurid high camp remake” of the Mexican crime-drama *La otra* (*The Other One*) (1946).²⁵³
- The comedy-horror *Vampire’s Kiss* (1988) as “a demented, high-camp remake of [Roman] Polanski’s *Repulsion* [1965].”²⁵⁴
- The mini-series *The Phantom of the Opera* (1990) as a “[h]andsome but almost high-camp remake.”²⁵⁵
- The American comedy *The Birdcage* (1996) as the “[s]lick and campier-than-camp remake of *La cage aux folles* [1978].”²⁵⁶
- *House on Haunted Hill* (1999) as a “lively high-camp remake of a 1958 B-grade horror flick.”²⁵⁷
- The satire *The Stepford Wives* (2004) as a “dismal high-camp remake” of the 1975 film²⁵⁸ and as possessing a “dyke subtext.”²⁵⁹
- *Scrooge & Marley* (2012) as a “campy, queer twist” on Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843).²⁶⁰
- The reality television show *Finding Prince Charming* (2016) as “a gay *Bachelor* [2002–],”²⁶¹ and as a “gay version” of the series.²⁶²

Other discussions frame a remake as, ostensibly, *queer* via the use of other labels, notably as a *gay* or *lesbian remake* or similar:

- The short film *Scorpio Rising* (1963) as “a classic gay version of *The Wild One* [1953].”²⁶³

- The short lesbian-themed film *Damned If You Don't* (1987) as “a transgressive retake on [Michael] Powell and [Emeric] Pressburger’s 1947 melodrama, *Black Narcissus*.”²⁶⁴
- The thriller *Self Defense* (1983) “a gay version of *Friday the 13th* [1980].”²⁶⁵
- The romance *Desert Hearts* (1985), as a lesbian-themed “semi-remake of *The Misfits* (1961).”²⁶⁶
- The British period-drama *Maurice* (1987) as a “gay remake” of *A Room with a View* (1985).²⁶⁷
- The short film *Flames of Passion* (1989) as a “gay remake” of *Brief Encounter* (1945).²⁶⁸
- The comedy-drama *No Skin Off My Ass* (1991) as “a gay remake of Robert Altman’s *That Cold Day in the Park* (1969).”²⁶⁹
- The Chinese film *Shuang zhuo* (*The Twin Bracelets*) (1991) as “a lesbian version of [*Da hong deng long gao gao gua*] *Raise the Red Lantern* [1991].”²⁷⁰
- The comedy-drama *The Living End* (1992) “as a gay version of *Gun Crazy* in 1949 and *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967,”²⁷¹ and as “a gay version of the feminist classic” *Thelma & Louise*.²⁷²
- The lesbian-themed *Go Fish* (1994) as a “sort of contemporary lesbian version of Gregory La Cava’s *Stage Door* [1937].”²⁷³
- The romcom *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995) as “a lesbian version of *Risky Business*.”²⁷⁴
- The French mini-series *L’@mour est à réinventer* (*Love Reinvented*) (1996) as “a gay version of 1994’s [television series *3000 scénarios contre un virus*] *3,000 Scenarios to Combat a Virus*.”²⁷⁵
- The romcom *I Think I Do* (1997) as “the gay *Big Chill* [1983], without the politics, or maybe the gay *Four Weddings and a Funeral* [1994], but with only one wedding (and it’s a straight one).”²⁷⁶
- The comedy-drama *Bootmen* (2000) as “a testosterone-soaked dance film that sets *Flashdance* [1983] Down Under with a gay twist.”²⁷⁷
- The reality television series *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) as a “gay version” of *The Bachelor* (2002–).²⁷⁸
- The romcom *Another Gay Movie* (2006) as a “gay remake of *American Pie* [1999],”²⁷⁹ and as “an impossibly grosser gay remake of the saucy teen movie standby *American Pie*.”²⁸⁰
- The teen comedy *The Curiosity of Chance* (2006) as “a gay version of a John Hughes flick.”²⁸¹

- The comedy *Beautiful People* (2008–2009) as a “gay version of *Adrian Mole* [1987].”²⁸²
- The action-comedy *D.E.B.S.* (2004) as “the lesbian version of *Charlie’s Angels* [1976–1981, 2000, 2011].”²⁸³
- The romcom *And Then Came Lola* (2009) as “the independent lesbian remake of [Tom] Twyker’s (*Lola rennt*) *Run Lola Run* [1998].”²⁸⁴
- The aforementioned *Chloe* as a “lesbian version of *Fatal Attraction* [1987].”²⁸⁵
- The romance *Redwoods* (2009) as “a gay version of *The Bridges of Madison County* [1995].”²⁸⁶
- The reality TV series *A-List: New York* (2010–2011) and *The A-List: Dallas* (2011) as “a gay version” of the *Real Housewives* franchise.²⁸⁷
- The New Zealand drama *Kawa* (2010) as “a more adult, gay version of *American Beauty* [1999].”²⁸⁸
- The British thriller *Seeing Heaven* (2010) “as a gay version of *Don’t Look Now* (1973).”²⁸⁹
- The thriller *Breaking the Girls* (2012) as a “lesbian remake of Hitchcock’s classic *Strangers on a Train* [1951].”²⁹⁰
- The French romance *La vie d’Adèle* (*Blue Is the Warmest Color*) (2013) as “a hot lesbian remake of *Annie Hall* [1977].”²⁹¹
- The comedy-drama *G.B.F.* (2013) as “a gay version of *Easy A* [2010].”²⁹²
- The drama *Love is Strange* (2014) as “a modern, gay version of *Make Way for Tomorrow* [1937]”²⁹³ and as a “gay version of *My Two Dads* [1987–1990].”²⁹⁴
- The horror film *Lyle* (2014) as a “lesbian remake of *Rosemary’s Baby* [1968].”²⁹⁵

Queer remakes also become such through queer retellings. In a range of reviews and scholarly discussions, the notion of screen narratives rewritten as queer is proposed. In cultural theorist Margaret McFadden’s work on the television series *The L Word* (2004–2009), for example, she discusses a range of queer retellings that transpire within the series itself:

Over the years, *The L Word* also “rewrote” many well-known films. Cherie Jaffe’s [Rosanna Arquette] competition with her daughter over Shane [Katherine Moennig] turns her into Mrs. Robinson [Anne Bancroft] from *The Graduate* (1967)... the “sit-down” between the feuding owners of

SheBar and the Planet evokes *The Godfather* (1972)... Shane's work as a hairdresser at a posh Beverly Hills wedding leads to a farcical lesbian version of *Shampoo* (1975).²⁹⁶

The sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (1975–) also offers queer retellings within episodes. Michael Lambert in *Out*, for example, describes the show's fictitious *Cherry Grove* skit, a lesbian spoof on the gay-themed reality television show *Fire Island* (2017): “SNL lampooned the show by making a lesbian version that does exactly the same, showing the lesbians’ ‘raunchy’ parties involving a lot of puzzles and Annie Lennox. And wine. So much wine.”²⁹⁷

In a range of mediums—notably in theater and literature—such retellings are commonplace; they are substantially less common, however, in film and television, presumably attributable to production costs and audience-size necessities. That said, big-budget examples are detectable: the drama *Far from Heaven* (2002)—Todd Haynes’s remake of the Douglas Sirk melodrama *All That Heaven Allows* (1955)—is one illustration. *All That Heaven Allows* is a women’s picture about a wealthy widow, Cary (Jane Wyamn), who falls in love with a younger gardener (Rock Hudson): the couple part due to the disapproval of Cary’s children and friends. In *Far from Heaven* (2002), the story is reimaged with the central female character (Julianne Moore) married to a homosexual (Dennis Quaid), and the gardener being black (Dennis Haysbert). The racial themes and, notably, the homosexual subplot are additions included by Haynes, forming a crucial component of his queer retelling of the story. Literary theorist Tison Pugh similarly discusses the queer retelling that transpired when the film-noir *Laura* (1944) was remade for television in 1968 in a remake written by Truman Capote. As Pugh notes: “The alterations evident in Capote’s *Laura* reflect queer themes prevalent in his literature, particularly in its treatment of the Pygmalion myth as representative of gay artistic sensibility.”²⁹⁸ Other such retellings I came across in my research include:

- Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho*, mentioned earlier, as a queer retelling of *Henry IV*.
- The Spanish comedy *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls Like Mom*) (1980) as Pedro Almodóvar’s queer retelling of *The Women* (1939).

- *Swoon* (1992) as a “decidedly queer rendition” of the Leopold and Loeb murder case, most famously depicted in Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1948).²⁹⁹
- The French drama *La belle endormie* (*The Sleeping Beauty*) (2010) as “[Catherine] Breillat’s arguably queer rendition of *Sleeping Beauty*.”³⁰⁰
- Anna Margarita Albelo’s romcom *Who’s Afraid of Vagina Wolf* (2013) as the lesbian retelling of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966).
- The short film *Zolushka* (2014) as a queer retelling of *Cinderella*, and the short film *Rusalka* (2017) as a queer retelling of *The Little Mermaid*.
- The short film *The Swan Prince* (2015) as a queer retelling of the fairytale of the same name.
- The short film *Scenes from Another Marriage* (2016) as a queer retelling of the mini-series *Scener ur ett äktenskap* (*Scenes from a Marriage*) (1973).
- The biopic *Lizzie* (2018)—yet another retelling of the Lizzie Borden story—as a “fresh Lizzie, a queer Lizzie, a *feminist* Lizzie.”³⁰¹
- The aforementioned period-drama *Mary Queen of Scots* as offering a “queer feminist revisioning” of the story.³⁰²

In most of these examples, the idea of a *retelling* or a *version* is more so a means of description—if not, even, as discussed in Chap. 2, a means of *reduction*—than a true remake in any meaningful sense, but nonetheless presents a useful survey of material framed in critical discourse as both a remake and as queer, and forms a dataset to examine how screen do-overs can be modernized through deviations from heterosexuality.

In the sections that follow, the idea of *how* a remake is made queer is examined through a discussion of queer-swaps, (re)inserted queer content, use of a queer gaze, and inverted casting.

The Queer-Swaps

Like many mooted sex-swapped projects (Chap. 2), queer-swaps regularly make pop culture news headlines but don’t often eventuate. In 2015, for example, a gay reboot of the mystery series *Hart to Hart* (1979–1984) was announced but never eventuated³⁰³; ditto a gay reboot of sitcom *The Golden Girls* (1985–1992), reported in 2017 but which hasn’t come to

fruition.³⁰⁴ While wholesale queer cast swaps are rare, there are a small number whereby characters who were, at least putatively, heterosexual in earlier incarnations of the material are given a queer makeover.

For years, audiences and scholarly analyses have speculated about certain Disney characters being coded as gay.³⁰⁵ Jeffrey Bloomer in *Slate* spotlights that the live-action *Beauty and the Beast* (2017)—a remake of the 1991 animation—“was a break from Disney tradition, which is to be as gay as possible without acknowledging it.”³⁰⁶ In Chap. 2, I discussed *Beauty and the Beast* as having been updated through the incorporation of feminist themes; as relevant to this chapter, the remake was also modernized through the presentation of the character LeFou (Josh Gad) as gay. In advance of the film’s release, director Bill Condon discussed the made-over character:

LeFou is somebody who on one day wants to be Gaston [Luke Evans] and on another day wants to kiss Gaston... He’s confused about what he wants. It’s somebody who’s just realising that he has these feelings. And Josh makes something really subtle and delicious out of it. And that’s what has its payoff at the end, which I don’t want to give away. But it is a nice, exclusively gay moment in a Disney movie.³⁰⁷

Condon’s comments led to extensive hype about LeFou in advance of the remake’s release. When the film was finally in cinemas—and displays of the character’s homosexuality were largely restricted to a blink-or-you’ll-miss it moment in the final scene where LeFou dances with a male villager—audience responses were, unsurprisingly, mixed. While some reviewers praised the made-over LeFou as progressive³⁰⁸ and groundbreaking,³⁰⁹ conversely the few seconds of a same-sex dance scene was deemed disappointing by others: Le Fou was lamented as being “as progressive as it is cautious,”³¹⁰ insufficient,³¹¹ and the “bumbling, sniveling sidekick of a villain who gets a mere seconds-long ‘exclusively gay moment’ in the background of a straight couple’s happy ending.”³¹² Similar pre-publicity attention was given to the reimagined Bo Peep character in *Toy Story* (2019). In Chap. 2, I discussed the character as being reframed as a feminist; in other commentary, the character is also described as channeling “lesbian energy.”³¹³

In other examples, characters are remade as queer with much less fanfare than LeFou received and yet which actually boasted more queer content.

Mother, May I Sleep with Danger? (1996), for example, is a made-for-TV thriller about a teenager, Laurel (Tori Spelling), who is dating Billy (Ivan Sergei), a boy who unbeknown to her, is a vampire. While the first film doesn't include any overtly queer content, it has been described as a "camp classic of bad acting and insane plotting"³¹⁴ and as a "campy cult-phenomenon."³¹⁵ Twenty years on, the film was remade, again for television (2016). In the remake, the central relationship is now lesbian: a teen girl (Leila George) is unaware that her new girlfriend (Emily Meade) is a vampire. Other such queer-swap examples include:

- In *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), Romeo's friend, Mercutio (Harold Perrineau), is a drag queen.
- In the aforementioned Christmas film *Scrooge & Marley*, Ben Scrooge (David Pevsner) is now a mean-spirited gay nightclub owner. Marley (Tim Kazurinsky), his former business partner, is also gay.
- The reality television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003–2007) was remade as the short-lived series *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl* (2005). In the original series, the hosts were all gay men; in the remake, the hosts were three gay men and one lesbian.
- In *The Women* (2008), the remake of the 1939 film, one of the central characters—Alex (Jada Pinkett Smith)—is a lesbian. There were no lesbians in the first film.
- In the British series *Little Dorrit* (2008), Miss Wade (Maxine Peake) is a lesbian, a sexual identity not made apparent in earlier adaptations.
- In *Star Trek: Beyond* (2016), a reboot of the *Star Trek* series, Sulu (John Cho) is gay.
- In the black-comedy *Heathers* (2018)—a remake of the film *Heathers* (1988)—one of the main characters, Heather Duke (Brendan Scannell), is gender non-conforming and another, Heather McNamara (Jasmine Mathews), is a lesbian.
- In *Lizzie* (2018), the title character (Chloë Sevigny) is gay. The possibility of Lizzie being homosexual was also presented in other biopics including in the made-for-television films *The Legend of Lizzie Borden* (1975), and *Lizzie Borden Took an Ax* (2014).

While such examples constitute queer-swaps, they are also examples of queer content being *added* to a remake.

(Re)Inserted Queer Content

Inserting wholly new material can be a way for heterosexual material to be (re)made as queer. In E. Alex Jung's *Vulture* discussion of the paucity of gay remakes, he identifies some of the limited ways that remakes have attempted to insert queer content:

The character Teddy Montgomery [Trevor Donovan] came out as gay in the CW remake of *90210* [2018–2013], and Mulan [Jamie Chung] declared her love for Princess Aurora [Sarah Bolger] in ABC's *Once Upon a Time* [2011–2018]. The best example may yet to come: The creators of the *Jem and the Holograms* remake [2015] said that they decided to make Kimber and Stormer lesbians. Netflix's remake of *House of Cards* [2013–2018] has stealthily made much of the narrative about Frank Underwood's [Kevin Spacey] sexuality, which isn't heterosexual, to say the least.³¹⁶

The US remake of *House of Cards* provides a particularly good example of inserted queer content. Comparing the American *House of Cards* to its 1990 British mini-series predecessor is no easy task: the American version had six seasons to develop characters and storylines, whereas the British series only had four episodes. That said, one of the central points of differentiation relates to the remake's framing of the protagonist as queer. In the British series, the central sexual relationship transpires between the married protagonist—Frank Urquhart—and Mattie, the young journalist. Their relationship is complicated: as noted, he calls her “Daddy,” and he ends up murdering her. In the American series, Frank Underwood has a similar-dynamic affair with journalist Zoe (Kate Mara), but there's also same-sex erotic content too: Frank and his wife, Claire (Robin Wright), have a threesome with secret service agent, Edward Meechum (Nathan Darrow), and Frank displays obvious sexual attraction to male associates like his college friend Tim Corbet (David Andrews), and the author Tom Yates (Paul Sparks). Creator of the American series, Beau Willimon, addressed questions about whether Frank Underwood was gay or bisexual, responding, “I don't think Frank would buy into any of those labels... he doesn't limit himself anymore than he limits himself when it comes to ideas on how to dominate the world.”³¹⁷ While Frank's sexuality is only a small aspect of his personality—and his sexuality is not labeled in the series—it nonetheless is a notably queer inclusion in the US remake that is absent from the British series. The US *The Office* (2005–2013)—a remake of the British sitcom (2001–2003)—provides another example.

Oscar (Oscar Nuñez), a homosexual accountant, was present throughout the run of the American show. The character was notably divisive, on the one hand criticized as being “fussy, prissy, aesthetic, and cruel – a sketch of a certain type of homosexual drawn by writers who seem to know the type at which they’re aiming,”³¹⁸ on the other hand celebrated as a “ground-breaking” and “pioneering” gay character,³¹⁹ and “one of the most interesting gay characters on television.”³²⁰ The British series, conversely, didn’t offer *any* queer characters. Another such example is the television series *Parenthood* (2010–2015), a remake of the movie of the same title (1989). The six seasons created the capacity for many more characters and much more content including, by season five, Haddie (Sarah Ramos) coming out as a lesbian: there were no queer characters in the 1989 film.

When *The Stepford Wives* (1975) was remade in 2004, among the updates included a gay couple where, as Alissa Quart notes in *Film Comment*, the “oppressive ‘husband’ is a Log Cabin Republican.”³²¹ The rebooted *One Day at a Time* (2017–)—the remake of the 1975–1984 sitcom—provides another example. In updating the material for a contemporary audience, queer content is introduced. In the first season of the reboot, daughter Elena (Isabella Gomez) comes out as a lesbian and is dubbed by *The Advocate* as “one of the most refreshing queer characters on TV.”³²² In the second series, Elena has a non-binary love interest, Syd (Sheridan Pierce). *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018–)—a reboot of *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* (1996–2003)—similarly inserts queer characters including a pansexual warlock, Ambrose (Chance Perdomo), and the non-binary character Susie (Lachlan Watson). No queer characters appear in the earlier sitcom.

A variation on the inserted queer character is the *expansion* of queer roles in a remake. In the aforementioned Australian television series *Prisoner*, for example, the character of Franky Doyle (Carol Burns)—considered as one of the first lesbian characters on Australian television—was killed off after 20 episodes. Franky’s ending has been interpreted as illustrative of the “kill your gays” trope whereby deviant sexuality is symbolically annihilated on screen.³²³ When the series was remade as *Wentworth*, however, Franky was allowed to live: as media theorist Sue Turnbull notes, “The updated Franky Doyle, as powerfully realised by Nicole da Silva... [is] still going strong after five seasons.”³²⁴ While both series had lesbian content, the remake made more of it, positioning Franky as not just a central character, but as an enduring one. *Wentworth* also modernizes *Prisoner* through its explicit presentation of sex. While *Prisoner* dealt

with topics including lesbianism, *Wentworth* presents sex as more graphic and arguably more erotic. Turnbull notes that “the sex in *Wentworth* is in your face and confronting,”³²⁵ and reviewers have similarly drawn attention to the overt sexiness. In the queer publication *Autostraddle*, for example, Franky and her lover, Governor Erica Davidson (Leeanna Walsman), are described as “the hottest lesbian television couple on air right now”:

[T]he tension is off the charts in a way I’ve never seen it off the charts before. Because their ulterior motives and power plays make shit so much more complicated and so much more intense. Because their relationship and desires involve BDSM in a way I don’t see on mainstream television all that often, much less with a queer couple, and I’m all about that. Did I mention the tension is off the charts? Because the tension is insane. INSANE. You could power a fucking first world country with the amount of electricity their interactions produce.³²⁶

Wentworth also includes a transgender character, Maxine (Socratis Otto): *Prisoner* doesn’t offer an equivalent. The aforementioned *Elementary*, incidentally, also featured a transgender housekeeper (Candis Cayne) in the first series, and *Supergirl* (2015–)—an adaptation of material previously filmed as *Supergirl* (1984)—introduced a transgender character, Nia Nal (Nicole Gaines), in Season 4. Mentioned earlier was Mercutio in *Romeo + Juliet* presented as a drag queen. Drag queens are also used in the 2018 *A Star Is Born*: protagonist Ally (Lady Gaga) sings in a bar owned by drag queens, and it is there where she meets Jackson (Bradley Cooper). D.J. “Shangela” Pierce, who plays one of the queens in the film, commented about how drag isn’t a “punchline” in the film but was presented as “just a slice of life.”³²⁷ That Jackson, notably, is so comfortable in the bar positions the character—and the film more broadly—as possessing a modern sensibility toward sexuality: as J. Bryan Lowder notes in *Slate*: “In that early Bleu Bleu bar scene, the script takes great care to assure us that though Jackson is a cowboy, he ain’t no homophobe. For her part, Ally goes on about the ‘honor’ of her weekly guest spot at Bleu Bleu, where she gets ‘to be one of the gay girls.’”³²⁸ Ally’s best friend in the film, Ramon (Anthony Ramos), is also presented as gay. The earlier adaptations of *A Star Is Born* are devoid entirely of queer content. *Mary Queen of Scots* also plays with gender, as evidenced in the character Rizzio (Ismael Cruz Cordov), the protagonist’s (Saoirse Ronan) secretary and confidante. In the *Advocate*, Tracey Gilchrist discusses Rizzio and contends

that the film “puts a uniquely prescient stamp on depictions of gender and sexual fluidity while showcasing an abiding friendship between a woman and a queer man.”³²⁹ Such fluidity is illustrated well in a scene when Rizzio dresses in female garb and asks Mary, “Is it a sin that I feel more a sister to you than a brother?” In these examples, broader culture’s increasing awareness of, and arguably comfort with, the concepts of non-binary gender and transgenderism are used as ways to reframe remade material as modern.

Discussed earlier in this chapter were remakes that reintroduce material that might have been deemed inappropriate for the era in which the first film was made. This is also a way queer content can be (re)introduced to a film. Psychoanalyst Harvey Greenberg discusses this as a key motivation driving remaking, noting that films might be remade

to open up psychological-political possibilities latent in the original movie that makers were unaware of, or that could not be pursued because of censorship (e.g. Blake Edwards’s *Victor, Victoria* [1982] – a remake of a now forgotten film of the thirties [*Viktor und Viktoria* (1933)] with a much more suppressed homoerotic subtext).³³⁰

Mentioned earlier was *These Three*, the first cinema adaptation of Lillian Hellman’s 1934 play *The Children’s Hour*. Nowlan and Wright Nowlan note that there was a stipulation from the Hays Office in advance of the 1936 production dictating that “any film produced from it could not use either the title or the lesbian angle.”³³¹ Twenty-five years later, however, Hellman’s play was filmed again as *The Children’s Hour* (1961) and the lesbian storyline was reintroduced: as Doris Milberg writes in her book *Repeat Performances: A Guide to Hollywood Movie Remakes*: “When [William] Wyler directed the 1936 version... he couldn’t use the original theme of suspected lesbianism. In the remake he could and did.”³³² *The Children’s Hour* was still made under the Code and it certainly wasn’t an explicit presentation, but by the 1960s attitudes to homosexuality were evolving and homosexual themes had more visibility. Such a remake becomes a *sexier* film as relevant for the purposes of this chapter, but also a more *definitive* adaptation. *Swoon*, introduced earlier, provides another illustration of this. Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1948)—itself a remake of a 1939 film—was based on the real-life story of Nathan Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb, who engaged in a thrill kill of a 14-year-old boy. Much discussion has gone into analyzing whether the homosexuality of the murderers could

be detected in Hitchcock's film³³³—film theorist Robin Wood argues that many of Hitchcock's villains are “coded gay”³³⁴—but, given the Hays Code era, nothing is made overt. When *Swoon* was made nearly half a century later, the sexuality of the perpetrators was able to be more fully explored, with cultural theorist Michele Aaron describing the film as a “decidedly queer rendition,”³³⁵ and criminologist Nicole Hahn Rafter noting that “*Swoon* rescues Leopold and Loeb's love from the coy slanders of the two earlier versions, normalizes it, and brings it to the fore.”³³⁶

While there aren't many examples of overtly inserted queer content in remakes, another way that a remake can be made queer is via the utilization of a queer gaze.

The Queer Gaze

In Chap. 2, I discussed the impact of a repositioned gaze in remakes: for example, material that is revisited by female directors and, in turn, potentially generates a new *female gaze*. The possibility of a *gay gaze*—with homosexual directors, as well as homosexual cinematographers, inserting queer content through the presentation and potential *eroticization* of male bodies in narratives—can be identified in several examples. Discussed earlier was the live-action remake of *Beauty and the Beast*, a film directed by an openly gay director. While the sexuality of LeFou is barely referenced in the film, nonetheless it could be contended that without Condon as director—without the unique outlook he delivers as a queer filmmaker—even that small moment of queer content would not have been included. The sexuality of known queer directors—Todd Haynes, Anna Margarita Albelo, Pedro Almodóvar, and Gus Van Sant have already been mentioned in this chapter—can similarly be interpreted as bringing their own queer gazes to remakes; something that can also be said for other remake directors who could also be viewed as remaking films with a queer spin:

- Bruce La Bruce's *No Skin Off My Ass*, a queer remake of *That Cold Day in the Park*.
- Randal Kleiser's *Blue Lagoon* (1980), the remake of the 1923 and 1949 films.

- Andrew Fleming's aforementioned *Hamlet 2*, as well as the comedy *Problem Child* (2015), a remake of the 1990 film; the romcom *Barefoot* (2014), a remake of the German film *Barfuss (Barefoot)* (2005), and *Nancy Drew* (2007), a revisiting of the character created by Edward Stratemeyer, appearing in films since *Nancy Drew... Reporter* (1939).
- Joel Schumacher's episodes of the US *House of Cards*, as well as *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* (1981), the remake of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957); the romcom *Cousins* (1989), the US remake of *Cousin cousine* (1975), and franchise expansions including *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman & Robin* (1997).
- Nicholas Hytner's *The Crucible* (1996), an adaptation of the Arthur Miller play (1953), first filmed in 1957.
- Rob Marshall's musical *Nine* (2009), an adaptation of *8½* (1963), and his musical *Chicago* (2002), an adaptation of material first filmed in 1927.
- Michael Sucaskey's TV drama *Scruples* (2012), a remake of the 1980 film, and his TV biopic *Grey Gardens* (2009), a remake of the 1975 film.
- Kimberly Pierce's horror film *Carrie* (2013), the remake of the 1976 film.
- Stephen Fry's period-drama *Bright Young Things* (2003), a remake of *Vile Bodies* (1970).

While the majority of the remakes listed here *don't* involve overtly queer content, nonetheless the idea of a queer director telling a story differently is key to the revision and the new positioning of a remake.

Van Sant's 1998 remake of *Psycho* has been subject to extensive analysis, presumably because of the reverence for Hitchcock's film (and thus the moral panic about Van Sant revisiting a film long considered untouchable), and partly because of speculation of what impact Van Sant's direction might have on the film. In Canet's discussion of the remake, he examines the impact of Van Sant's "queer perspective":

In Van Sant's version, Sam remains naked throughout the scene, satisfying both the female and male gaze. In this case, it is not the body of the woman that is the object of desire, as we are used to, but the man's body, thus reflecting Van Sant's personal vision.³³⁷

Francis also discusses the altered gaze in the film:

Van Sant queers the remake... Mortensen's buttocks are shown during the opening but [Anne] Heche's form remains hidden from the camera. In Vaughn's masturbation scene the viewer is privy to Heche undressing, but again she remains turned from the camera. Sexuality in the remake privileges the male form and its action.³³⁸

Francis also compares Anthony Perkins in the role of Norman in the Hitchcock film to Vince Vaughn occupying the role in 1998:

Unlike Perkins's meek posturing in the parlor with [Janet] Leigh, Vaughn seems more slovenly and dominant. His performance is certainly more "masculinized" than that of Perkins's.³³⁹

While the preoccupation with what a director brings to a film—that is, auteur theory—is only one way to analyze a film, nonetheless the small tweaks Van Sant chose to make in an otherwise shot-for-shot remake can be construed as distinctly *queer tweaks* borne from the unique outlook that is at least somewhat informed by the director's sexuality.

Van Sant's *Psycho* can also be interpreted as a queer remake based on the utilization of inverted casting.

Inverted Casting

In Canet's work on *Psycho* (1998), he contends that the film is, in part, made queer through a concept he refers to as "inverted casting." He spotlights the casting of Anne Heche—a "high profile lesbian"—as Marion, identifying that "instead of assigning the veiled homosexuality to Norman, he assigns it to Marion."³⁴⁰ Francis also discusses the casting of Heche, flagging that, in comparison to Leigh, she is a "woman who happens to look boyish":

Although Heche is a woman, the audience is not allowed to see body parts that 'define' her physically as female. Her pixie haircut and smallish frame align her with 'twink' culture.³⁴¹

Francis also spotlights Heche's romantic relationship with Ellen DeGeneres at the time of production.³⁴² Communications scholar Janet Staiger also explores *Psycho*'s inverted casting, identifying that Hitchcock employed this same device:

For *Strangers on a Train* [1951], Hitchcock apparently knew that Farley Granger was gay, but he cast Granger as the straight, Guy, and gave the “gay” role of Bruno to Robert Walker, who was straight as far as was known.³⁴³

Here, Hitchcock can be interpreted as being ironic, playful, if not even perhaps subtly subversive. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how an actor’s sex appeal can be brought to a role to imbue a character—and a new production—with erotic appeals. An actor’s sexuality can also be a way to do this, whereby even if a narrative or character remains putatively straight, the known sexuality of the actor can help code a role or a story as queer. Frank Underwood’s characterization as queer in the US *House of Cards*, for example, is only bolstered by openly gay Kevin Spacey in the role.

Discussed later in this chapter is *Hairspray* (2007), the remake of the 1988 John Waters’s cult classic, which has been criticized as a *sanitized* remake. One aspect that creates the capacity for the film to be read as a little more queer than it perhaps appears is the casting of John Travolta in the role previously occupied by drag performer Divine. Travolta has long been haunted by rumors regarding his sexuality,³⁴⁴ and arguably his casting could be considered a way to add an element of queer content to a putatively straight narrative (Travolta’s denials about the gay content of the role however—discussed later in this chapter—render this an imperfect illustration of inverted casting). The same point, however, can be said for other actors who bring their queer sexuality to a seemingly straight role. The remade *Beauty and the Beast* provides another example of this. While much attention has been given to the sexuality of LeFou, perhaps a more interesting “queer” character is Gaston, the object of LeFou’s affections. Gaston, while putatively heterosexual in the film, is played by the openly gay actor Luke Evans. Arguably Evans’s role as Apollo in the action-adventure *Clash of the Titans* (2010)—a remake of the 1981 film—provides another such example of a remake being open to a queer reading because of the sexuality of the actor who inhabits the role. Other examples of queer actors in straight-seeming remake roles include:

- Jodie Foster as Laurel in *Sommersby*, the remake of *Le retour de Martin Guerre*; as well as her appearances in other remakes including the action-comedy *Maverick* (1994), the remake of the television series (1957–1962); the period-drama *Anna and the King* (1999), a remake of *Anna and the King of Siam* (1946), and the crime-drama *The Brave One* (2007), a remake of *Death Wish* (1974).

- Lily Tomlin as the housewife protagonist, Pat, in the comedy *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, a remake of *The Incredible Shrinking Man*.
- Ellen Page as Courtney in the sci-fi *Flatliners* (2017), the remake of the 1990 film.
- Ian McKellan as the character 2 in the sci-fi series *The Prisoner* (2009), a remake of the earlier series (1967–1968), and his role as Norman in the made-for-television drama *The Dresser* (2015), a remake of the 1983 film.
- Nathan Lane as Max Bialystock in the musical *The Producers* (2005), a remake of the 1967 film.
- Victor Garber as Mayor Shinn in *The Music Man* (2003), a remake of the 1962 film, and his role as Daddy Warbucks in *Annie* (1999), the remake of the 1982 film (material first made as early as 1932 with *Little Orphan Annie*).

In each of these examples, remakes are open to being construed as queer(er) based on queer actors bringing their sexuality to a role and, in turn, potentially providing a nod to a knowing audience. It's worth noting here that the idea of queer actors—or, for that matter, *any* queer staff involved in filmmaking—bringing a queer subtext to a narrative is a controversial assertion. Given the difficulty that queer actors have in getting roles—notably so roles where they are playing heterosexual characters—the inference that they *inevitably* bring something queer to a narrative is an idea that I imagine some queer performers would find offensive.

THE WHY OF GOING QUEER

In some ways, remaking a film as queer shares similarities with simply remaking a film as more sexual: it can bring something new to old material, helping to tell a premade story in a way that hasn't been done before. Of course, choosing to remake a film as queer—in a world where homophobia still exists, where studios want to sell as many tickets as possible, and where most audiences don't identify as queer—raises some unique issues and is, therefore, undoubtedly done with deliberate intent. In the following sections, I propose explanations for queer remakes including to reflect the zeitgeist, for marketing, and as queerbait.

To Reflect the Zeitgeist

Key in making a film modern is to reflect the era that produced it. In practice this means mirroring and sometimes even pushing the sexual mores of a culture. In a 2018 discussion of the highly successful series *Sex and the City* (1998–2004), star Sarah Jessica Parker identified that the show was a product of its era and therefore couldn't be effortlessly adapted a decade on: "You couldn't make it today because of the lack of diversity on screen."³⁴⁵ Parker is referring to the expectation that today casts be diverse. In his discussion of the possibility of the aforementioned gay remake of *Hart to Hart*, Jung underscores this point: "As demographic shifts continue, it makes sense that popular culture would retrofit classic stories for a contemporary context."³⁴⁶ Part of this retrofit is representing sexual diversity.

A lesbian central character in the *One Day at a Time* reboot mentioned earlier is an example of a remake consciously embodying its era. In Kasandra Brabaw's *Refinery29* discussion of the television series *Heathers* (2018)—the television remake of the 1998 film—she observes use of the same technique:

Unlike the original *Heathers*, which casts thin, white women in the title roles, version 2.0 includes a plus-size, body-positive Heather, a genderqueer Heather, and a Black, lesbian Heather.³⁴⁷

Here, Brabaw flags that to update decades-old material, the cast was made more diverse: this included through sexuality. In these examples, while sexuality is used to update that material, such an update only works because it reflects changing social attitudes: the new *Heathers* therefore, reflects its society as well as nods to the expectations of an audience within that zeitgeist that they see their own lives represented.

While in the new incarnations of *One Day at a Time* and *Heathers* queer characters have central roles, modernization through queer content can also happen in more subtle ways. In film theorist Peter Clandfield's discussion of the US remake of *The Prisoner* introduced earlier, he flags an episode where the village bar plays a role: apparently it "caters to queer or alternate tastes, indicating that the Village offers superficial acceptance of diversity."³⁴⁸ In such an example, the newer series is (albeit subtly) remaking itself for the modern era with nods to sexual diversity.

In Chap. 2, I discussed criticisms of sex-swaps as merely a means for studios to be self-congratulatory. It should be noted that similar criticisms have been leveled at the inclusion of queer content in remakes. Bloomer, for example, discusses Condon's comments about LeFou in *Beauty and the Beast* and described the director's "self-congratulation in the gay press" as ridiculous.³⁴⁹ Michael Musto makes a similar point in *Out*:

Movie companies are always about 40 years late to the table with allegedly groundbreaking material, and then they always make sure to congratulate themselves on the incredible courage involved in what they've done.³⁵⁰

Bloomer and Musto's comments can be interpreted as cynical or mean-spirited except for the fact that, ultimately, the highly anticipated "exclusively gay moment" was, in fact, just a couple of seconds of dancing. Such an example illustrates the idea of premature merriment regarding progress, and also highlights that depicting social progress is often much less important to studios than a positive box office.

Queer Marketing

Whether intended by Condon to be the central focus of the pre-release discourse of *Beauty and the Beast* or not, the framing of LeFou as queer nonetheless dominated conversation about the remake. Nico Lang, writing for *Harper's Bazaar*, construed this strategy as deliberate, noting "Disney is marketing *Beauty and the Beast* as a major step forward for the studio."³⁵¹

Discussed earlier was controversy over sexier films and possible bans being key in drawing attention to a remade title. *Beauty and the Beast* arguably benefitted from controversy over its (albeit minimal) queer content. Talk of the exclusively gay moment, for example, led to Kuwait and Malaysia refusing to show the film,³⁵² calls for audience boycotts,³⁵³ and an Alabama drive-in not screening it,³⁵⁴ in turn granting the film that little bit of extra buzz.

While Condon's comments built up expectations and, in turn, led to criticisms of the "exclusively gay moment" being overhyped,³⁵⁵ overblown,³⁵⁶ and over-exaggerated,³⁵⁷ the fact that the queer content was hyped *at all* highlights the widespread contemporary interest in queer popular culture and the capacity for such material to play a useful role in both marketing and audience creation. The use of queer content to sell a

film is demonstrated particularly well through the 2016 remake of *Mother, May I Sleep with Danger*. In advance of the film's release, Josef Adalian writing for *Vulture* notes, "the biggest news about *Mother* is that Franco has also come up with a very radical twist for his remake: It's now a same-sex vampire love story."³⁵⁸ In her *IndieWire* discussion on the film, Liz Shannon Miller similarly spotlights the "twist":

Fun fact: If you happen to mention on Twitter that an upcoming Lifetime movie features a large amount of gratuitous lesbian vampire sex, people way outside the traditional Lifetime movie demo suddenly have questions about when it airs. That is exactly what actor/writer/director/*IndieWire* contributor James Franco is counting on as the executive producer of this weekend's *Mother, May I Sleep With Danger?* remake.³⁵⁹

Adalian and Miller both spotlight queer content as being used to attract audiences. While this can be construed as reflective of the Zeitgeist and audience expectations that film and television depict sexual diversity, it's also worth identifying queer content being used for purposes of audience titillation. Depictions of lesbians on screen have long been criticized as objectified and hypersexualized to titillate male heterosexual audiences: depictions of female same-sex relations, for example, are common in porn targeted to an assumed male gaze.

In communications scholar Kelly Kessler's discussion of lesbianism in popular culture, she observes that "the 1990s brought lesbianism in vogue and into the mainstream cultural consciousness at a rate until then unprecedented."³⁶⁰ Two of her examples include the drama *Bound* (1996) and, as discussed throughout this chapter, *Showgirls*. While *Showgirls* is remembered for its explicitness more so than any pithy exploration of queer issues—the film, in fact, received criticism for "dabbling in lesbianism purely for the sake of a male-hard on"³⁶¹—as evidenced by dance numbers performed for the audience *within* the narrative and, of course, via the film's sexy presentations to *cinemagoers*—simulated lesbianism is often depicted as enticing. When such displays are included in a remake—as in *Mother, May I Sleep with Danger* or *Showgirls*—such content can be construed as less about being progressive and more a cynical presentation of queerness as spectacle. The notion of homosexual content being presented as a spectacle, notably in the context of remakes, has been criticized previously: media theorist Silvia Barlaam discusses this in her comparison of the British *Queer as Folk* (1999–2000) and the US remake (2000–2005):

The British series is focused on narrating a drama whose characters are like anyone else, whose sexual choices are tangential to who they are... The U.S. series instead proposes straight away an image of stereotypical gay spectacle, a volatile mix of sound and movement exploding on the small screen.³⁶²

Whereas *Queer as Folk* was an exploration of, predominantly, male homosexuality, the same criticism has even greater applicability to presentations of lesbians who are not only often displayed as a spectacle but as a distinctly erotic enticement for both male and female audiences. Miller references this at end of her review of *Mother, May I Sleep with Danger*, writing, “Yeah, we told you about the lesbian vampires. So we get why you’re gonna watch.”³⁶³ Sam Adams also addresses this idea in *Rolling Stone*, drawing attention to the remake’s “nubile teenage vampires... [and] hefty dose of lesbian softcore... and also provide[s] ample opportunity to peer down the front of busty young women’s blouses.”³⁶⁴ Both Miller and Adams cynically flag the use of lesbian sex as an audience draw-card. While arguably any kind of sexual presentation can be construed as being about titillation, as noted, lesbian sexuality has long been considered extra sexy, perhaps in part because it has been historically absent from the mainstream. Such a tactic has been used in other remakes too. In Alison Darren’s *Lesbian Film Guide*, she discusses *Diabolique*—the aforementioned remake of *Les Diaboliques*—and identifies that it “tries to compensate for being an otherwise pointless remake by heavily hinting at Sapphic leanings which never materialize.”³⁶⁵

In Michael Medved *Digital Spy* discussion of the speculation that *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) might have openly gay characters—which never actually eventuated—he notes, “There’s not a seething, bubbling hunger to see straight stars impersonating homosexuals. I think they’re just trying to generate controversy.”³⁶⁶ In this comment he also nods to something achieved in films like *Showgirls*, *Mother, May I Sleep with Danger*, *Diabolique*, and also *Chloe* mentioned earlier: each showcases a cast of, presumably, heterosexual actors playing lesbians in an effort to titillate the audience. The idea of titillating an audience, compounded with Medved’s point on *Sherlock Holmes*, hints to the notion of queer content being used as queerbait in scenarios which, as Darren flags, often “never materialize.”

Queerbait

Since the beginning of cinema, underrepresented audiences—notably so queer audiences—have had to comb through films in the hope of seeing themselves represented. Queer audiences have long had to satisfy their yen for portrayal via characters who could be construed as coded as gay, without it being explicitly said. While contemporary analysis flags this as problematic—notably in light of cinema’s very long history of coding *villains* as queer—historically, such content were the only breadcrumbs of representation that sexual minorities had. While such queer coding was important for films made in more conservative eras and, notably so, under the Hays Code, this practice continues today in various forms. Given that over half a century on from the Hays Code, and in a world where same-sex marriage is legal in most Western countries, depicting characters as explicitly queer is more permissible than ever. And yet doing so is not yet commonplace. While there are many more queer representations in contemporary film and television than ever before, the practice of dangling the *possibility* of a queer representation only to not follow through in the narrative is known as *queerbaiting*, something defined by Bea Mitchell for *Pink News* as

a term which refers to authors, writers, or showrunners (etc) attempting to attract an LGBT audience by hinting at same-sex relationships between characters, though they’re never actually consummated... By adding homoerotic subtext or erotic tension between two characters, usually leads, LGBTQ audiences are enticed to tune in, unaware that there was never an intention to elevate the subtext to an actual relationship.³⁶⁷

Mitchell explains that such a tactic is deployed because

it’s thought that Queerbaiting is a way of appealing to [queer viewers] without alienating their main audience, who may be uncomfortable with openly queer characters, or who may not care about them. So, via Queerbaiting, writers and/or creators are able to appeal to the LGBTQ market, while avoiding any backlash from the strange homophobic market.³⁶⁸

Queerbaiting is, of course, subjective, and there is a fine line between this practice and what might be termed “tentative inclusivity”: LeFou in *Beauty and the Beast* illustrates this—some saw the character as significant, while others saw it as anticlimactic. Queerbaiting, however, is a contemporary

concern because arguably audiences—notably so *queer audiences*—have become more savvy to the cynical marketing techniques used by studios and thus are calling for actually queer characters rather than vague nods. The television detective series *Rizzoli & Isles* (2010–2016), for example—described by *Buzzfeed* as “the gayest nongay show on television”³⁶⁹—was often accused of queerbaiting audiences via the relationship between the character Detective Jane Rizzoli (Angie Harmon) and Chief Medical Examiner Maura Isles (Sasha Alexander). So aware were producers of their queer fan base that they actually played into it. Harmon, for example, notes “Sometimes we’ll do a take for that demo[graphic]... I’ll brush by [Maura’s] blouse or maybe linger for a moment. As long as we’re not being accused of being homophobic, which is not in any way true and completely infuriating, I’m OK with it.”³⁷⁰

Needless to say, several remakes have been accused of queerbaiting. Arguably, doing so in a remake is distinctly egregious because the material had the opportunity to be “properly” updated through the do-over, but didn’t follow through. LeFou in *Beauty in the Beast* has been called out as an example of queerbaiting,³⁷¹ as has the aforementioned *Ghost in the Shell*.³⁷² In the latest reboot of the series *Power Rangers* (2017)—a reboot of the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* (1993–1999)—there’s a tiny hint to Trini (Becky G) perhaps being queer, although it doesn’t pan out across the course of the narrative.³⁷³ The aforementioned *Riverdale* has been called out for teasing audiences with a promised romance between Betty (Lili Reinhart) and Veronica (Camila Mendes), with critics referencing a kiss between the two characters in Season 1 but, to date, not following up: “The show demonstrates no willingness to actually let its stars break out of the heterosexual mold for more than one ratings-grabbing kiss.”³⁷⁴ The aforementioned *Supergirl* (2015–) has similarly been criticized as letting queer fans down with hinted-to same-sex romances that never eventuate.³⁷⁵ In Lynnette Porter’s discussion of the aforementioned *Sherlock*, she also observes that it “teases viewers with questions about the detective’s orientation”³⁷⁶:

From the pilot episode, John [Martin Freeman] is frequently assumed to be Sherlock’s [Benedict Cumberbatch] sexual partner, and John just as often tries to correct that impression to reinforce his heterosexuality.³⁷⁷

Queerbaiting gets so much attention because queer presentations are still uncommon and, thus, there is a perceived exploitative quality to

continuing to tempt an audience—notably so a queer audience—by promising content, in a zeitgeist where audiences expect actual diversity, and yet not delivering; as Eliana Kavouriadis writes in her *The Spectator* discussion on this topic: “To treat queer fanbases as disposable commodities is demoralizing and dehumanizing and perpetuates negative attitudes and opinions of the queer community.”³⁷⁸

While open to criticism, of course, queerbait is, nonetheless, a way to update a remake with the specter of progressive sexuality even if, oftentimes, it doesn’t materialize. Such breadcrumbs, while controversial, remain important in a world where some remakes have, in fact, actively attempted to *remove* queer content.

THE STRAIGHTENED REMAKE

In Chap. 2, I discussed remakes that had their feminist content removed or downplayed. Something similar occurs in remakes whereby queer content gets sidelined. Media theorist Ryan Lizardi discusses this in his work on nostalgia, identifying examples of

texts that simplify and de-radicalize the past by recreating and enhancing classic hegemonic structures. Even more problematic are remakes that “sanitize” or adjust past texts that may have stood slightly outside the hegemonic norm, bringing them more in line with an “accepted” history.³⁷⁹

Elementary, introduced earlier, provides a good example of this whereby, in sex-swapping the Watson character, some of the homoerotic subtext of the original material is removed. Another illustration of this is *Hairspray* (2007), centered on plump Tracy Turnblad’s (Nikki Blonsky) quest to be on a television dance show. Whereas the 1998 title was an independent film, made by John Waters—a director renown for dark, queer, camp, and distinctly subversive content—the remake was a big-budget affair starring John Travolta, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Christopher Walken: as media theorist Suzanne Woodward argues, “the big budget remake of *Hairspray* deviates significantly from the queer countercultural associations of the original camp classic,”³⁸⁰ noting:

[T]he latest reincarnation of *Hairspray* was made specifically for mainstream audiences and, as a result, has had its more outrageously camp elements stripped away to ensure the mass marketability of gender-bending content.³⁸¹

In line with Lizardi's comments, Woodward contends that the remake "discards, whether wilfully or accidentally, the queer politics of the original, producing instead a sanitized exemplar of normative nostalgia."³⁸²

The most obvious way that the 2007 *Hairspray* deviates is in the casting of Edna, Tracy's mother. In the 1988 film, the character is played by Divine, a drag performer who starred in a slew of Waters's films and whose role in *Hairspray* is quite clearly a drag performance. When the film was remade, the role of Edna—now occupied by Travolta—becomes something different: clearly, the role is still played by a man, but the character is framed as female and played straight. Woodward criticizes that the remake role becomes a "family-friendly drag queen to soothe the nerves of heteronormative film spectators."³⁸³ Travolta himself was keen to distance the role from any subversive connotations, claiming: "There's nothing gay in the movie... I'm not playing a gay man."³⁸⁴ While one could argue, as discussed earlier, that the casting of Travolta is subversive itself, nonetheless the remake casts an actor in the role who not only identifies as heterosexual but is also quick to distance the film from a queer reading.

Another example of eliminated queer content transpires in *Viva Laughlin*. In the originary series—the British *Blackpool*—the protagonist, Ripley's (David Morrissey) son, Danny (Thomas Morrison), is gay: as described in an *Advocate* review, Danny "is both coming out *and* in trouble with the police."³⁸⁵ When the series was remade in the US as *Viva Laughlin*, Ripley's (Lloyd Owen) son—renamed Jack (Carter Jenkins)—is variously sanitized, as communications scholar Carlen Lavigne examines:

[L]ike his alter-ego Danny, [Jack] is a shy teenager desperate for his father's approval, but there are no veiled hints regarding his sexuality and unlike Danny, he isn't seen smoking pot or dealing drugs.³⁸⁶

While *Viva Laughlin* was an ultimately unsuccessful series, it is noteworthy that of the plot changes made, one was to remove the possibility of Jack being homosexual. The musical *My Fair Lady* (1964) is another example of a remake thought to downplay queer content. The George Bernard Shaw play, *Pygmalion* (1913)—a play first filmed in Germany in 1935 and then many times since—centers on Eliza, a Cockney girl who becomes a refined woman under the tutelage of Professor Henry Higgins. In the play, Eliza's relationship with Higgins is platonic and Shaw's play ends with the assumption that Eliza will go onto marry suitor Freddy.

While the *why* of Higgins himself not wanting to marry Eliza is not addressed in the play, it has certainly come under scrutiny by literary scholars. In John Louis DiGaetani's analysis, for example, he posits a homosexual subtext:

One of the central questions in the play is why Henry Higgins does not want to marry Eliza Doolittle at the end of the play. He seems to want her to live in his house, he seems to love her, he even says he has grown accustomed to her face. Is he just a confirmed old bachelor and likes to remain so? One of the implications that a close reading of the play suggests is that Henry Higgins is a gay man who is very aware of the law. In the first scene he meets Colonel Pickering and immediately invited him to move into his house. By the last scene, he tells Eliza that she can stay in his house – along with him and Pickering. He even dances with Pickering at one point to teach Eliza how to dance.³⁸⁷

Despite the capacity to read a homosexual subtext into the material—and despite Shaw's own objections to the relationship between Eliza and Huggins being romanticized, describing it as “sentimental nonsense”³⁸⁸—nonetheless, some of the earliest performances of the play attempted to couple the two; as literary theorist Paula James notes, “[t]he 1938 film firmly embedded the image of Higgins and Eliza as ‘an item.’”³⁸⁹ Subsequent films—and, most notably *My Fair Lady*—end with a Higgins and Eliza in a kind of dyad: the ending of the 1964 film is described by Mark Bostridge in *The Telegraph* as “a crowd-pleasing travesty of the original, which defies the story's own internal logic.”³⁹⁰

In Mitchell's *Pink News* explanation of queerbaiting quoted earlier, she observes that “avoiding any backlash” is part of the motivation for only hinting to queer presentations rather than presenting them as fully realized. Such explanations also allude to some of the studio rationales for downplaying queer content in a remake, or avoiding it altogether. In Damian Alexander's *Polygon* discussion of the 2017 *Beauty and the Beast* for example, he discusses Disney's reluctance to properly include LGBT characters and explains why the company is progressing “much slower rate than its competitors”:

This is probably due to fear of backlash from conservative populations—the company more than likely believes if it neither confirms nor denies any claims, then it can't be held responsible for being too liberal or too conservative.³⁹¹

Here, Disney is accused of trying to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. Another explanation for straightening content, however, can—ironically—be with the intent of being *more* progressive. Earlier I discussed villains oftentimes coded as homosexual. Arguably, removing this kind of queer content can be a way to delete this anachronistic and offensive subtext. Francis, for example, discusses this as manifesting in one of the key differences between the 1960 *Psycho* and the 1998 remake: “The last fight scene alters a 1960s fear of sexual and mental difference in transvestitism and turns it into a killer in drag with no rooted motives... the psychiatrist’s lines that explain transvestitism are also removed.”³⁹² In the 1998 film, the queer content of cross-dressing is eliminated so that the linking of queerness and psychopathy is deleted. In turn, the pathologizing of queer behavior is removed and an arguably more progressive film results. In the following section, the notion of downplaying sexual content more broadly is examined.

TURNING DOWN THE SEXINESS

While this chapter has, thus far, focused on examples where remakes are modernized through more sex, there are indeed examples where the general sexual quotient is lowered. In James Limbacher’s workbook on remakes, *Haven’t I Seen You Somewhere Before?* he touches upon this idea:

Nearly all the great literary works have been put on film and later on television, although many of them were altered and watered down to fit the moral standards of the period.³⁹³

In this section, I explore the idea of what a “watered down” and “less sexy” remake looks like and examine reasons why eroticism might be reduced.

The Less Sexy Display

For all those occasions when remakes are made with more sex—more intercourse, more nudity, more raunch—examples exist where such content is gutted. For all the ways that *A Star Is Born* was updated in the 2018 production, a notable elimination was the infidelity plot line. In the 1976 film, for example, Esther (Barbra Streisand) arrives home to find her new husband, John (Kris Kristofferson), in bed with a journalist. In the 2018 remake, no such plot takes place. The elimination of infidelity was similarly

a way that *Blackpool* was updated when it was remade in the US as *Viva Laughlin*, something Lavigne discusses:

In the *Blackpool* pilot, British Ripley [David Morrissey] sleeps with prostitutes, illegally evicts tenants from a slum (which he owns), and mocks an elderly protestor outside the arcade... Conversely, in *Viva Laughlin*, American Ripley [Lloyd Owen] is a well-meaning family man. He is loyal to his wife... Furthermore, the prostitutes have been removed from the plot, as have the slum apartments and protestors.³⁹⁴

While infidelity is not completely eliminated from the aforementioned romantic-drama *Cousins*—the American remake of the French film *Cousin Cousine*—Atkinson and Shifrin flag that the remake is “definitely not as sexy as the original.”³⁹⁵ While the authors don’t detail why, an explanation hinted to in Donald Liebenson’s *Chicago Tribune* review is the American film’s treatment of infidelity:

In *Cousin, Cousine*, [Victor] Lanoux’s character can express a laissez-faire attitude toward his wife’s extramarital affair. ‘It’s my respect for other people’s freedom,’ he explains. [Ted] Danson’s character in *Cousins*, is not allowed to be quite so blasé. At a crowded market, he loses his reserve and cleaves a fish in two.³⁹⁶

Such an example is indicative of many American remakes of foreign content whereby sexual content is reduced or altered to, presumably, cater to the assumed sensibilities of a stateside audience. When the British horror film *The Wicker Man* (1973) was remade in the US in 2006, the sexual content was removed in pursuit of a less restrictive rating. In his observations of *The Inbetweeners* (2012), the US remake of the British series *The Inbetweeners* (2008–2010), Amol Rajan similarly identifies reduced sex:

If you read scripts of the British show, and listen hard when watching repeats, you’ll notice that, like with *Iago*, the core of their language is filth. There are constant references to sexual obscenity, adolescent frustration, and scatological produce. These have come to typify how we view teenage boys. In America, by contrast, boys who are 16–19 are portrayed in a more flattering light through television. Of course the peccadilloes and pimples are still there; but an image of good, gilded and mostly clean living dominates. What got lost in translation in the American version was the dirty minds and disgusting habits of our teenage reprobates.³⁹⁷

Just as the American film alters the way sexuality is presented, it also slightly raises the ages of the boys too, in turn, making their antics appear a little less risqué. Raising the age of protagonists also transpires in the US adaptation of *Queer as Folk*, something Barlaam observes, noting that it reflects American values about age of consent.³⁹⁸

While many explanations exist for why American content is often considered as conservative compared to European material, one key policy reason is the Hays Code and the impact it had on filmmaking—and thus on audience expectations—for many years and, thus, its enduring legacy. For remakes produced under the Hays Code, therefore, sexiness often simply *had* to be reduced. The toning down of the 1932 pre-Code *Red Dust* when it was remade in 1953 as *Mogambo* for example, is considered as attributable to the Hays restrictions. DiLeo spotlights the same thing impacting on *You Can't Run Away from It* (1956), the musical remake of the aforementioned *It Happened One Night* (1934):

Imagine taking one of the screen's sexiest comedies and remaking it, but leaving out the erotic component. In place of the original film's brilliant stars, Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert, a couple smouldering with chemistry and brimming with charm, we get mechanical June Allyson and asexual Jack Lemmon. Instead of '30s sexiness, we get '50s coyness.³⁹⁹

Discussing *Algiers* (1938), the US remake of the French crime-drama *Pépé le Moko* (1937), film theorist Lucy Mazdon notes that “depictions of ‘loose women’, suicide and the law’s failure to triumph” needed to be modified.⁴⁰⁰ The Code of course, even impacted remakes of pre-Code *American* films that needed to be toned down when filmed again. Discussing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1941), for example—the US remake of the 1931 film—Druxman notes, “Although John Lee Mahin’s script was virtually a scene-by-scene recreation of the earlier film, the writer *did* tone down the sexual aspects of the story, update the dialogue, and tighten the action.”⁴⁰¹ Feminist film critic Molly Haskell also discusses this, contrasting the 1929 *The Letter* with the 1940 remake:

[C]ompare the 1929 version of *The Letter*, in which Jeanne Engels seems to disintegrate before our eyes with the force of her passion, and the 1940 remake, in which Bette Davis has to give a suppressed and largely psychological performance in conformance with code decorum.⁴⁰²

A less sexy display can also be about making a more progressive production. In Ebert's discussion of *Psycho* (1998), for example, he spotlights the downplaying of the sexiness of the female central character, Marion:

Van Sant's decision to shoot in color instead of black and white completes the process of de-eroticizing her; she wears an orange dress that looks like the upholstery from my grandmother's wingback chair.⁴⁰³

While such a change relates to Van Sant's choices as a queer director, it is also a modern reimagining of the film that reduces the objectification of women (a topic discussed further in Chap. 2).

In this section, I've discussed some examples of sexual storylines being reduced; remakes being less erotic is often a point of criticism in commentary, as explored in the next section.

The Less Sexy Criticism

Discussed earlier were remakes that were pitched as more erotic but which failed either to be sexier or to succeed as films. *Less sexy* can also be a way to criticize a remake. Allegations that a remake is less sexy transpire in a range of reviews. In Greenberg's discussion of the fantasy romance *Always* (1989), for example—a remake of *A Guy Named Joe* (1943)—he proposes that the new film is less sexy:

The oddly juvenile – and asexual – quality of their relations infects [Steven] Spielberg's work... [I]n *A Guy Named Joe*, [Spencer] Tracy slow dances with [Irene] Dunne at the officer's club, while a single flyer eyes her speculatively. In *Always*, at a dance at the firefighter's canteen, [Holly] Hunter is besieged by a horde of grimy smoke jumpers who ogle and paw at her like moonstruck Boy Scouts.⁴⁰⁴

In such an example, the subjective nature of sexiness is alluded to, and the notion of the remake being *less sexy* is key in Greenberg's criticism: the remake, in turn, gets subtly criticized as less intimate, less authentic, and in possession of less of the "magic" of the first film. Worth noting, *sexy* in popular parlance can also be used as being less about eroticism and more so about being good, fashionable, new, eye-catching, and so on. A range of reviews offer similar criticisms, often explicitly calling out a film as less sexy, or suggesting that it has been *sanitized*:

- *Mogambo* as a “somewhat sanitized remake of *Red Dust*.”⁴⁰⁵
- *Endless Love* as a “tepid”⁴⁰⁶ and “sanitized remake of Zeffirelli’s cult dud.”⁴⁰⁷
- The fantasy-comedy *Kiss Me Goodbye* (1982) as a “sanitized remake” of the Brazilian film *Dona Flor e Seus Dois Maridos* (*Donna Flor and Her Two Husbands*) (1976).⁴⁰⁸
- The drama *Dead Poets Society* (1989) as “a sanitized remake of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* [1969], stripped of sexual brio and political élan.”⁴⁰⁹
- The romantic-drama *Love Affair* (1994) as a “tepid remake” of *Love Affair* (1939),⁴¹⁰ and as “a passionless remake of a remake.”⁴¹¹
- The comedy-fantasy *The Shaggy Dog* (2006) as the “considerably less sexy remake” of the 1959 film.⁴¹²
- The musical-drama *Fame* (2009) as a “tepid”⁴¹³ and “sanitized”⁴¹⁴ remake of *Fame* (1980).
- The horror film *Embrace of the Vampire* (2013) as a “stale” remake of the “sexy 1995 cult horror classic.”⁴¹⁵
- The made-for-TV musical *Dirty Dancing* (2017), a remake of the 1987 film, criticized as “just not dirty enough,”⁴¹⁶ that it “never capitalizes on the crawling-out-of-your-skin horniness of the original,”⁴¹⁷ and that “what was once sexy, sultry and a little subversive has been sanitized and Disney-fied.”⁴¹⁸
- That crime-drama *Shaft* (2000) “lacks the sex and sensibility of the original” (1971).⁴¹⁹
- The British remake *The Forsyte Saga* (2002), a remake of the 1967 series, as “far less sexually explicit than the original BBC version.”⁴²⁰

Certain remake performances have also been called out as less sexy:

- In a discussion of the 2017 *Dirty Dancing* remake, the performance of Colt Prattes, who takes on Patrick Swayze’s role of Johnny, is criticized as “creepy, not sexy.”⁴²¹ Prattes’s relationship with Abigail Breslin, who played Baby, is also panned as having “all the chemistry of mannequins.”⁴²²
- In a discussion of *Against All Odds*, Rachel Ward’s performance is compared to that of Jane Greer from the 1947 film, *Out of the Past*: “While sexy enough, [Ward] nonetheless lacks the air of the siren that Greer’s ethereal Kathy effortlessly exudes.”⁴²³

A variation of such criticisms transpires when complaints are made about a *lack* of sex in a remake. It was reported, for example, that many British viewers of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (2015) “were dismayed by the lack of raunchy scenes”⁴²⁴:

One viewer was so disappointed with the nudity content – or lack thereof – that they described the 90-minute programme as ‘as salacious as the abrasions of two blocks of wood.’ Another merely stated that the hotly-anticipated show – which was billed as a ‘raunchy’ adaptation – did not contain ‘nearly enough filth’. One viewer tweeted: ‘What was the point of them adapting *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and not showing nudity? How prudish.’⁴²⁵

Accusations of less sexy remakes also plague American adaptations of international content as hinted to earlier. Assumptions that American media is more puritanical haunts numerous remakes. In discussing the romcom *Escapade* (1935), for example, reviewer Leonard Maltin similarly describes the film as a “[r]emake of the much superior (and sexier) Austrian film *Maskerade* (*Masquerade in Vienna*) (1934).”⁴²⁶ In their work on the French film *Bonne Chance!* (*Good Luck*) (1935), and its American remake *Lucky Partners* (1940), Nowlan and Wright Nowlan note, “The French version was considered a bit too racy for American audiences, as there was no mistaking that the couple did more than hold hands. In the American remake, decorum was maintained.”⁴²⁷ In comparing Ole Bornedal’s *Nightwatch* (1997)—his US remake of his Danish thriller *Nattevagten* (1994)—media theorist Pietari Kääpä observes:

Bornedal’s original has a Copenhagen urban specificity and satirical wit that flaunts Danish social taboos, with scenes of near-fellatio in a fancy restaurant, vomiting in a church during communion and a vertical sex scene against a morgue wall.⁴²⁸

The sex scenes were eliminated from the US remake. In their comparison of the US and the UK versions of the sitcom *The Office*, communications theorists Janet Boseovski and Stuart Marcovitch similarly identify that: “Consistent with office politics in Britain, the ‘water cooler’ talk in the original series is racier, with significantly greater sexual undertones.”⁴²⁹

While on occasions films simply fail to convince reviewers that they are sexy—*Showgirls* discussed throughout this chapter is such an example—in other remakes, the sex is consciously toned down. In the sections that

follow, I propose several reasons for turning down the heat including to be politically correct, to swap the genre, to grow the audience, and as related to the public/private split.

Political Correctness

In Kim Holston and Tom Winchester's discussion of the 1976 and 2013 *Carrie* films, they argue that *lowering* the sexual quotient was an effort to modernize:

The updating takes the form of texting and video via smartphone. Otherwise it's almost a scene-for-scene remake. Even though it is R-rated as was the original, this version has no nudity and tones down the language that made the 1976 version raw.⁴³⁰

While we could argue that nudity doesn't quite shock the way that it did in 1976, arguably the nudity was eliminated in the 2013 *Carrie* because the kind of 1976-style flesh exposure of the first film looks sexist. In Chap. 2, I discussed the 1976 *Carrie* in the context of the male gaze: Brian De Palma's film arguably included gratuitous nudity that had no relevance to the plot but served as eye candy for a voyeuristic audience. In 2013—and notably with a female director at the helm—presenting copious scenes of teen nudity might be interpreted as inappropriate, sexist, and as failing to make the revisions expected of a modern-era remake. Removing sexual content for reasons of gender equity, however, inevitably led to accusations that the remake was politically correct.⁴³¹ In Armond White's review, for example, he describes the 2013 *Carrie* as being a product of its era, to its detriment:

[Kimberly] Peirce directs this remake with a depressing, plot-oriented single-mindedness. That's what political correctness and TV style have led to: a version of *Carrie* that is reduced to a few faint lesbian teases and feminist alarum (Carrie's fanatical, repressed mother is a cutter who injures herself) and an anti-bullying message (at an inquest following the prom massacre).⁴³²

While it is impossible to determine whether a reviewer is simply stating fact or being critical when describing a film as *politically correct* (Chap. 2), the notion of a film—particularly one about teenage girls that has been

directed by a queer woman—avoiding gratuitous nudity appears to be a modern approach cognizant of contemporary politics. *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017–)—an adaptation of the Margaret Atwood 1985 novel that was first filmed in 1990—is another example of material seemingly toned down for political reasons. The poster for the 1990 film shows protagonist Kate (Natasha Richardson), seemingly naked but holding the story's iconic red cloak against her body. In the poster for the 2017– television series, the focus is on protagonist June's (Elisabeth Moss) face: the character is fully dressed in the red cloak and white bonnet. Whereas the 1990 poster offers sexiness as part of the marketing, the 2017– series plays up the sartorial repression that is key to the plot. For a series that first aired to coincide with the first year of the Donald Trump presidency—and, thus, the loss of Hillary Clinton—the television series tapped into a political climate of very angry women. Downplaying the sex and turning up the feminist criticism of patriarchy was a logical modern move.

Genre Swap

In Chap. 2, I discussed that on occasions films change genre when they are remade. Such a change can lead to the reduction of sexual content. Nowlan and Nowlan, for example, discuss the “saucy” dialogue from the romcom *Bachelor Mother* (1939) and identify that the remake, *Bundle of Joy* (1956), was “tame in comparison to the original farce.”⁴³³ *Bundle of Joy*, however, was a musical, and such a genre tends to be relatively conservative. The genre of film musicals emerged in the 1930s with the rise of sound technologies and reached peak popularity in the 1950s, a period considered as highly conservative in the US. Unsurprisingly, numerous scholars have pointed to musicals as an inherently conservative genre. Theater scholar Stacy Ellen Wolf, for example, contends, “The wonder of the musical is its ability to do double duty – to promote conservative values *and* to provide empowering representations of women, sometimes simultaneously.”⁴³⁴ Film theorist Jerome Delamater similarly identifies that the basic purpose of musicals is “to conceal conservative ideology with a formal innovation that often gives the illusion of progressive ideology.”⁴³⁵ By remaking a film of another genre—notably so if it was pre-Code material—into a musical remake invariably necessitates toning down the contents to make room for lighter fare.

Genres can be changed for a range of reasons, most notably to expand an audience, an idea explored more broadly in the next section.

Audience Expansion

Just as a filmmaker might want a higher classification to position a remake as a distinctly *adult* offering, similarly they may also want to avoid a NC-17 rating, in line with the film industry's "two most devout ambitions," according to film theorist Ruth Vasey: "to please all of the people, everywhere, all – or at least most – of the time, and to displease as few people – or at least as few people who mattered – as possible."⁴³⁶ Sandler discusses films including *The Girl on a Motorcycle* (1968), *Greetings* (1968), and *If...* (1968), which, after unsuccessful box offices as X-rated titles, were each recut to an R classification to gain bigger audience.⁴³⁷ Toning down sexual content may indeed be a way to broaden the audiences. This was particularly important when video rental was a consideration: Sandler observes that the now-defunct video rental chain *Blockbuster* wouldn't stock NC-17 films and that some cinemas would not screen them,⁴³⁸ in turn limiting the places such material can be viewed, thus providing filmmakers incentive to produce less explicit content.

A theme throughout this book is material being remade to court new audiences. Earlier I discussed increased sexual content inserted into a film to attract a higher classification and the corresponding adult audience; the same thing can occur in the reverse with adult content eliminated to get a lower classification and to attract a broader—and younger—audience. In Danielle Ryan's *Paste* discussion of the 2006 *The Wicker Man*, she references this motive:

America's *The Wicker Man* removed content to ensure a more lucrative PG-13 rating. Instead of violence, the remake instead removed the sexual content from the original, weakening its ability to comment on gender and sexuality.⁴³⁹

Noted earlier were criticisms of the 2009 *Fame* remake being tepid and sanitized. A review published in *The Bulletin* proposed that the (unsuccessful) updates were motivated by audience expansion efforts whereby the material was "sanitized and dumbed down for a hypothetical teen market that is way too sophisticated for it."⁴⁴⁰ Dana Barbuto discusses the same issues in her *Patriot Ledger* review:

This scaled back version comes as no surprise, though. The original carried an R rating and the remake is PG. After all, you can't make money off your target audience if that demographic isn't allowed to see the film.⁴⁴¹

For the 2009 *Fame* to be suitable for a PG-13 market, the sexual content needed to be toned down: the same thing transpires in other examples. *She-Ra: Princess of Power* (1985–1987), for example, was an animated series about the title character protecting the universe from the Evil Horde. The series was remade as *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018–) and the protagonist got a makeover: as Alex Abad-Santos observes in *Vox*, “She looks much younger, and her costume is a little more battle-ready, more befitting of a space cadet than a lipstick glamazon with indomitable cleavage.”⁴⁴² While Abad-Santos observes that the character has been criticized for her “less sexy” makeover—noting that for some fans “She-Ra is no longer appealing, no longer sexy, and perhaps no longer an object of their sexual attention”⁴⁴³—the remade She-Ra targets a younger audience and, in turn, overt displays of sexiness are eliminated.

The final explanation for sidelining sexual content discussed in this section is the changing means of erotic media consumption.

The Public-Private Split

As noted earlier in this chapter, *Showgirls* was a box office failure, although it had an afterlife on DVD. This provides a hint to one of the reasons that films designed for cinema release—as contrasted with those intended to be consumed at home via streaming services or on broadcast television—might shy away from explicit content: audiences don’t necessarily want to view sexually explicit content in public; arguably this is even less desirable today, in a world of effortless porn access. In Alyssa Katz’s discussion of *Lolita* (1997) in *The Nation*, for example, she writes, “Voyeurism went private with the arrival of the VCR, at exactly the time AIDS hit, and it has stayed home, and on television ever since.”⁴⁴⁴ Internet porn means that audiences no longer need to go to the cinema and pay to see an NC-17 film for access to erotic content. It could, therefore, be argued that for some studios making a remake with a lower rating and broader appeal is a less risky proposition than restricting a box office through more sexual content and, thus, a higher rating.

While we might not see too many NC-17 films of the *Showgirls* ilk any longer, arguably the rise of not only cable television but also streaming services creates an opportunity for material with high sexual content to find a different distribution method. In Bletchly’s discussion on sex in British television, for example, she addresses this, highlighting the challenges posed for broadcast television by streaming services but also the

notion of domestic provision of erotic content as a means to compete with other sources of entertainment:

With more dramas being made due to streaming giants such as Netflix and Amazon, it is harder for TV execs to attract millions of viewers. So it should be no real surprise that sex scenes, affairs, nudity, flings and fumbings are in the vast majority of dramas hitting our screens. Many big hits of recent years, like *Doctor Foster* [2015–], *The Handmaid’s Tale* [2017–] and current series *Bodyguard* [2018–] feature sex in some form. ITV’s quaint *The Durrells* [2016–]... even had Louisa [Keeley Hawes] almost hooking up with hunky Sven [Ulric von der Esch] and a “will they, won’t they” with islander Spiro [Alexis Georgoulis]. Speaking to TV producers, there is a need to excite viewers in a way there wasn’t 10 years ago, not least as many will be playing with their phone while watching.⁴⁴⁵

Arguably, then, *television* is where we might anticipate more sexed-up remakes in the future rather than cinema.

This book predominantly focuses on mainstream film and television as opposed to other kinds of reproductions such as fan-made productions. Pornographic remakes however—while not mainstream offerings—are nonetheless commercial productions that attempt to provide a distinctly explicit spin on originary material. In the final section of this chapter, such remakes are examined.

PORNOGRAPHIC REMAKES

In a scene from the comedy-drama *Ideal Home* (2018), protagonist Erasmus (Steve Coogan) is questioned about titles in his DVD collection including *Sex Wars: Phantom Ass* and *Bareback Mountain*. Erasmus’s explanation centers on the genre rather than why he owns such films: “What they do is take a recognized title and just give it a bit of a cheeky twist.” Mainstream titles given a “cheeky twist” are, in fact, referenced in several pop culture examples. In a scene from the “Dial B for Virgin” episode of sitcom *Married with Children* (1986–1997) for example, Al (Ed O’Neill), who is at the video rental store with his wife (Katey Sagal), sneaks off to the adult section. “Ahhh, here are the classics,” Al muses. “*Schindler’s Lust*, *Booty and the Beast*, and my favorite, *Forrest Hump*.” In a scene from the “To Serve and Disinfect” episode of sitcom *Will & Grace* (1998–), Grace (Debra Messing) commits to tracking down every copy produced of a porn film that her friend Karen (Megan Mullally) had starred in. Reporting back on her mission:

Grace: I've been in every sleazy video store in Manhattan. I went into rooms [*Penthouse* founder] Bob Guccione wouldn't go into without a Hazmat suit. I had to weave through icky boxes with titles like... *Drive This, Miss Daisy...* *Diddler on the Roof...* *The Ass Menagerie...*

While in each of these scenes the fake porn titles are presented for humor, nonetheless pornographic remakes are more than just sitcom fodder and, in fact, are common enough to be listed by Eberwein in his taxonomy. To illustrate the category of "pornographic remakes," Eberwein references *Ghostbusters* (1991), the porn version of *Ghostbusters* (1984).⁴⁴⁶ Such porn remakes span the explicitness spectrum from sexploitation films—referring to independent films made predominantly in the 1960s and 1970s, which had high-level nudity but low-level sexual explicitness—through to more hardcore material. Worth noting, while Eberwein separates the category "pornographic remakes" from "comic and parodic remakes"—that is, *Throw Momma From the Train* (1987) as a comic and parodic remake of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951)⁴⁴⁷—there is much overlap between the two categories with many of the porn remakes *also* being comic and parodic.

A sexploitation remake example is the action-drama *Fugitive Girls* (1974), described by Mike Quarles in his book on exploitation films as "a sexed-up remake" of *The Violent Years* (1956).⁴⁴⁸ *Fugitive Girls* is a lesbian-themed women-in-prison film with explicit portrayals of crime and nudity. In my work on Christmas films, I discuss *The Passions of Carol* (1975), a pornographic spin on Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.⁴⁴⁹ Other authors document a range of such titles. Film theorist I.Q. Hunter discusses the real-life production of these films by companies like Seduction cinema, noting that they specialize in soft-core versions of films including "*Kinky Kong* (2006), *The Lord of the G-Strings: The Femaleship of the Ring* (2003) and *Spider-Babe* (2003) that seize on appetising textual material and rework it in a lower – or since the originals are rarely art films, even lower – cultural register."⁴⁵⁰ Matt Keeley writing for *Hornet* compiled a list of the best (and strangest) porn parodies, including pornographic versions of *Saw* (2004), such as *Bonesaw* (2006); *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) pornified as *A Clockwork Orgy* (1995); *Twilight* (2008) as *Twinklight* (2010), *The Godfather* (1972) as *The Godmother* (1987); *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) as *The Bare Wench Project* (2000); *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) as *Raiders of the Lost Arse* (2001); and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

(2001) as *Whorrey Potter and the Sorcerer's Balls* (2010).⁴⁵¹ Literature scholar Richard Burt discusses pornographic remakes of Shakespeare, notably erotic takes on *Romeo and Juliet* such as *The Secret Sex Lives of Romeo and Juliet* (1969), *Romeo and Juliet 2* (1988), and *Romeo and Juliet* (2012).⁴⁵² GQ presents its own list of such parodies:

- *Tits a Wonderful Life* (1994)/*It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)
- *Not the Bradys XXX* (2007)/*The Brady Bunch* (1969–1974)
- *A Tale of Two Titties* (1990)/Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (first filmed in 1911)
- *Not Three's Company XXX* (2009)/*Three's Company* (1976–1984)
- *Everybody Does Raymond* (2000)/*Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996–2005)
- *Cliff Banger* (1993)/*Cliffhanger* (1996)
- *Not Married with Children XXX* (2009)/*Married with Children* (1986–1997)
- *Buffy the Vampire Layer* (1996)/*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992, 1996–2003)
- *The Honeymooners* (1988)/*The Honeymooners* (1955–1956)
- *Not the Cosbys XXX* (2009)/*The Cosby Show* (1984–1992)
- *Foreskin Gump* (1994)/*Forrest Gump* (1994)
- *This Ain't The Partridge Family XXX* (2009)/*The Partridge Family* (1970–1974)
- *Pulp Friction* (1994)/*Pulp Fiction* (1994)⁴⁵³

To this list, *BuzzFeed* adds their own titles:

- *Missionary Position: Impossible #2* (2003)/*Mission Impossible II* (2000)
- *Titty Titty Gang Bang* (2005)/*Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968)
- *Edward Penisbands* (1991)/*Edward Scissorhands* (1990)
- *Breast Side Story* (1990)/*West Side Story* (1961)
- *Dawn of the Head* (2005)/*Dawn of the Dead* (1978)
- *The Da Vinci Load #2: Angels & Semen* (2007)/*Angels & Demons* (2009)
- *Penetrator* (1991)/*The Terminator* (1984)
- *Bitanic* (1998)/*Titanic* (1997)
- *Honey, I Blew... Everybody* (1992)/*Honey I Blew Up the Kid* (1992)
- *Whore of the Rings II* (2003)/*Lord of the Rings II* (2001)
- *The Dicks of Hazzard* (2006)/*The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979–1985)

- *21 Hump Street* (2012)/*21 Jump Street* (1987–1990)
- *Cara Loft: Womb Raider* (2003)/*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001)
- *The Porn Identity* (2005)/*The Bourne Identity* (2002)
- *Legally Boned* (2009)/*Legally Blonde* (2001)
- *Saturday Night Beaver* (1986)/*Saturday Night Fever* (1977)
- *Down on Abby: Tales from Bottomley Manor* (2014)/*Downton Abbey* (2010–2015)
- *The Sex Files* (2009)/*The X-Files* (1993–)
- *Naporneon Dynamite* (2010)/*Napoleon Dynamite* (2004)
- *Ass Ventura: Crack Detective* (1995)/*Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994)
- *Clockwork Orgy* (1995)/*A Clockwork Orange* (1971)
- *The Poonies* (1985)/*The Goonies* (1985)
- *A Wet Dream on Elm Street* (2011)/*A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984)
- *Play-Mate of the Apes* (2002)/*Planet of the Apes* (1968)⁴⁵⁴

A *Runt* article also provides their own list:

- *American Booty* (2000)/*American Beauty* (1999)
- *The Da Vinci Load* (2006)/*The Da Vinci Code* (2006)
- *Evil Head* (2012)/*The Evil Dead* (1981)
- *Dawson's Crack* (2000)/*Dawson's Creek* (1998–2003)
- *Sexbusters* (1984)/*Ghostbusters* (1984)
- *Game of Bones* (2013)/*Game of Thrones* (2011–2019)
- *Good Will Humping* (2007)/*Good Will Hunting* (1997)
- *Drill Bill* (2004)/*Kill Bill* (2003)
- *Horat* (2007)/*Borat* (2006)
- *Inrearendence Day* (1996)/*Independence Day* (1996)
- *Inspect Her Gadget* (2013)/*Inspector Gadget* (1983–1986)
- *Missionary Impossible* (2006)/*Mission Impossible* (2006)
- *Night of the Giving Head* (2008)/*Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
- *Quantum Deep* (1993)/*Quantum Leap* (1989–1993)
- *San Fernando Jones and the Temple of Poon* (2000)/*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)
- *Twin Checks* (1991)/*Twin Peaks* (1990–1991)
- *The Texas Vibrator Massacre* (2008)/*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)
- *White Men Can't Hump* (1992)/*White Men Can't Jump* (1992)
- *The Whores Have Eyes* (2009)/*The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)⁴⁵⁵

Aside from the titles listed, others porn remake examples compiled in my research include the following:

- *Please Don't Eat My Mother* (1973) as a “sexy remake” of *Little Shop of Horrors* (1960).⁴⁵⁶
- *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976) as a “loose reworking of George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, familiar to many in its musical incarnation as *My Fair Lady*.”⁴⁵⁷
- *Sylvia* (1977)—also known as *A Saint, a Woman, a Devil*—as a “steamy adaptation” of *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957).⁴⁵⁸
- *Fiona on Fire* (1978) as an “erotic remake” of the film-noir *Laura* (1944).⁴⁵⁹
- *She-Male Voyager* (1994) as “a witty drag remake of the classic Bette Davis tearjerker [*Now, Voyager* (1942)].”⁴⁶⁰
- *La Dolce Vita* (2006) as “a glossy gay remake of Fellini’s classic [1960].”⁴⁶¹
- *Nostalgia* (2009) as a “queer remake”⁴⁶² and a “scene-by-scene, gender-bending”⁴⁶³ remake of *Behind the Green Door* (1972).

While such films are, mostly, a means to add novelty—and marketability—to standard pornographic fare, on some occasions, notably so with some of the remakes with higher production values, there is also an effort to do something creative with the content. Worth noting, there is much overlap in pornographic remakes of the kind discussed in this section and exploitation films more broadly. Hunter, for example, discusses the enormous range of “Jawsploitation” films,⁴⁶⁴ noting that “exploitation films often explicitly imitate other movies, cannibalizing their titles, concepts and publicity gimmick.”⁴⁶⁵ Something very similar occurs with the pornographic remakes discussed in this section.

This chapter examined sexed-up and also sexed-down remakes made so through the addition (or removal) or sex, nudity, and queer content.

NOTES

1. Bozell (2005).
2. Bozell (2005).
3. Johnson (2009).
4. Eberwein (1998, 30).
5. Anderson (2017).

6. Jackovich (1980).
7. Browne and Browne (2001, 304) and Maltin (2014).
8. Collins (2009, 5).
9. Wilson (2005, 79).
10. Spratford and Clausen (2004, 5).
11. "The Unnerving '90s: The decades best horror movies" (2007).
12. Freeman (2007, 54).
13. Halligan (2010, 87).
14. Kendall (2006).
15. Schwartz (2005, 37).
16. Satern (1994, 180).
17. Neibaur (2017, 78), Weinberg (1987, 159), McDonagh (1996, 134–135) and Beaver (2000, 310).
18. Ryan (1981).
19. Wolk (1999).
20. Larson (1985, 286).
21. Chapman (2006, 172).
22. Meehan (2011, 10).
23. Tookey (n.d.).
24. Verevis (2006, 119).
25. Baron (1989).
26. "Perkins' Jekyll can't save his Hyde" (1989).
27. "Perkins' Jekyll can't save his Hyde" (1989).
28. Elliott (1994).
29. Mathews (1994).
30. "A Street Car Named Desire DVD" (2018).
31. Bleiler (2013).
32. Fullerton (2013).
33. Gilbert (2015).
34. Levy (2016).
35. Arnold (1995).
36. Germain (2004).
37. Meslow (2016).
38. Page (2015).
39. Weinraub (1996).
40. "Moll nominated for best actress in Baftas" (1997).
41. "Lolita 'too hot to see'" (1996).
42. Dirks (n.d.).
43. "Steamy remake fails to live up to expectations" (1998).
44. Varese (1998).
45. "Here's What the Cast of Cruel Intentions the Musical Looks Like" (2017).

46. Bernard (1999).
47. "The 39 most stylish films of all time" (2017).
48. VanDerWerff (2014).
49. Arnold (2000).
50. Wuntch (2000).
51. Hockney (2002).
52. Heldenfels (2003).
53. Whittington (2012).
54. "No life in this tale of death" (2003).
55. "Well worth the fare" (2007).
56. "'Vice' victorious at the U.S. box office" (2006).
57. "BBC Four gets turned on to Andrew Davies' steamy adaptation of Fanny Hill" (2007).
58. "The Western Mail: Fanny Hill helps BBC's digital channel to shine" (2007).
59. "Farrelly brothers' raunchy remake is funny but bloated" (2007).
60. Schwarzbaum (2007).
61. Smith (2011).
62. Bradshaw (2010).
63. Bunbury (2008).
64. Keal (2012).
65. "Sorority Row" (n.d.).
66. Crawford (2012).
67. Johnson (2011).
68. Kennedy (2011).
69. Johnson (2011).
70. Maerz (2011).
71. Solomons (2010), "Rachel Weisz strips off for nude love scenes to play an adulterous wife in steamy remake of The Deep Blue Sea" (2012).
72. Hicks (2011).
73. Williams (2011).
74. Eriksen (2011).
75. Guerrasio (2013) and Thilk (2018).
76. "The culture charts" (2013).
77. In Hastings and Hill (2012).
78. "Kate Upton plays raunchy nun in sexy adaptation of 'The Three Stooges'" (2011).
79. Williams (2014).
80. Sneider (2013).
81. "Gritty drama plus the return of a few old favourites in 2015" (2015).
82. Wheatley (2010, 92).
83. Klimck (2015).

84. Millican (2016).
85. Logan (2017).
86. Anderton (2018).
87. “Tolstoy the woman hater” (2016).
88. Hope (2016).
89. Stephenson (2016).
90. Williams (2015).
91. “Dwayne Johnson Gives ‘Baywatch’ Critics the People’s Elbow on Twitter” (2017).
92. “Still screening in Bay Area theaters” (2017).
93. Farley (2017).
94. Cills (2018).
95. Simonpillai (2019).
96. Sneider (2013).
97. “Endless Love: Strong cast failed by tepid remake” (2014).
98. Ebert (2014).
99. “Endless Love: Strong cast failed by tepid remake” (2014).
100. Browne and Browne (2001, 304) and Maltin (2014).
101. Collins (2009, 5).
102. Druxman (1975, 165).
103. DiLeo (2017).
104. Monaco (1992, 94).
105. Wiegand (2012, 59).
106. Evans (2014, 308).
107. Dawidoff (1989, 135). (My emphasis).
108. John Farr in *The Huffington Post* argues, “Suspense films and those portraying sexual situations share one crucial quality: those that work best know what to put forward, but more important, what to hold back”: a “restraint” that he contends is often *absent* in modern cinema (Farr 2007).
109. Whittington (2012).
110. Halliwell and Walker (1996, 959).
111. “Farrelly brothers’ raunchy remake is funny but bloated” (2007).
112. Bang (2007).
113. Ebert (2000, 288).
114. Young (2016).
115. Rosewarne (2014).
116. Stasia (2014, 114).
117. Brew (2015).
118. In Sandler (2001, 83).
119. Such an idea was referenced in reviews of *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015) that lamented the lack of sexual content. A review in *The Star* for example, was

titled “It may not make you come, but you’ll be glad you went,” referencing the idea that it too was being judged on its ability to arouse (“It may not make you come, but you’ll be glad you went” 2015). My own article on the film lamented a similar lack of raunchiness (Rosewarne 2015).

120. Sandler (2001, 72–73).
121. In Sandler (2001, 81).
122. McArdle (2008).
123. Martin (1980).
124. McMurrin (1980).
125. In Ferguson (2003, 207).
126. Goldstone (1980).
127. Valley (1998).
128. This idea can also work in the reverse. *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017–) is viewed as a series that was abreast of the *Zeitgeist* because its airing coincided with the beginning of the Donald Trump presidency. Despite the series being based on Margaret Atwood’s 1985 novel, and despite being previously filmed in 1990, it’s the television series that is considered as particularly cutting edge because of the political climate it aired in.
129. Forrest (2002, 178).
130. Dalton (2005).
131. Kinnard (1988, 47).
132. Hunt (2018).
133. Turner (2009).
134. Sickels (2011, 63).
135. Pearce (2017), “Former Disney Stars in R-Rated Movies” (n.d.).
136. Rosewarne (2013c).
137. Davies (2016), Tatspaugh (2007, 147).
138. Druxman (1975, 13).
139. Meuel (2014, 109).
140. Sandler (2001, 78).
141. Goodwin (1995).
142. Lavigne (2011, 62).
143. Druxman (1975, 105).
144. Nowlan and Nowlan (1989, 96).
145. Collins and Traylor (2012, 175).
146. “Steamy remake fails to live up to expectations” (1998).
147. “Elizabeth Berkley on Late Show (1995)” (1995).
148. In Svetkey (1998).
149. Jamieson (2016).
150. Keegan (2018).
151. Wood (2017).

152. Rosewarne (2013b).
153. Wood (2017).
154. Brown (1996).
155. Maslin (1995).
156. Canet (2018, 22).
157. Canet (2018, 22).
158. Leitch (2000, 271).
159. Thomson (1999).
160. Canby (1981).
161. Arnold (1981).
162. Rosewarne (2013b).
163. Palmer (2017, 42).
164. Muir (2007, 232).
165. Denby (1928, 61).
166. Rivera (2008).
167. Leitch (2002, 148).
168. Belau and Cameron (2016, 36).
169. Belau and Cameron (2016, 36).
170. In “Worst sex scenes revealed” (2005).
171. In Brew (2015).
172. Mathews (1995).
173. In his (1971) *New York Times* review of Polanski’s *Macbeth* adaptation, Roger Greenspun addresses the film’s pre-release controversy: “So much has been written and rumored about the nudity and violence... that it seems worth insisting that the film is neither especially nude nor unnecessarily violent. There is some nudity—the sleepwalkers scene; a steaming coven of perhaps three dozen weird sisters; more importantly, the naked chest of Duncan before it receives the dagger. And there is much quite energetic violence. But the nakedness seems natural to Polanski’s construction of ‘the single state of man.’ And the violence, together with the blood it makes flow, is surely part of what *Macbeth* is all about” (Greenspun 1971).
174. Leitch (1990, 146).
175. Ferguson (2003, 207).
176. Gleiberman (1994).
177. “Verhoeven’s ‘Showgirls’ – sex waiting in the wings” (1995).
178. Vaughn (2006).
179. In “The Postman Always Rings Twice” (1980).
180. Forshaw (2015).
181. Ringel (1998).
182. “Shunned here, ‘Lolita’ is opening in Rome” (1997), Bianculli (1998).
183. Rosewarne (2013b, 188–189).

184. Rosewarne (2013b, 189).
185. In Keeps (2000).
186. Sandler (2001).
187. Druxman (1975, 212).
188. Martin (2012, 68).
189. Kooyman (2013, 249).
190. Shachar (2012, 156).
191. Shachar (2012, 155).
192. Eriksen (2011).
193. Martin (2012, 72).
194. Davies (2016).
195. Travers (1996).
196. York (2006, 57).
197. Robinson (2004).
198. Weldon (1996, 119).
199. Ehrenstein et al. (1982, 48).
200. "Forgot About *Summer School*? Bummer! What About Nine More Eighties Comedies?" (2011).
201. Scott (1985).
202. Grant (2006, 17).
203. Moh (1999).
204. Bullock (2012).
205. Russell (2002).
206. Norman (2003).
207. "Weightless wonderwork with wow factor" (2005).
208. "Satellite pick of the day" (2007).
209. Adams (2006).
210. King (n.d.).
211. "Also Released" (2012).
212. Forrest (2002, 178).
213. In Nunn (2018).
214. Mandell (2016).
215. In Mandell (2016).
216. In Mandell (2016).
217. Bletchly (2018).
218. Hutcheon and O'Flynn (2013, 146).
219. Butler (1996).
220. Zanger (2006, 15).
221. Evans (2014, 308).
222. Bullock (2012).
223. Canet (2018, 22).
224. Francis (2013, 26).

225. Scheer (1980, 32).
226. Atkinson and Shiffrin (2008, 278).
227. Rebello (1990, 77).
228. Collins and Traylor (2012, 175).
229. Verevis (2006, 109).
230. Leitch (1990, 146).
231. Leitch (1990, 147).
232. Leitch (1990, 147).
233. Pearson (2016).
234. Keal (2012).
235. Natale (1994).
236. Belau and Cameron (2016, 36).
237. Gilbert (2015).
238. Gilbert (2015).
239. In Hastings and Hill (2012).
240. In Hastings and Hill (2012).
241. In Jeffrey (2014).
242. In Druxman (1975, 214).
243. Sykes (2016) and Travis (2016).
244. In Furness (2015).
245. Peltz (2017).
246. "Movie Review – Laurence Anyways" (2016).
247. Humphrey (2013, 171).
248. Kassendorg (2017).
249. Grant (2015).
250. Brown (n.d.).
251. White (2017).
252. Scheuer (1987, 699).
253. Alpi (1998, 150).
254. Catchpole and Burr (1990).
255. Maltin (1995, 1001).
256. Ginibre (2005, 40).
257. Hopton (2000).
258. Kermodé (2004).
259. "Dire straights" (2004).
260. Lubitow (2012).
261. Brathwaite (2017).
262. Addady (2016).
263. Fritscher (2008, 588).
264. Holmlund (1998, 225).
265. In Olson (1996).
266. Robertson (2018).

267. McKee (1999).
268. Dyer (1993, 11).
269. Allon et al. (2001, 307).
270. Friedman (2012, 233).
271. Levy (2015, 165).
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Conclusion

When we think of titles like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Scarface* (1983), or *Heat* (1995)—that is, films that are popular with both critics and viewers—often forgotten is that these beloved movies had already been made for the screen previously: they are remakes even though their status as such is commonly minimized or ignored. When a title is popular—when it is enjoyed, and considered as making a positive contribution to cinema or television—its status as an already-filmed story tends not to matter. Commonly, it's only when a film bombs at the box office that the R-word is mentioned—repeatedly—and when such material is condemned with adjectives like cheap,¹ dumb,² listless,³ mediocre,⁴ ridiculous,⁵ superficial,⁶ and tepid,⁷ and dismissed as a “warmed over” version of an “original.”⁸

Given the subjectivity of appraisals of popular culture, there is no easy way to determine if a remake is better than a predecessor, although box office takings and critical acclaim are strong indicators. While there is no foolproof recipe for a remake to make money and become beloved, oftentimes those on “best of remakes” lists⁹ tend to be ones that have done something new and different with an already-filmed story and thus distinguished from remakes that adhere too closely to ordinary material. Shot-for-shot remakes like *Psycho* (1998) or *Funny Games* (2007), for example, often lead to “why bother?” criticisms and are frequently interpreted as lacking in creativity and as failing to provide sufficient justification for audiences to spend money on seeing the same story again. In his article on

the 1998 *Psycho* for example, Chris Evangelista observes that the film “led critics and audiences to respond with a resounding, ‘Why?’”¹⁰ Rob Young presents such a criticism in his *CinelineX* review of the horror film *The Omen* (2006), a remake of the 1976 film:

If you’ve seen the original version of *The Omen* and then you watch the remake from 2006, you have to ask “Why did they even bother?” The remake was barely even a remake. It was a shot-for-shot, scene-for-scene copy of the original.¹¹

As film theorist Laura Mee surmises, “A faithful remake is frequently regarded as not just uncreative or derivative, but as ultimately *pointless*.”¹²

The remakes that get lauded as better, however, often manage to do more with the material, to somehow positively renovate the story. Scholars have, for example, frequently discussed remakes in the context of gentrification. In his *Maclean’s* article, Brian Johnson describes remakes as “akin to urban gentrification”: “You jack up an old property and renovate it with a contemporary setting, bankable stars, state-of-the-art filmmaking techniques and a fresh coat of topical sentiment.”¹³ Film theorist Alexandra Heller-Nicholas describes the horror film *The Last House on the Left* (2009) as a *gentrified* remake of the 1972 film.¹⁴ Literary theorist Michael Harney uses the same term in his discussion on American remakes of French films, noting: “Hollywoodization is analogous to architectural gentrification.”¹⁵ Deployment of new technology is the most obvious way to gentrify a title.

L. Frank Baum’s book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), for example, was first made as a silent film titled *The Wizard of Oz* in 1925. When the material was revisited in 1939—with sound and in Technicolor—it constituted a clear example of a remake that did something different and distinctly *innovative* with Baum’s originary material. It is the 1939 film version that, nearly a century on, audiences still adore and which has been dubbed the most “influential” film of all time.¹⁶

While technology is an obvious means to, and rationale for, revisiting material via a remake—and an overt tool of gentrification—there are numerous others. Violence, for example, can make a film appear more contemporary and cutting edge and imbue a remake with new appeals. The 1983 *Scarface* was a much more violent film than its predecessor; the remake was described by criminologist Nicole Hahn Rafter as “a bold and bloody remake of [Howard] Hawks’s 1932 classic.”¹⁷ The 1983 film, in fact, is in line with a range of media framed in reviews as *darker* or *grittier*.

In Chap. 3, I quoted from a review of the television series *Riverdale* (2016–) which described it as a “violent, sexed-up adaptation” of the *Archie* comics.¹⁸ The spotlighting of increased grit occurs widely in remake reviews:

- The Spanish horror film *Faceless* (1987) as a “glossier and gorier remake” of *Gritos en la noche* (*The Awful Dr. Orlof*) (1962).¹⁹
- The crime-drama *Get Carter* (2000) as a “dark remake” of the 1971 film.²⁰
- The sci-fi adventure *Planet of the Apes* (2001) as a “dark remake” of the 1968 film.²¹
- The sci-fi series *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009) as a “dark remake” of the television series (1978–1979).²²
- The horror film *The Grudge* (2004) as “the eerie remake of the spooky Japanese thriller *Ju-On: The Grudge* [2002].”²³
- The family adventure film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) as a “dark remake” of the Roald Dahl story.²⁴
- The crime-comedy *Fun with Dick and Jane* (2005) as a “darker remake” of the 1977 film.²⁵
- The action-comedy *Miami Vice* (2006) as a “dark remake” of the television series (1984–1990),²⁶ and as a “grittier remake.”²⁷
- The crime-drama *The Departed* (2006) as a “bloody remake” of *Mou gaan dou* (*Infernal Affairs*) (2002).²⁸
- The horror film *The Wolfman* (2010) as a “considerably gorier remake of *The Wolf Man* [1941].”²⁹
- The horror film *Fright Night* (2011) as a “scarier remake” of *Fright Night* (1985).³⁰
- The thriller *The Mechanic* (2011) as a “gored-up/sexed up” remake of the 1972 film.³¹
- The adventure-drama *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) as a “dark remake” of the animated *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).³²
- The family-comedy *Annie* (2014) as a “gritty remake” of the 1982 film.³³
- The superhero film *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012) as a “grittier remake” of *Spider-Man* (2002).³⁴
- The horror film *Carrie* (2013) as an “unnecessarily gory” remake of *Carrie* (1976).³⁵

- The zombie horror *Evil Dead* (2013) as a “scarier remake,”³⁶ and as a “very scary remake”³⁷ of the 1981 film.
- The adventure-drama *Man of Steel* (2013) as a “dark remake” of *Superman* (1978).³⁸
- The live-action fairy tale *Maleficent* (2014) as a “scarier remake” of the animated *Sleeping Beauty* (1959).³⁹
- The crime-drama *The Equalizer* (2014) as an “ultra violent,”⁴⁰ “violent remake,”⁴¹ and a “ridiculously violent remake” of the television series (1985–1989).⁴²
- The live-action *The Jungle Book* (2016) as a “dark remake” of the animated film (1967).⁴³
- The Western *The Magnificent Seven* (2016) as a “gritty remake” of the 1960 film.⁴⁴
- The horror film *It* (2017) as a “darker remake” of the 1990 mini-series.⁴⁵

As Deborah Krieger observes in *The Axl*, “the type of remakes in development these days consistently emerge under a cloud of Dark and Edgy.”⁴⁶ While going down the *darker* more violent route is one way to justify a remake, to modernize material and to expand an audience—and perhaps is worthy of its own volume of analysis—sex and sexuality are others.

While not quite a bells-and-whistles Technicolor/3D/special effects kind of gentrification, nonetheless, like violence, the use of sex can be a way to add finesse as part of the renovation and retelling of a previously filmed story. While some of the sexual approaches are familiar—for example, the use of sexy imagery in movie posters as part of the “sex sells” marketing maxim—others give a snapshot as to where a culture is regarding sexual mores. The demise of Hays Code, as well as the rise of identity politics in the 1970s and, in more recent years, advocacy and activism around the gamut of queer issues have each made a marked impact on filmmaking. To carve out new audiences and to appear modern, if not even *woke*, remakes often harness these issues and use them to inject new life into previously filmed content to deliver timeliness and fresh appeals. Sex and sexuality serve as obvious ways—and, notably, also comparatively *cheap* ways—to repackaged old material as abreast of the zeitgeist.

Remakes constitute both an inevitable and significant component of the filmmaking industry. Be it because there will always be an audience for clever (re)tellings of beloved stories or because filmmaking is expensive and studios are risk adverse, remakes across time, across cultures, and

across media will continue to comprise much of the pop culture we consume. It is for this reason that their ongoing analysis remains important.

This volume has focused on sex and sexuality as ways to modernize remakes, although other means of update would work equally well to tell a scholarly story of change over time in social attitudes and cultural preoccupations. Violence has already been mentioned as an area worthy of closer inspection; race as well as social issues like climate change, migration, and disease are other means often used in remaking to repackage screen content as new and desirable and thus would make for worthwhile academic studies.

Sex and Sexuality in Modern Screen Remakes is a continuation of my work on the interplay between screen and society. This book examined how sexiness, but also how gender roles, sexuality, and politics can be used to tell an old story afresh. In discussing sex as a modernizing tool in film production, insight is also provided into the ever-evolving—and ever-contested—role of sex in society.

NOTES

1. *Flight of the Phoenix* (2004), for example, has been described as a “cheap remake” of the 1965 film (Washington 2004); *Wrong Turn* (2003) as “a cheap remake of Wes Craven’s not-very-expensive-to-begin-with *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)” (Steelman 2003); *Not of this Earth* (1988) as a “cheap remake” of the 1957 film (Newman 2011, 233); and *Immediate Disaster* (1954) as “a cheap remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* [1951]” (Brosnan 1979, 108).
2. *Mr. Deeds* (2002), for example, has been described as a “particularly dumb remake” of *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) (Kerr 2002); *Alfie* (2004) as a “dumb remake” of *Alfie* (1966) (“‘Alfie’ remake lacking” 2005); and *D.O.A.* (1988) as a “dumb remake” of the 1949 film (Janusonis 1988).
3. *The Eye* (2008), for example, has been described as a “listless remake” of *Gin gwai (The Eye)* (2002) (Greenblatt 2008); *Bangkok Dangerous* (2008) as a “listless remake” of the 2000 film (Grimm 2008); and *Three for the Show* (1955) as a “listless remake” of *Too Many Husbands* (1940) (Parish and Bowers 1974, 120).
4. *Little Miss Marker* (1980), for example, has been described as a “mediocre remake” of the 1934 film (Craddock 2006, 1687); *Narrow Margin* (1990) as a “mediocre remake” of the 1952 film (Newman 1993, 170); and *The Cape Town Affair* (1967) as a “mediocre remake” of *Pickup on South Street* (1953) (Castell 1996, 170).

5. *CHIPS* (2017), for example, has been described as a “ridiculous remake” of the television series (1977–1983) (Rogers 2017); *Yours, Mine, and Ours* (2005) as a “ridiculous remake” of the 1968 film (Morency 2009, 265); *Sydney White* (2007) as a “forced, often ridiculous remake” of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) (Bain 2007); and *The Wicker Man* (2006) as a “ridiculous remake” of the 1973 film (Frank 2006).
6. *The Rains of Ranchipur* (1955), for example, has been described as a “superficial remake” of *The Rains Came* (1939) (Maltin 2001, 1118); *Clash of the Titans* (2010) as a “superficial remake” of the 1981 film (“Creature-feature ‘Clash’ is a superficial remake” 2010); and *Always* (1989) as a “superficial remake” of *A Guy Named Joe* (1943) (Worley 2005, 127).
7. *The House Across the Street* (1949), for example, has been described as a “tepid remake” of *Hi, Nellie!* (1934) (Halliwell 1989, 484); *Connie and Carla* (2004) as a “tepid remake” of *Some Like It Hot* (1959) (Hewitt 2004); and *Two Men in Town* (2014) as a “tepid remake” of *Deux hommes dans la ville (Two Men in Town)* (1974) (Young 2014).
8. *Death at a Funeral* (2010), for example, has been described as being a “warmed over” remake of the 2007 film (“‘Death’ warmed over as a remake” 2010); *Chappie* (2015) as “little more than a warmed-over *RoboCop* [1987] remake” (Marcus 2015); *The Hangover II* (2011) as “basically a warmed-over remake of *The Hangover* [2009]” (Mendelson 2013); and *Peter’s Friends* (1992) as “*The Big Chill* [1983] warmed over” (Hinson 1992).
9. Acuna (2013), Roush (2016), and O’Falt (2018).
10. Evangelista (2017). Reviews of *Psycho* (1998), in fact, ask the same question: see Watson (1999), and Elwood and Mancini (2002).
11. Young (2016).
12. Mee (2017, 200).
13. Johnson (2009, 63).
14. Heller-Nicholas (2010, 92).
15. Harney (2002, 74).
16. “Wizard of Oz beats Star Wars as most influential film of all time, study of 47,000 movies shows” (2018).
17. Rafter (2006, 52).
18. Anderton (2018).
19. Olney (2014, 373).
20. Luksic (2000).
21. Pete (2001).
22. Chess (2008, 87).
23. Axmaker (2004).
24. “Film of Dahl classic on top” (2005).

25. “More ideas reprised” (2006).
26. “Director, stars defend darker remake that leaves pastels back in the ‘80s; Fire & ‘Vice’” (2006) and Rahner (2006).
27. “Miami Vice tops UK film chart on debut weekend” (2006).
28. Horn (2007) and “The Oscars, from Wings to The Shape of Water: The 90 films to win Best Picture” (2018).
29. Bussey (2015).
30. “Movie bits” (2011).
31. Hicks (2011).
32. Bannon (2011) and Oliver (2016, 134).
33. Myers (2016).
34. Smith (2012).
35. “Stephen King’s horror classic gets an unnecessarily gory remake more blood, wasted” (2013).
36. Frank (2013).
37. “Bruce Campbell, Fede Alvarez talk up ‘very scary’ remake of ‘Evil Dead’” (2013).
38. “Man of Steel is solid gold at the box office” (2013).
39. “Angelina Jolie, Elle Fanning talk ‘Maleficent,’ Disney’s darker, scarier remake of ‘Sleeping Beauty’” (2014) and Strauss (2014).
40. Roach (2014).
41. MacInnes (2014).
42. Kermodé (2014).
43. Taylor (2016).
44. Syme (2016).
45. Delgado (2017).
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