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“SHE’S A SLY ONE:” RETHINKING COMPLICITY AND SURVIVAL IN PAULA
VOGEL’S *HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE*

by

MARY ANN BARFIELD

Under the Direction of Matthew Roudané

ABSTRACT

In an early 1998 interview, playwright, Paula Vogel, sat in conversation with Arthur Holmberg to discuss the ambivalent victim-perpetrator power dynamics in her critically-acclaimed play, *How I Learned to Drive*, explaining that “there are two forgivenesses in the play. . . one forgiveness for Peck, but the most crucial forgiveness would be Li’l Bit’s forgiving Li’l Bit. Li’l Bit as an adult looking at and understanding her complicity.” Since the Holmberg interview, critics have made only passing references to Vogel’s discussion of complicity in play reviews and critical essays. This thesis represents the first sustained engagement with complicity as an ethical subject to argue that Li’l Bit’s dependence upon her uncle for emotional and sometimes physical survival exempts her from moral scrutiny in the course of his abuse.

INDEX WORDS: *How I Learned to Drive*, Paula Vogel, Complicity, Sexual abuse, Trauma theory, Theater studies, American drama

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MARY ANN BARFIELD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
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Georgia State University
2020

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May 2020

DEDICATION

To Bridgitte Colwell, whose spirit has been as bright as the sun or as her hair.

To Dr. John Lurie, who has written and flourished alongside me.

To Dr. Mark Roland, white tab on a priest's collar. You found a spark and made your empathy into bellows.

To Dr. Andrew Lee, who has believed in my work—and prayed for it—since the very beginning.

To my sister, who prays words into materials.

To my mother, who taught me how to write and how to seek out truth.

To my father, who has two bodies, like a king. I started this project with the first and I finished it with the symbols—his passion, his gentleness, his goodness. I think that he must pray for me in Heaven.

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To my committee members, Dr. Matthew Roudané, Dr. Tanya Caldwell, and Dr. Jay Rajiva.

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Dr. Caldwell, you reached out to me early in this program asking—not about a paper or an assignment—but about how I was doing in general. You have opened your home and your schedule to me countless times since then and I'm continually surprised by your warmth and hospitality so many years later.

Dr. Rajiva, one of the first things I noticed about you was that you never completed my sentences for me when I was first learning to speak up in class. I hope you realize how empowering it has been for me to have a teacher who follows through on the ethical representation he writes about by making intellectual space for other voices without speaking into it.

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1 “SHE’S A SLY ONE:” RE-THINKING COMPLICITY AND SURVIVAL IN PAULA VOGEL’S HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE

In January of 2018, Judge Rosemary Aquilina sentenced Larry Nassar to up to 175 years in prison, telling him, “I just signed your death warrant” (Cacciola and Mather). Nassar, a pedophile and former osteopathic physician, was recruited by the USA Gymnastics team as national medical coordinator in 1996 where he used his position to sexually abuse over 150 children and adolescents until 2014 (Hauser and Zraik). In court, Nassar shook his head when his accusers spoke, charging them with public attention-seeking, and writing in a single-spaced, six-page-long letter to the court, “I was a good doctor because my treatments worked. The same ones speaking out now came back to me and referenced friends and family...Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” (Cacciola and Mather). When Judge Aquilina read this last line aloud, the attendant victims and their families gasped in surprise and shook their heads in disgust. Many of Nassar’s victims had been less than ten years old when he abused them.

Nassar’s trial—and especially that moment of victim-perpetrator tension in Nassar’s trial—represents in some ways the recent changes to public discourse surrounding sexual violence. Nassar was not, after all, the only figure under public scrutiny in recent years, but was rather one of over 250 high-profile figures named for sexual misconduct as a result of the MeToo Movement (Corey). In 2006, civil rights activist Tarana Burke launched the Me Too movement and, in 2016, actress, Alyssa Milano, drew attention to Burke’s work by asking her own Twitter followers to reply to a tweet with the words “me too” if they had ever been sexually harassed or assaulted (Chan). In the responses that followed the post, many women would come forward to launch allegations of sexual misconduct against high-profile men like Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, Kevin Spacey, and Louis CK (Corey). In theater and performance studies, other men and

women launched other allegations (and lawsuits) in an effort to hold artistic and technical directors accountable for sexually abusive behavior (Tran et al).

In this introduction, I build upon this transparency and activism by reading Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* in the context of changes in public discourse that have been generated as a result of the MeToo Movement. In particular, I situate my reading in recent discussions surrounding two subjects: complicity and blame (in chapter one), and survival and victimhood (in chapter two). In this section, I establish an ethical framework for the kinds of theoretical questions that emerge in philosophical analyses of complicity and blame. I provide an overview of Saba Bazargan-Forward's three methods of analyzing complicity with particular attention to Christopher Kutz's writings on joint-action complicity. Because all three methods of analyzing complicity are primarily designed without children or adolescents in mind, I supplement my reading of Kutz with David Kennedy's writings on childhood identity formation as well as other psychoanalytic writings on child sexual abuse. My aim in this reading is not to infantilize Li'l Bit nor to minimize Peck's influence in her life, but rather to raise questions about what critics are meaning when they talk about the "fraught" question of complicity in *Drive* (Smalec 589). Ultimately, I demonstrate how this blameworthiness or complicity is bound up in Li'l Bit's dependency upon Peck in a way that exempts her from full participation in what Kutz calls "the accountability system" (48).

While I primarily examine the power dynamics surrounding Li'l Bit's experience of victimization in chapter one, I dedicate the second chapter to charting her transition from victim of trauma to survivor of trauma. In chapter two, I situate the notion of trauma survival in Robin James' writings on feminist narratives of resilience and Vogel's early interview discussion of the "gifts we receive from the people who hurt us" (Holmberg 436). In revisiting these gifts, I

account for Li'l Bit's survival in view of her own flexibility and creativity towards Peck's self-destructive coping skills rather than Peck's lessons or Peck himself. At the end of this chapter, I make a distinction between survival and healing in order to evaluate, not merely Li'l Bit's escape from Peck, but the resources that allow her to maintain that physical and emotional separation.

Over the course of this essay, I analyze complicity and survival in *Drive* to demonstrate how Li'l Bit survives *in spite of* Peck's abuse, and not *because of* it. To this end, I hope to absolve Li'l Bit of any responsibility for Peck's crimes while providing a theoretical and textual framework for the interpretation one recent *Drive* actor offered when she said that "sexual abuse happens in ways that compels the victim to protect the predator. Sometimes the victim doesn't recognize what has happened is abuse until years later. Sometimes love is involved...and this doesn't excuse [abuse], but it does confuse it" (Kloster). In this thesis, I offer Peck no protection for his confusion and crimes and no platform for his project of erasure. In doing so, I hope to build upon the work of other Me Too activists by returning blame where blame is due, to play and real world perpetrators like Peck, Larry Nassar, R. Kelly, and Jeffrey Epstein who shoulder the pipe dreams of young girls in order to abuse them.

1.1 Complicity and Knowing: Reading Drive in the #Metoo Era

In 2017, a writer for the website *Dictionary.com* declared complicit to be the word of the year, explaining that it had "sprung up in conversations...about those who speak out against powerful figures and institutions and about those who stay silent" ("Dictionary.com's 2017"). While the connotations in the website's definition of the word—"involved with others in an illegal activity or wrongdoing"—have no precise relationship with knowledge or privilege, the writers comments certainly do ("Dictionary.com's 2017"). In this instance, the language of "staying

silent,” has all of the moral weight of John Stuart Mill’s oft-cited idea that “Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing” (74). In Los Angeles, an artist accused Meryl Streep of this kind of complicit silence with Harvey Weinstein, superimposing the phrase “she knew” in a Barbara Kruger-inspired font over a poster-sized photo of the actress (Paiella). On *Saturday Night Live*, Scarlett Johansson performed in a sketch as Ivanka Trump, promoting a new fragrance line called *Complicit* for the woman who “knows who she is and what she’s doing” and “who could stop all this, but won’t” (“Complicit”). With both Streep and Ivanka Trump, complicity has the connotation of what Carina Chocano has recently written in the *New York Times* as “a moral (non) stance that clears the way for everything from bad manners to genocide” (Chocano).

While I will return to the relationship between knowledge and complicity in this section, I will first distinguish between the three primary methods of analyzing complicity, which philosopher and ethical theorist Saba Bazargan-Forward has described as the “problem of marginal contributions” (327). Bazargan-Forward begins his book chapter, “Complicity,” by defining the “juristic” approach to the problem of marginal contributions that “advertises to the theoretical grounds for complicity in the law” (327). Because I am evaluating Li'l Bit's moral complicity, the juristic approach has little bearing on this essay aside from the legal notion of “mens rea” as it relates to questions of intentionality in moral wrong-doing. In a “group-agency” analysis, Bazargan-Forward “locates complicity in the individuals who together compose a group agent” (328). Philip Pettit explains how group unity necessarily “binds the attitudes of the collectivity at any time and across different times,” in a way that “cannot be smoothly continuous with the corresponding attitudes of [individual] members” (184). Putting this notion to work, Margaret Gilbert writes of a family member, Betty, who “might oppose [the] wishes [of

individuals in her family so that]...all she needs to do to exit the larger collective in question is to leave a particular geographical area” (79). In speaking to issues of survival and dependency, however, Gilbert describes how relationships to the family—to a smaller units within a larger collective—may make such departure impossible. Betty may “have little money, and several young children to care for” so that while she may say that the tribe “is to blame” for the behaviors that she “might oppose,” she herself bears no personal moral responsibility (79). While Gilbert’s method of analyzing complicity is better suited for analyses of collective agency rather than Peck’s relationship with Li’l Bit, her example of Betty and her small children speaks to a power dynamic that emerges in all three methods of complicity—that is, that dependents (children, people who cannot support themselves) are held to different standards of accountability than adults.

Theorists who analyze blameworthiness through a method of joint-action complicity provide more specific standards regarding how we ought to account for such relationships of dependency. Bazargan defines joint-action complicity as “the shared actions and intentions of individuals engaged in a cooperative product” (328). One theorist, Seumas Miller, frames the theory in an art gallery robbery, writing, “Burglar A might be individually morally responsible for turning off the security system...burglar B individually morally responsible for smashing the glass shield protecting the work of art. However, A and B are jointly morally responsible for the theft of the work of art” for “realizing this collective end” (242).

Arriving at that collective end, however, Christopher Kutz has stipulations towards what he calls the “multiplicity of relations among agents” in a moral system as structured by “participatory” relationships. Speaking more directly to Gilbert’s notion of dependency, Kutz evaluates the moral accountability of children and adolescents who “are treated as not

responsible and hence not accountable for serious harms” (50). Drawing on Peter Strawson's argument in *Freedom and Resistance*, he bases this limited accountability on our “awareness of cognitive and affective limitations in non-responsible agents naturally precludes them from participating in the relationships characteristic of adult society” (50). The blamelessness of these “immature agents” Kutz explains, “lies in the relationship the respondent has with the agent, namely objective rather than participatory” (50).

To summarize these theorists, analyses of complicity (legal or otherwise) generally account for both intentionality and issues of dependency in moral decision-making, especially as that decision-making relates to children and adolescents. Returning to the 2017 writing of complicity as a “(non) stance,” towards privileged knowledge then, I argue in chapter one that Li'l Bit's relationship with Peck—as both his student and his underage niece—exempts her from Kutz's accountability system. In doing so, I both counter Aunt Mary's claim that Li'l Bit “knows exactly what she's doing” while demonstrating how Li'l Bit's knowledge and agency is continually compromised by and bound up in her dependency upon Peck's authority (Vogel 67).

1.2 Survival and Victimhood: Feminism and Resilience

In chapter two, I examine—not Li'l Bit's dependency upon Peck—but her path towards independence, from victim of trauma to survivor of trauma. Such rhetorical distinctions between trauma victims and trauma survivors have their roots in longer-standing traditions by second-wave writers. Kathleen Barry, for example, writes in *Female Sexual Slavery* of “victimism [as] a status assigned to [victims] by those who are judging [their] experience[s]” (46). Victims may be characterized with a “passivity in accepting the noninteractive role of victim—the simple object of abuse” (46). Surviving “is the other side of being a victim,” as it requires “will, action, [and] initiative” in order to cope with or overcome sexual violence (46). While Li'l Bit is never merely

a passive object of Peck's abuse, I illustrate—in chapter one—how her dependency upon Peck's authority ultimately undermines her efforts to overpower him.

In chapter two, I evaluate the conditions and resources that Li'l Bit looks to in order to end her relationship of dependency with Peck in the context of Robin James' writings on feminism and resilience. Though James situates her theory in more complicated analyses of neoliberal military policy, she simplifies her writing in the way of feminism by gesturing to what she refers to as a therapeutic narrative. In that narrative trajectory, women are damaged by crises and misogyny, but they use this damage to become self-aware survivors. In Li'l Bit's narrative, I read what Vogel identifies as Peck's "gifts" of survival as resources of Li'l Bit's own imagination (Holmberg 436). Specifically, I evaluate the mind-body alienation that Li'l Bit inherits from Peck and that compromises nearly every other gift he gives her in the way of emotional support. Ultimately, I demonstrate how towards a process of healing that Peck himself never teaches her.

1.3 Review of Literature

In evaluating the victim-perpetrator dynamics between Li'l Bit and her Uncle, many critics have turned to psychoanalytic frameworks of analysis in view of the chronology of *Drive* and the notion of traumatic latency. Andrea J. Nouryeh, for example, reads the play's chronology—the flashing-back and flashing-forward—as a representation of the PTSD flashbacks that Jennifer Freyd describes in her work on memory and betrayal. Nouryeh writes that these “flashbacks...surface randomly, moving back and forth in time” (56). Though Graley Herren pushes back against the literalism of Nouryeh's psychoanalysis¹, he also looks to both the DSM-III definition of PTSD as well as Cathy Caruth's writings on “powerlessness and belatedness,” to argue that Li'l Bit is a “post-victim” and “active choreographer of her own memories from the

¹ Herren describes Nouryeh's reading as the “psychosexual equivalent of a bad acid trip” (106).

play's beginning" (106). In chapter two, I touch briefly on Herren's argument surrounding the "healing capacity of theater" to evaluate Li'l Bit's development from trauma victim to trauma survivor in the community outside of her family's influence.

Both V.B Lipscomb and Joanna Mansbridge read the play's chronology as a means of evaluating Li'l Bit's past and present subjectivity. Lipscomb, then, evaluates Vogel's chronology through the work of age theorist, Margaret Gullette, and the subgenre of the "female midlife progress novel" (77). Lipscomb argues that Vogel's "handling of age and performance illustrates a different view of midlife progress: an age performative reflecting a more postmodern fragmentation of the self" (90). While Lipscomb looks to the age performances of both the Li'l Bit and the Greek Chorus, she begins her writings on the fragmentation of self by referring to the mind-body split in the penultimate scene of the play² to argue that because "Li'l Bit's no longer living in her body, the presentation of age...challenges the traditional memory-play concept of an essential, stable, ageless self, and complicates the issue of midlife progress" (92). While Joanna Mansbridge deliberately avoids pathologizing Lil Bit, she writes that *Drive* "employs a nonchronological structure, using detours and reverse movements to mimic the workings of memory, to reorient structures of empathy, and to map out a different temporal terrain of sexuality and subjectivity" (126). By "focusing on memory," *Drive*, "mobilizes memories to pose questions about the present...mov[ing] us away from reading Li'l Bit's story as the psychological journey of an individual protagonist and toward a broader understanding of the way memory renders conceptually and experientially porous the boundaries between individual and collective, the past and present" (125).

² In that scene—the First Driving Lesson—the Female Teenage Greek Chorus narrates eleven-year old Li'l Bit's lines, while the actress playing Li'l Bit endures the physical memory of the assault

Mansbridge, of course, is not alone in her examination of the memory play genre, but critics disagree about Vogel's use of the form. Several critics contextualize Vogel's characterization of *Li'l Bit* in Tennessee Williams' characterization of Tom Wingfield³, leading critics like Graley Herren to write that "this memory play traces its descent through *The Glass Menagerie* line, not the *M. Butterfly* line" (107). For critics like Nouryeh, of course, this reading of memory is at odds with the diagnostic criteria for PTSD flashbacks.

Other critics distinguish among types of memory to make broader observations about how we recall narratives and how narrative memory can heal us. Alan Shepard and Mary Lamb, for example, argue that Vogel's "formal experiments, together with her studies of transgressive subjects, create an atmosphere that opens spectators to the possibility of reimagining and sometimes re-scripting a number of America's myths and historical truths" (199). Shepard and Lamb distinguish between memories of the mind and memories of the body, in their essay, to evaluate the ways that our understanding of space is shaped by sensory, rather than historical memory. Herren, too, distinguishes between forms of memory to demonstrate how healing in *Drive* is contingent upon "somehow converting...trauma from [an] ever-present performance to past narrative memory" (106). David Savran agrees with Herren's assessment of performative healing, writing that *Li'l Bit* "imagines herself miraculously whole again through the power of memory" (196).

Attilio Favorini is one of only a handful of critics to touch upon child and adolescent memory development in the play, writing that "conversational interactions that occur during events may facilitate children's understanding of an experience and serve to organize the resulting representation...children learn from such interactions who I *am* in relation to who I *was*" (162).

³ Vogel has, of course, spoken with David Savran about her affinity for Williams, saying, "I never ever fell out of love with Tennessee Williams" (116).

In chapter one, I ground my own writings on Li'l Bit's developmental subjectivity in the power dynamics of these conversations, though I read memory through the philosophical language of complicity to argue that Li'l Bit's memory-based construction of subjective agency is always-already built upon her history of trauma.

Several critics also speak to this notion of constructing a subjectivity in view of Li'l Bit's creation of alternative forms of narration. In her essay, "Walls made out of paper," Mary DeShazer offers a moving tribute to her friend and colleague, Lynda Hart, by reading Margaret Edson's *Wit and Vogel's Drive*, through Foucault's discourse on madness and an alternate symbolic. She writes that the spacing of the alternate symbolic of theater allows Li'l Bit to be both herself and "her witness" just as the audience is called to witness and offer "multiple confirmations" of her performance (113). Sarah Lansdale Stevenson, too, writes of the split subjectivity of victims of sexual abuse, explaining how "a radical separation from the body is characteristic of the incest-survivor's relationship to her body" (232). Stevenson, however, concludes that, in the course of Peck's abuse, Li'l Bit begins to see her breasts and other parts of her body as "no longer part of herself" (232). In a playful response to this essay, Susan Abbotson rightly argues that Vogel advocates for women to "take ownership of their own lives and bodies, thus wresting control from a manipulative and restrictive society" (2). It is this notion of "wresting control" that I address in chapter two as Li'l Bit manages to re-purpose Peck's abuse as a survival strategy (2).

Ann Pellegrini and Jennifer Griffiths both situate their readings of *Drive* in trauma writings of the early 1990's as well as the political aims of second-wave feminists. Griffiths argues that "Vogel's play stages an intervention against the political-historical limitations of trauma treatment and a corrective measure against the erasure of the perpetrator in survivor discourse...the play serves as a warning that unless these painful ambiguities around the survivor-perpetrator dynamic

are addressed...survivor movements risk repeating the failure of earlier trauma paradigms” (93). Ann Pellegrini also writes of the limitations of survivor moments in medical discourse, arguing that “there is a complexity between victim/perpetrator relations that PTSD cannot lay hold of or recognize” (418). Pellegrini argues that “the secret” Li'l Bit speaks of at the play's beginning is not the abuse, but Li'l Bit's “ambivalent desire [for] and identification [with]” Peck (418).

Pellegrini is not the only critic to speak to Li'l Bit's identification with Peck. In a New Historicist reading of Vogel's text, Andrew Kimbrough reads *Drive* alongside James R. Kincaid's *Erotic Innocence* assertion that “Yes, we all feel the attractiveness of children” (qtd in Kimbrough 53). Kimbrough's essay echoes Bigsby's claim that the play is “about an America which struggles to sustain notions of innocence, spiritual concern, and family values while flooding its consciousness with sexual titillation” (Bigsby 320). Kimbrough ultimately argues that the play “testifies to the radical and self-implicating belief that community begins when we recognize that what we find most abhorrent and intolerable in others is really that which we find most fearful and shameful about ourselves” (49). Jennifer Griffiths has rightly observed that “the play's depiction of its perpetrator...does not seem to reflect this kind of projection entirely, and the community's faults do not seem to mirror the perpetrator,” and when I evaluate Vogel's writing on community in chapter two, I look to the members of Li'l Bit's community who do not, as Griffiths writes it, “enable the abuse and its damage through gender stereotypes and an incomplete understanding of the survivor's journey into resiliency” (107).

In the way of mapping that journey into resiliency, I would like to conclude this essay by touching briefly on the gendered language that Andrew Kimbrough uses to contextualize his writings on child sexual abuse. Looking to Philip Jenkins' *Moral Panic*, Kimbrough writes of “the concomitant fallacy that sex crimes against children are on the rise when evidence points to

the contrary, that adult sexual behavior with minors and children occurs less frequently now than it did in the past” (52). We “seem to be addicted,” he writes, “to our proclivity for creating hysteria” (49). As critics, we too could pathologize the present cultural moment. We, too, could speak in the medical language of addiction and Madwoman-in-the-Attic *hysteria*. We could treat truth-telling like sickness and silence like good health. But we know better now. We know that one man’s comfortable silence is another woman’s lost scholarship. We know that we can no longer maintain simultaneous positions of acquiescence and intellectual integrity. We know that we can no longer maintain acquiescence and *moral* integrity. We are long overdue then for an analysis of blame in *Drive* that does not replicate the very cultural complicity that Vogel wrote about in 1997. We owe it to our students.

2 THE FRAUGHT QUESTION OF COMPLICITY IN *DRIVE*: DEPENDENCY, MORALITY

In an early 1998 interview, Paula Vogel sat in conversation with Arthur Holmberg to discuss Mark Brokaw's spring 1997 off-Broadway production of *Drive*. Speaking on the ambivalent victim-perpetrator power dynamics in her work, Vogel framed Li'l Bit's narration in notions of forgiveness and healing, telling Holmberg "There are two forgivenesses in the play. One forgiveness for Peck, but the most crucial forgiveness would be Li'l Bit's forgiving Li'l Bit. Li'l Bit as an adult looking at and understanding her complicity" (qtd. In Holmberg 436). In play reviews, critics began to echo this language surrounding forgiveness and blame with one writer speaking to Vogel's "fraught question of complicity" in the play (Smalec 589).

In this first chapter, I revisit these early play review writings on complicity in *Drive* in the context of more recent public discussions of sexual violence to examine two questions: *What do we mean, as critics, when we speak about Li'l Bit's complicity, and how is that understanding of complicity related to blameworthiness?* By reading *Drive* in conjunction with Christopher Kutz's writings on joint-action complicity, I demonstrate how Li'l Bit's blameworthiness is bound up in her dependency upon Peck. Ultimately, I argue that this dependency exempts her from moral scrutiny or full participation in what Kutz describes as the "the accountability system" (48). *Drive*, after all, is a play about systemic power and since "we are in . . . [a] cultural moment in the United States in which scandals about the abuse of power through sexual manipulation and assault proliferate in social media," the critical language surrounding our own theatrical Lolitas and Humbert Humberts is in need of revision (Vogel "Preface").

2.1 *Drive*, Complicity and the Critics

Paula Vogel wrote and developed *How I Learned to Drive* during a 1996 residency at the *Perseverance Theater* in Juneau, Alaska (Drukman). When Mark Brokaw directed and premiered the play off-Broadway in March of 1997, Vogel's work quickly and "quietly [began] tak[ing]the theater world by storm" (Morse and Vogel). Joe Adcock of the *Seattle Post* called the play a "spellbinding work of genius" (13). J. Wynn Rousuck wrote that "Vogel's writing [was] so strong that, in the end [the play's] power [would] haunt [the audience], just as Li'l Bit's memories haunt[ed] her" (Rousuck). John L. Lehman wrote that Vogel "handle[d the] taboo [subject matter]" with "brilliance and humor" (35) and in the *San Francisco Gate*, Steven Winn spoke to these taboos by explaining that "*Drive* treats its stigmatized love affair with ambivalence and sympathy for both parties. Uncle Peck is not exactly a villain, nor is Li'l Bit entirely a victim. But then of course he is, and she is" (Winn).

Writing on this ambivalence, early play reviewers generally spoke about the subject of complicity in less-than-specific terms. Stephanie Coen, for example, wrote that Peck was "disarmingly sympathetic [and] Li'l Bit unnervingly complicit" without specifying *what* she felt Li'l Bit was complicit *in* (30). David Benedict was similarly indirect, writing that "Vogel's non-chronological cross-cutting" enabled the playwright "to examine not only the entire family's role in the act, but . . . Li'l Bit's own choices" (Benedict). Marilyn Stasio spoke more than directly Coen or Benedict, writing that Peck "understands [children] well enough to make them complicit in their own seduction" (21). Vogel was similarly forthcoming. One article read, "Ask Vogel if she feels her central character is in any way complicit in the abuse, and her answer is uncomfortable and complex. "I think she is. I think she is feeling complicit. I think she is taught to be complicit. I think we are all complicit" (J. Morgan 12).

In critical writings surrounding the play, scholars have been careful to distinguish between this notion of Li'l Bit as complicit in her Uncle's abuse and Li'l Bit as a character "feeling complicit" in her Uncle's abuse (J. Morgan 12). Jennifer Griffiths, for example, observes how Peck always "introduces the sense of choice" in his encounters with his niece "making *her feel complicit* if anything happens" (105). Griffiths leans on Li'l Bit's own interpretation of the encounters, in other words, without assigning any value judgments of her own. Graley Herren argues that Li'l Bit's forgiveness of her uncle is "tantamount to a concession that her relationship with [him], while undeniably involving moments of outright victimization, also contained a great deal more and that she was complicit in nurturing and actively participating in that arrangement" (110-111). V.B. Lipscomb distinguishes between Li'l Bit's perspective and the perspective of the audience, in one section of her book chapter, writing that Peck's encounter with Cousin Bobby "prevents the audience from framing excuses for Peck's behavior," even as it "mitigates Li'l Bit's sense of complicity" as she is forced to come to terms with Peck's pattern of perpetration (97). Andrew Kimbrough is careful to note that "Li'l Bit takes responsibility for a past for which she, as a child, could not have had responsibility," while concluding that her "acceptance of culpability" is "part of the process of her growth and healing" (54). In general, then, critics tend to privilege Li'l Bit's interpretation of her abuse over their own readings of Peck's behavior.

In writings on trauma, of course, theorists have long prioritized this kind of narrative agency from victims who look to testimony as a means of healing from trauma.⁴ In his *Vicissitudes of Listening*, for example, Dori Laub argues that "what is important," in trauma

⁴ In trauma theory, there is a lengthy history of psychoanalytic writings on this relationship between testimony and narrative agency. As defined in an example by Shoshana Felman, the testimony "is itself presented as an act of bearing witness to the trauma of survival [and] the event to which the testimony points and which it attempts to comprehend and grasp is enigmatically, at once historical and clinical" (20).

recovery, is not the “empirical historical facts” in a victim’s retelling of an event but the “discovery of knowledge . . . its evolution and its very happening” in the event of testimony (62). The process of narration, in other words may be more important to Li’l Bit’s healing than a precise, chronological retelling of a trauma narrative. It is for this reason that Ann Pellegrini privileges Li’l Bit’s interpretation and presentation of her relationship with her perpetrator over our own interpretations as critics, asking, “Must a rape narrative conform to naturalized scripts of injury and innocence in order to be legitimated as a real injury? What preexisting patterns of meaning-making and intelligibility shape what can be told, what can be heard” (421). Ultimately, Pellegrini concludes that, “The complexity of women’s responses to rape and other forms of violence cannot be comprehended by the demand to narrate violation and only violation” (420). Li’l Bit is under no obligation, in other words, to make her abuse “narrative conform to naturalized scripts of injury and innocence” (421).

Insofar as “naturalized scripts of injury and innocence” shape our critical encounter with perpetrators like Peck, however, other cultural scripts of sexual promiscuity and female desire shape our interpretation of Li’l Bit’s victimization (421). Stefan Kanfer, for example, characterizes Li’l Bit as “not quite complicit in the affair but not entirely blameless either . . . a mixture of victim and unwitting temptress” (22). Susannah Clapp writes Li’l Bit as “if not manipulating at least complicit” (Clapp). Andrew Kimbrough writes that “Except for the early instance of molestation, L’il Bit and Uncle Peck mirror the real life example of Woody Allen and Soon Yi Previn, who are at this date married and raising a child together” (51)⁵.

In recent criticism, of course, reviewers have moved away from these characterizations of Li’l Bit as a “manipulative” (Clapp) “temptress” (Kanfer), regularly speaking in the

⁵ In the wake of Ronan Farrow’s work in the New York Times, the public has, of course, begun the process of reevaluating Allen’s legacy.

psychological language of “grooming” (Reid) and observing “the way the silky, seemingly gentle, troubled Uncle Peck has shepherded the illusion of consent” in his conversations with Li'l Bit. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräf and Amanda M. Young-Houser are the first critics to give language to these changes in scholarship, writing in a recent book chapter, “Complicity implies that the person who is complicit is so knowingly and intentionally” (24). For Li'l Bit, they argue, this isn't always so.

While Meyer-Dinkgräf and Young-Houser mostly raise questions about the critical charges of complicity directed at Li'l Bit, Christopher Kutz's writing on blame may provide answers and solutions for critics who continue to conflate Li'l Bit's agency with Peck's decision to abuse her. In the introduction, I outlined Saba Bazargan-Forward's three methods of analyzing complicity and I ended that summary by providing an overview of Christopher Kutz's writing on “participatory” relationships in analyses of joint-action complicity. In his analyses of blameworthiness, Kutz argues that children and adolescents “are treated as not responsible and hence not accountable for serious harms” because of their “cognitive and affective limitations” and because of the “objective rather than participatory” relationship they have with adults (50). In childhood and girlhood studies, critics speak to this relationship of dependency and the subject-object morality between adults and children in the language of “the adult-child polarity” (Kennedy 92). Because the child is “a transitional being” David Kennedy explains, childhood—as a state—is “otherness, the excluded underside of adult subjectivity (92). Furthermore, because children in this transitional state are “only just acquiring the adult language games that interpret the limits of cause and effect . . . the boundaries between self and other, and the metaphysics of the self-body relation,” Kennedy suggests that childhood identity is intersubjective—not subjective—and “subdued and cultivated” by the adults to whom a child looks for survival (92).

To be certain, in speaking to intersubjectivity, Kennedy is primarily referring to younger children since there is a significant distinction between the “cognitive and affective” limitations of a toddler and those of an eleven-year old (50). Ann Pellegrini has spoken of these differences in *Drive*, noting how categorizing adult-child sexual contact” as “abuse squeezes out all moral ambiguity and also evacuates the category of childhood” (424). Older children, however must also encounter similar developmental gaps, especially when speaking to developmental concepts like “war, murder, criminality and the police” or to socially taboo sexual concepts, like rape or incest (Kennedy 15).

In *Rape and Resistance*, for example, Linda Alcoff recalls the intersubjective experience of trying to talk about her rape, at age nine, without the discourse to make sense of it. She writes, “I didn’t have the language to name what happened. If I had been asked to tell, I would not have known what exactly to say. I was, as we used to say then, unaware of the facts of life. The word “rape” was not in my vocabulary, much less sexual abuse, sexual violence or pedophilia” (25). L’il Bit is not, of course, nine years old, but she faces the same developmental gap that Alcoff does as she attempts to find language for Peck’s abuse.

Vogel most directly draws attention to Lil’s Bit’s naiveté toward the developmental gap in a conversation Li’l Bit has with her mother, Lucy, during the play’s final moments. Forbidding Li’l Bit from joining Uncle Peck on a car ride to the beach, Lucy tells Li’l Bit that Peck is “a small town hick who learned to mix drinks from Hugh Hefner” (87). Li’l Bit asks, “Who’s Hugh Hefner?” in a moment that might have been funny had the audience not just witnessed Uncle Peck’s *Playboy* photo shoot (87). When Li’l Bit argues back with her mother that she needs a “father figure” and “someone to look out for [her],” Vogel makes it clear that Lil Bit hasn’t any idea what it is that she needs protection from (87). Writing on that missing

information, Mary DeShazer has spoken of the “belated historicity” (111) in Li'l Bit's observation that, even the way her family was, she was nearly sixteen before she learned that “pedophilia did not mean someone who loved to bicycle” (Vogel 14). That latency in experience is not by any means a psychic amnesia or a crisis of language, but rather a difference in language as formulated by a non or partial-participant in the moral system still learning “the language games” of grown-up sex rituals (Kennedy 16). Unfortunately, in that moment Lucy does nothing to educate Li'l Bit as she adapts to Kutz's “accountability system” (48), telling her with some resignation, “If anything happens I'll hold you responsible” (88).

Again, the audience might have had a different reaction here had Vogel not already written this language into an earlier scene in the play. At fifteen, Li'l Bit asks her mother and grandmother if sex is painful. Her mother responds truthfully, explaining that sex hurts, “Just a little bit. Like a pinch” (42). Her grandmother, on the other hand, disagrees vehemently. “Tell her it hurts!” she says. “It's agony! You think you're going to die! Especially if you do it before marriage!” (42). Lucy turns from her daughter to her mother saying, “I'm going to tell her the truth . . . you left me and Mary completely in the dark with fairy tales and told us to go to the priest” (42). If someone had taught “me something about the facts of life, I wouldn't have had to marry . . . that no-good-son-of-a [bitch]” (44). Grandmother says back, “I hold you responsible!” When Lucy parrots that phrase in the last scene, Vogel demonstrates how trauma is as cyclical as bad sexual education (44). Because Grandmother refuses to sexually educate her daughters, Lucy eventually finds herself penniless and pregnant. When Li'l Bit's father abandons his daughter and his wife, Li'l Bit finds herself in need of both paternal support and the kind of sexual education her mother probably could have used in adolescence. There is a certain sense of dramatic irony, then, when Mother ends the conversation with Grandmother by naming the threat

Li'l Bit already knows too well, saying, "If she doesn't find out from me, where is she going to find out? In the streets?" (42). For Li'l Bit, sexual education began in "the streets," years before this conversation (42).

In early writings on the play, critics tended to lose sight of these gaps in Li'l Bit's sexual development because of the shifts in chronology. Herren has observed, for example, how Li'l Bit's selection of a "chronologically late and relatively benign scene" at the start of the play "effectively paints Peck in a far kinder light" (109). That generosity towards her uncle, however, also leaves her more vulnerable to charges of complicity as critics fail to reconcile Peck's empathy with his ongoing abuse (109). Andrew Kimbrough, for example, frames Li'l Bit's development in a kind of innate sexual precociousness, writing her as a "prescient teenager aware of her budding sexual allure" (51). That language of "prescience," however, does not align with this first moment of early adolescent sexual naiveté, leading critics like Bigsby to write that Vogel's chronology forces the audience to "revise its reaction to the early scene . . . as Li'l Bit becomes first seventeen, then sixteen, then fifteen, and, finally, eleven" (1609). In evaluating the play in line with this development, Vogel makes it clear that Li'l Bit's *seeming* prescience emerges from her trauma history. She is prescient because "she has been taught," about her sexuality prematurely (J. Morgan 12). While many critics, Kimbrough and others, have shown great determination in characterizing Li'l Bit as *nearly-an-adult* in *Drive*, those same critics fail to acknowledge that she is, by the same token, *nearly-a-child*, too.

In Li'l Bit's relationship with Peck, Vogel initially frames Peck's manipulation in Li'l Bit's childhood naiveté towards, not just sex and *Playboy*, but the law. To this end, Peck often coerces Li'l Bit into minor legal transgressions before coercing or forcing her into more traumatizing sexual transgressions. During their first car ride together, for example, Peck

preemptively buys Li'l Bit's silence before he ever begins abusing her by offering to let her drive. Li'l Bit voices her concern, saying, "It's against the law at my age!" but Peck insists, that he "started driving" at her age before adding in a conspiratorial tone, "you can't tell anyone I'm letting you do this" (89). While Li'l Bit's legal violation may only appear incidental given Peck's sexual violation, clinicians and law enforcement officials who work with victims of sexual abuse would likely disagree.

In studies of disclosure rates—that is, in studies of children who come forward to authorities with allegations of sexual abuse in childhood—the fear of "getting into trouble" is a considerable barrier in police interviews (M. Morgan and Edwards 110). For adolescents like Li'l Bit, this vague fear often emerges from confusion and self-blame. The American Prosecutors Research Institute, for example, observes that an offender like Peck "may enhance the attractiveness of his company with alcohol or drugs, prohibited video games, and sexually explicit materials" (3). Such moral equivocations—a young girl's belief that she will get into just as much trouble for playing a video game or driving a car as her uncle will for abusing her—are not always easy for adults to understand, but they are real fears for children and adolescents conditioned to trust the authority figures who "teach [them] things" (Vogel 87)..

In a recent book chapter on *Drive*, Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe and Amanda M. Young-Hauser argue that "Li'l Bit is not at all complicit," in this scene, because "complicity . . . implies that the person who is complicit is so knowingly and intentionally" (24). This view of complicity as a moral outcome of knowledge and knowing has emerged explicitly in the discourse of the #metoomovement and implicitly in the work of theorists like Kutz who write of child-adult relationships in the language of moral "dependency" (50). When Li'l Bit steps into Peck's car, neither her mother nor her uncle has given her the sexual or legal information she needs to

contextualize Peck's betrayal, therefore any criticism of Li'l Bit's complicity at age eleven must be foregrounded in the developmental knowledge that she lacks. This sexual violation is simply an example of Kutz's non-"participat[ory]" "objective" relationships (50).

Critics rarely disagree about the power dynamics surrounding the abuse in this scene, especially since Li'l Bit cannot "reach the pedals" and is not so much driving Peck's car as she is navigating at the mercy of someone controlling the gas and brake (87). Yet even as an older adolescent, after Li'l Bit has begun to understand the sexual power dynamics between her Uncle and herself, she continues to find herself vulnerable to Peck's sexual advances because of her dependence upon him for sexual and legal information. As she enters Peck's basement for a photo shoot, he reminds her that she has "drawn the line" in terms of sexual boundaries in the photo shoot and she tells him, with some apparent understanding of nudity clauses in business law, "That's right. No full-frontal nudity" (60). Peck "tries not to laugh," as she tells him that she has been "reading" (60). Evidently, Li'l Bit has been studying to give herself the sexual education she lacked at age eleven.

But then the legal parameters change again. Peck tells her, "You're doing great work. If we keep this up, in five years we'll have a really professional portfolio. (64). Once again, Li'l Bit consents to one contract—photographs with no full-frontal nudity—only to discover that she has already been participating in a different contract. While Vogel's play predates legislation surrounding revenge pornography, "forty-six states" have recently criminalized the very abuse of power Vogel addresses in this scene (Mark et al). While someone in Li'l Bit's position might consent to being photographed then lawmakers have recently reckoned with the ethics of ex-partners sharing photos without the consent of the women in them. In 1969, Li'l Bit has no such legal recourse but this more recent legislation is indicative of the uneven power dynamics in the

scene. While many critics frame Li'l Bit's next choice to unbutton her shirt as an act of complicity, it is still a decision bound up in Li'l Bit's dependence upon Peck for emotional and sexual information. The decision is, in the first place, an act of emotional dependence; Peck is the only figure in her life consistently admiring and expressing his love for her, even as he justifies abusing her with his emotional support.⁶

But Li'l Bit has more pragmatic motivations, too. At the beginning of scene, she tells the audience of the "small room" or "zone" set aside "in every man's home" where "he keeps his manly toys: the Vargas pinups, the tackle," the explicit photos of his underage relative, and these objects are guarded by an "invisible sign . . . reading Girls Keep Out" (59). Li'l Bit has entered a man's domain of rules and secrecy in other words, and while we can label her as complicit for playing by the rules Peck sets in that zone, we must also acknowledge that the very notion of playing by anyone's rules is, by its definition, an act of submission. Peck has already demonstrated his insincerity to Li'l Bit by telling her that the photos that were meant to be "just between [her and him]" (65) might also be suitable for Playboy and he has demonstrated his narcissism by questioning the legitimacy of Li'l Bit's self-protective ("I don't want anybody seeing this") concern, saying, "If that's the way you feel five years from now, it will remain that way" (65). Just as Peck swore her to secrecy at age eleven by framing his sexual violation in her violation of the law, Peck frames this new violation in a different adolescent fear—the fear of

⁶ Psychologist, Adrian Powell, has written that, "the paedophile will identify and take advantage of the child's needs," (22) and it is the job of those adults working with the child in recovery to "reinforce . . . that the error was not in the child's wanting attention or pleasure but in the teaching given by the perpetrator" (Wieland 37). Some critics have, of course, become distracted by Li'l Bit's dual motivations in this scene, since she wants and needs attention as an adolescent, but does not necessarily want to be photographed for a public forum in order to secure that attention.

exposure and peer ridicule. Having already mentioned her frustration with “the boys at school” (62), she now expresses a fear of exposure by mentioning them again, telling Peck, “Any boy around here could just pick up, just go into the Stop & Go and buy” (65). By momentarily aligning herself with Peck’s interests, she protects herself from the possibility of future social estrangement among her classmates. This calculated attempt to cooperate with the man threatening her with blackmail, however, also means that her complicity is bound up in her dependency upon Peck to keep the original pictures to himself, out of sight of the “Neanderthals in short pants” (62).⁷

In her writings on child sexual abuse, Sharon Lamb has spoken of these acts of complicity as “choiceless choices” (38). She writes that when victims of abuse “have the courage to tell someone,” of ongoing abuse, for example, the “result of their disclosure is their removal from the household . . . or the loss of many other aspects of their lives that they treasure” (38). Although they “may see themselves as making a choice to keep the family together, or taking care of a ‘sick’ daddy, these are choiceless choices since either way these victims lose” (38). Li’l Bit, in other words, might choose to have her picture taken in order to maintain some semblance of control over the photoshoot, but she must also surrender her own privacy and safety in that exchange. That relationship between survival and dependency, of course, serves as the basis for Peck’s and Li’l Bit’s entire relationship. As Jennifer Griffiths has explained, “Li’l Bit’s body/sexuality keeps him stable. He has convinced her that she is capable of and responsible for rescuing him from himself. As her only source of support, she must comply with this

⁷ Posing for more explicit pictures may, of course, seem like a counterintuitive survival strategy, but it is a strategy based in Li’l Bit’s anxiety and the psychological reality that sex offenders “blackmail. . . children to provide further images [of child sexual abuse] or sexual favors based on [prior] footage or images of the child obtained illegally” (Sanderson 66).

arrangement to continue to receive this support” (105). Such “negotiations always introduce the sense of choice, making her feel complicit if anything happens” (105).

The choiceless choices Li'l Bit makes, however, do not always have the life-or-death implications of her early choices. It is one thing to get a sixteen-year old drunk but quite another to put an eleven-year old at the wheel of a moving vehicle. Li'l Bit does, after all, eventually develop the language and sexual education to determine that “pedophilia does not mean someone who love[s to] bicycle” (14) and—in this sense—she seems to surpass Kutz’s notion of the “cognitive limitations” of younger adolescents (50). She has not, however, managed to fully overcome the adult-child, subject-object polarity in her relationship with her uncle, since Peck also maintains his authority over her in power dynamics outside of the language of sexual or legal education. It is for this reason that Kutz does not write of the relationship between age and emotional maturity as “scalar,” but rather views age as one factor among a “multiplicity of relations” between agents in a moral system (26). This is to say that, regardless of how quickly Li'l Bit adapts to Peck’s teaching style, her relationship with him is still rooted in the “affective limitations” of her trauma history (Kutz 50).⁸

In addressing this continual interplay between Li'l Bit’s early reactions to Peck’s abuse and her later adolescent reactions, Vogel initially presents Li'l Bit as a figure caught between terror and immobility. During her second driving lesson at age fifteen, for example, Peck asks her to do a safety check during which she checks the side and rearview mirrors of the car. In her final monologue, Li'l Bit performs the same safety check again, but when she “adjusts the rearview mirror” for the second time, she catches “the spirit of Uncle Peck” in the light “sitting in the back seat of the car” (92). Because Vogel uses this stage business to convey Li'l Bit’s

⁸ Kutz uses the word “limitations,” but we could also call this an affective *difference*. (50).

reflections on her past memories of trauma, it is in this moment that she begins to voice concern for her safety based on her first driving lesson with Uncle Peck. When he asks her to lock the doors, she jokes, “But then I’m locked in with you” before asking more seriously, “If I put my hands on the wheel—how do I defend myself?” (49). Peck, then, tells her that he “will never touch [her]” while she’s driving, though he of course might have more accurately said, *I will never touch you* again (49).

When Mansbridge writes that *Drive* “mobilizes memories to raise questions about the present” (125), she is primarily referring to the memories that the present-day Li’l Bit mobilizes as a narrator in order to “floor it” in the direction of healing at the end of the play (92). In looking to Atillo Favorini’s notion of “facilitated representations” of trauma (162), however, Vogel makes it clear that, in this moment, as much as Li’l Bit would like to believe Uncle Peck when he tells her that her life is “in her own two hands,” her experience with Peck, at age eleven, stands in direct contradiction to the present driving lesson (49). Li’l Bit is always looking backward then, even as Peck insists that she keep her eyes on the road. History after all is the only way that she will ever learn how to remain ten steps ahead of her uncle. In this sense, her very survival is dependent upon the information and education Peck is willing to impart to her in a relationship of limited “participat[ion]” (Kutz 26).

This is not, of course, to say that Li’l Bit has managed to consistently outthink Peck by the second driving lesson since she still has much to learn in the way of Peck’s education. A month after that conversation, Peck invites Li’l Bit to celebrate her first long-distance drive by riding with her to an inn an hour away on the Eastern Shore. There, he talks her into ordering a cocktail. In this scene, he recycles an older method of manipulation—the same one he used when he first let her drive—by assuring her that she can drink underage as long as she remains under

his adult supervision. He explains to her that restaurants “on the Eastern Shore [are] European . . . and very understanding if gentlemen wish to escort attractive young ladies who might want a before-dinner cocktail” (23). Notably, he himself remains sober. Once Peck has gotten Li'l Bit sufficiently drunk, Vogel revisits this notion of student-teacher and adolescent-adult dependency by objectifying Li'l Bit in the language of a disabled car. The Voice tells the audience, “Even with careful maintenance and preventative operation of your automobile, it is all too common for us to experience an unexpected breakdown” (30). As Li'l Bit stumbles on her way to the car, Peck “swoops her up his arms,” before “gently deposit[ing] her on the front seat” (30).

In the next moment, Peck challenges not only the boundaries of Li'l Bit's understanding of the laws surrounding underage drinking, but her moral framework for their entire relationship. Though Li'l Bit is well aware of her uncle's interest in young girls and boys, she does not yet use the language of sexual abuse to describe it. In this scene, she writes their interactions as a kind of sexual affair, saying that what they're doing “isn't right . . . it isn't nice to Aunt Mary” (31). Peck, of course, pushes back against her interpretation asking, “Have I forced you to do anything?” (32). In this moment, though, the alcohol has compromised Li'l Bit's judgment. Vogel writes that “there is a long pause as [she] tries to get sober enough to think this through” before saying, “I guess not” (32). Had Li'l Bit entered the car sober, she might have responded to Peck's question differently. Instead, she ends the moment by kissing Peck and then moving away from him “dizzy again” (32).

As Peck makes his way downstage, in the next moment, Vogel replicates this back-and-forth motion during Peck's fishing trip with Cousin Bobby. Peck and Bobby have taken to the river to spend the day looking for pompano which Peck tells Bobby are “shy, mercurial fish” (34). As Bobby hooks a pompano, Peck coaches him saying “Tip the rod up—not too sharp—

hook it—all right, now easy, reel and then rest—let it play. And reel—play it out, that’s right” (35). Christopher Bigsby has noted that Peck’s “strategy with fish mirrors that which he adopts with the young woman [and young man] he desires” (1609). If Peck only ever pulls on his line—if he strictly depends upon force, in other words—the line between the fish and himself will snap or the fish will swim away. At the restaurant, Peck is content to expedite the process of tiring Li’l Bit out—of letting her play—by weakening her sense of judgment with cocktails. In order to maintain the tension in the line between them, though, he returns to his reel-then- rest approach by also reminding her that he hasn’t “forced [her] to do anything” (32). In this way, he sets the parameters for her interpretations of their encounters.

That definition of trauma has, of course, surfaced and resurfaced in criticism surrounding the play in view of Vogel’s complex writings on victimization. Ann Pellegrini, for example, has written of rape as the “paradigm of [sexual] injury” since it implies a strict separation between innocent victims and villainous perpetrators in comparison to other kinds of sexual violence (420). Jennifer Griffiths, too, “differentiate[s] the levels of damage [after trauma]” by situating her argument about victim agency in the Rind Study⁹ (96). While Griffiths immediately acknowledges that the study is “deeply flawed,” she views the cultural response to the implications *in* the study as a signifier of our reluctance “to consider variations to the cultural narrative of childhood sexual abuse” (96). The authors of the study concluded, she goes on to explain, that “if a child was coerced particularly by violence or the threat of violence, the emotional consequences were much more severe . . . [and if] a child . . . had some agency within the situation . . . the presence of that agency [could] account for a child’s resiliency in later

⁹ The Rind Study was a controversial study led by Bruce Rind in 1997. Rind concluded that the psychological long-term harm associated with sexual abuse was dependent upon the degree of coercion and force used by the perpetrator.

years” (Griffiths 96). Though Griffiths is careful to note that this view of trauma is “hardly a nuanced one,” she concludes that “Li’l Bit’s resilience [in overcoming Peck’s abuse] comes from her ability to remain aware of the shifts in power and to see herself as having some control within the situation” (99).

Though I do not disagree with this aspect of Griffiths’ analysis, that notion of “the presence of agency” may have different emotional implications of harm for children and adolescents not coerced or threatened with violence during abuse (96). Some psychologists who work with victims of child sexual abuse, for example, have written that an “overt use of physical force makes it easier for a child to recognize that the CSA was unwanted and forced upon him,” and, therefore, “makes it easier for the child to blame the abuser rather than himself because the subtle mixture of love, affection, and sexual activity are not present” (Sanderson 49). When force is used in sexual abuse, in other words, victims almost always respond “to the experiences “very negatively” (105). If, however, a child has agency, “damage is caused primarily by guilt. The more a child imagines that he or she had complicity in the affair, the more guilty he or she will feel, and the harder it will be to get over the experience” (106).¹⁰ In her analysis of this kind of complicity, Sharon Lamb writes that “Any self-blame [at all is] associated with poorer [long-term] adjustments” (32). While Li’l Bit’s terror during the first driving lesson, might mean that she is more traumatized in that moment, the guilt and self-blame she experiences in the absence of terror may have other implications for more “long-term harm” (106). In Li’l Bit’s case, the absence of force “makes it easier” for her to take responsibility for some of Peck’s behavior even as Peck continues to set the rules for their encounters in the same way that he set the rules for the photo shoot when Li’l Bit was thirteen (Sanderson 49). In this sense, it is not surprising that Li’l

¹⁰ “Damage” is Griffiths’ word and, to be clear, it refers to psychological harm (106).

Bit initially tries to frame the power dynamics of her sexual encounters in the context of infidelity rather than abuse, nor is it surprising that Peck reels a drunk, played-out Li'l Bit towards an alternate definition of the experience. In doing so, he preemptively denies her right to feel violated. Once again her interpretation and judgment is dependent upon Peck's interpretation and judgment.

While this absence of force or violence confuses Li'l Bit, critics too, are not immune to Vogel's charm and seduction.¹¹ Ideal victims, after all, are defined by their weakness¹² while victims with power are harder to read. In scene one of the play, for example, critics read Li'l Bit's reaction to Peck's touch with ambivalence. Susan Abbotson writes that Li'l Bit is "capable of enjoying her breasts on her own terms" (6). As Peck kisses them, Li'l Bit "rears back her head" (Vogel 12) in what Abbotson concludes is "ecstasy" (6). Pellegrini argues that Li'l Bit's "measured response [toward Peck's physical touch in that moment] . . . walks the line between desire and resignation" (422). Depending upon the choices of the actress and the interpretation of those choices by the audience then, Li'l Bit may appear to be rearing her head back in ecstasy, as Abbotson concludes, or leaning her head back in emotionally-detached resignation. Unsurprisingly, it is the first scene that Bigsby calls a "parodic teenage tryst" (1608).

That ambivalence, of course, is partly dependent upon Li'l Bit's presentation of the memory which Bigsby has called "relaxed and not overtly exploitative" (1608). The stage directions read that "The two sit facing directly front. They do not move. Their bodies remain passive. Only their facial expressions emote" (8). Graley Herren has written that this limited

¹¹ Critics have written of the power of seduction in *Drive* since the play opened. Ben Brantley, for example writes that between Vogel and Peck "it is hard to say who is the more accomplished seducer" (Brantley).

¹² In his writings on ideal victims, criminologist Nils Christie examines five characteristics that influence our sympathy towards victims of crimes. He argues that "the [ideal] victim is weak . . . the victim was carrying out a respectable project . . . she could not be blamed for where she was . . . the offender was big and bad . . . the offender was in no personal relationship to her" (1).

representation of physical engagement is “not nearly so disturbing” (108) and Bigsby concludes that “power seems to reside with the young woman rather and not the man whose behavior makes him seem younger than he is, and more dependent” (1608). The limited physical engagement, however, both empowers Li'l Bit as narrator of her own story and requires the audience to listen more carefully to the verbal exchanges on stage since—regardless of Li'l Bit's appearance of agency—that agency cannot simply be separated from her history of sexual abuse.

When we listen to Li'l Bit alongside a chronology that accounts for her early adolescent development, then, we get the sense of a young girl who is constantly listening for changes in conversational tone, for a driving lesson that is about to become violent. Though the conversation may be read as mutually flirtatious, it is also steeped in Li'l Bit's abusive interpersonal history with her Uncle and the “affective limitations” of an adolescent trauma victim (Kutz 50). Peck, for example, tells her that he loves the smell of her hair and she responds to this line by alternating between the passivity and self-protection she learned in early adolescence. She initially only says, “Uh-huh,” before quickly moving to establish firmer boundaries in the conversation when she anticipates that Peck is preparing to change the tone of it (8). After Li'l Bit tells him that she uses Herbal Essence shampoo, he begins what is probably a typical projection of sexual fantasy by saying, “I'm gonna buy me some . . . and when I'm all alone in the house, I'm going to get into the bathtub and uncap the bottle and—” Li'l Bit stops him, saying, “Be good,” intuiting how the sentence is likely going to end (8). But Peck says, “What did you think I was going to say? . . . I'm going to wash my hair. That's all” (8). When Li'l Bit tells Peck that she thought he was planning to do “something nasty” with the shampoo, Peck says with surprise, “With shampoo? Lord, gal—your mind!” (8). Li'l Bit asks, “And whose fault is it?” (8). This last line speaks back to the ways in which Peck's sexual imagination has

influenced Li'l Bit's own sexual imagination in the course of her adolescent development. Had Peck responded to this assessment with self-defense or denial, the scene might have turned out very differently, but Peck is careful to keep his tone playful, lest Li'l Bit spend too much time thinking about the uneven power dynamics that have led her to self-protection.

Though Vogel only touches on the *possibility* of Li'l Bit's dependency upon Peck in this exchange, she is more explicit at another point in the scene. As Peck removes Li'l Bit's bra, she tells him, shivering, "It's a little cold," and he quickly interprets her physical reaction for her, telling her, "That isn't why you're shaking" (12). Peck is not, of course, the first sex offender to lay claim to authority over the physical sensations and experiences of someone else's body but—given the lengths to which Li'l Bit goes to maintain this bodily alienation via alcoholism—this is one of the most subtle and traumatically violent moments in the play. In this scene, of course, the adult Li'l Bit also reclaims some sense of bodily authority by situating herself as a "post-victim" who now has the power to reimagine her trauma (Herren 106). As I close this essay, I want to draw attention to the power of that imaginative revision.

My purpose in writing this essay has never been as hopeful as the criticism that has come before it in view of writings on the adult survivor of trauma and her capacity for healing. I examine, instead, the vulnerable child victim in the present-tense process of traumatization. If theater can help us "find . . . a way to reinvest our energies in a different future . . . full of hope and reanimated by a new, more radical humanism," as Jill Dolan has written, I'd like to believe that this essay promotes hope in other ways (3). I hope that our readings of complicity in *Drive* will eventually include the language of grooming, dependency, and childhood intersubjectivity. I hope that, in sorting through these power dynamics, we move one step closer to dismantling the systemic powers that perpetuate the violence of perpetrators like Peck. I hope that the work of

#metoo activists has not been done in vain in that process of dismantling systemic power. And I hope more than anything else that those voices like Li'l Bit's and Linda Alcoff's are no longer misrepresented in the teaching and criticism of this play. We have a critical responsibility to make space for our theatrical Lolitas for the sake of both our students and the audiences that continue to see themselves in Vogel's work.

3 CHANGING GEARS: LI'L BIT'S TRAJECTORY FROM VICTIM TO SURVIVOR

In 2018, *Playbill* released an Equity Principal Audition call for the David Morse-Mary Louise Parker 2020 revival of *Drive* in which Li'l Bit was described as “smart, tough, funny, sensual, and sensitive. A survivor” (“Casting Call”). That last alliterative descriptor—Li'l Bit as a *survivor*—emerged in the early criticism and interviews surrounding *Drive* and has re-emerged in public discourse in the wake of the MeToo Movement. In 1997, for example, Vogel spoke to Arthur Holmberg of a “culture of victimization,” that encouraged “people to dwell in their identity as victims” (436). In contrast to that culture, she wrote Li'l Bit as someone who learns, through abuse, “how to survive” (436). In a recent and real-life example of Vogel’s reflections on resilience and survival, 140 of Larry Nassar’s victims were honored with the Arthur Ashe Medal of Courage for testifying to his abuse in court and, in an ESPN article, they were identified as “sister survivors” (Maine). This distinction between survivor and victim was, of course, a major theoretical concern for second wave feminist activists. In 1979, for example, Kathleen Barry argued that being “defined as a victim,” means to “deny that identity is ongoing and changing” (47). Vogel puts it another way, telling Charlie Rose of victims of crimes who get “into a rut and spin . . . [their] wheels over and over and over again” (Morse and Vogel). In contrast, Barry continues, survivors depend upon “will, action, [and] initiative” (47) to get out of the rut and, “floor it” as Li'l Bit does at the end of *Drive* (Vogel 91).

In this chapter, I study Li'l Bit’s trajectory from victim of trauma to survivor of trauma alongside Robin James’ writings on feminism and resilience discourse. Though James is a musicologist and philosopher, her analyses of the performances of women pop stars intersect with trauma theory and feminist writings on post-traumatic growth. In *Resilience and Melancholy*, James argues that feminist resilience narratives replicate and reinforce misogyny by

framing the objectification of women's bodies as a means of subjectification. In Vogel's play, *Li'l Bit* recycles Peck's objectification into a survival strategy of bodily alienation in order to end her relationship with him and, by reading that process in the context of James' writings, I argue that Vogel writes this survival as a matter of *Li'l Bit*'s flexibility and creativity towards Peck's "gifts...inside that box of abuse" rather than her endurance of them (Holmberg 436). In doing so, I especially attend to *Li'l Bit*'s mixed metaphors of flight, in the play, as double-signifiers of both escapism and physical escape itself to examine the ways in which *Li'l Bit* subverts Peck's escapism into an escape route.

In her writings on feminist narratives of overcoming, Robin James looks to Mark Neocleous' assertion that the rhetoric of military resilience has replaced the rhetoric of military security. Resilience, as Neocleous explains it, "connotes the capacity of a system to return to a previous state, to recover from a shock, or to bounce back after a crisis or trauma" (3). While the military security of past decades entailed prevention and protection from crises, in other words, the military resilience of more recent years anticipates and prepares for crises in order to recover from them more quickly. For this reason, Neocleous concludes, the military now speaks "of resilience and its (positive) connotations" instead of speaking "of fragility and its (negative) associations" (3).

Robin James begins her theory of feminine resilience with this premise of fragility-as-security by turning Neocleous' military writings onto the traditional understanding of ideal feminine embodiment as vulnerability (80). In traditions of ideal femininity, women are taught, as Iris Marion Young writes it, "to approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy" (34). Moreover, women "often experience [their] bodies as . . . fragile encumbrance[s], rather than the medium for the enactment of [their] aims" (Young 34).

Because of this cultural shift from security-thinking to resilience-thinking, however, James proposes that, while resilience-femininity “assumes that women are always already damaged by [a] patriarchy” that renders them fragile, ‘good’ women visibly overcome the negative effects of that damage (82). Femininity, then, “is performed first as damage, second as resilience” (82). In the fitness industry, writers have represented this shift from “good” frailty to “good” resilience by reconceptualizing their marketing strategies from the visible fragility of traditionally underweight bodies to the muscular strength of athletic bodies. In the online magazine *Women’s Fitness*, for example, one article title reads, “Strong is the new skinny” (“Why Strong”); security-bodies, then, are disciplined into weightlessness, resilience-bodies are disciplined into muscle.

That strategy shift does not, of course, disrupt the objectification of women’s bodies, but rather the standards by which women are objectified. In turn, James explains, objectification is made more economical. Resilience, then, not only requires women to “bounc[e] back from injury and crisis,” but to “capitalize on deficits so that [they] end up ahead of where [they] initially started (one step back, two steps forward)” (4). In the case of the *Women’s Fitness* article, this resilience in the face of objectification “reinforces and strengthens patriarchy,” because it’s no longer “the sexism that needs collective overcoming, but individual women that need to be “resilient” in the face of unavoidable, persistent sexism” (85). Because resilience discourse is not about overcoming patriarchy, but upgrading it, then, the notion of “objectification (being looked at)” is repurposed as a resource for “subjectification (overcoming)” (106).

In *Drive*, Li’l Bit manages to escape her relationship with her Uncle by capitalizing on the “deficit” of his objectification even as she learns to replicate the very misogyny that undermines her subjectification (4). Jill Dolan, for example, has written of the complexity of this

objectification-as-subjectification narrative in her reading of Peck's photo shoot. Dolan writes that, while "Peck's motives are not pure . . . the experience instills in Li'l Bit a sense of her own allure, a glimpse of a budding sexuality that's powerful to her in a family life in which she is otherwise naive and powerless" (127). As Li'l Bit grows up, she then uses this power as a means of subjectification. In the next section of this chapter, I evaluate the limitations of objectification as one of the "gifts inside [Vogel's] box of abuse" to argue that Li'l Bit survives not because of Peck's "gifts," but because of her own creativity in using Peck's resources against him (Holmberg 437). In this section, I evaluate Bigsby's speculation that "Peck has summoned Li'l Bit into being, or at least forged him into a weapon against himself," in view of the questions that Deborah Hull raises in her dissertation on *Drive*. Hull writes, "Yes, Uncle Peck empowers Li'l Bit with the knowledge she eventually uses to "think what the other guy is going to do before he does it," but why? Vogel states that she "think[s] he taught his niece how to reject him," but she does not say that he intentionally taught her how to reject him (Morse and Vogel). In revisiting Hull's and Bigsby's questions, I hope to return agency to Li'l Bit who survives, not because of the gift of Peck's abuse, but because of her subversion of it (324).

3.1 Subjectification and Objectification

In readings of Vogel's text, much of Peck's abuse falls along a continuum between objectification and subjectification. David Savran, for example, has written that the photo shoot is "the center of the play, for it is in this scene that Li'l Bit most graphically becomes an object for Uncle Peck, and more ominously, for herself as well" (264). Vogel, in fact, frames Li'l Bit's objectification in a lengthier cultural history of men objectifying women. The stage directions read, "Throughout the shoot, there can be a slide montage of actual shots of the actor playing Li'l Bit—interspersed with other models à la Playboy, Calvin Klein and Victoriana/Lewis Carroll's

Alice Liddell” (62). The photographs of Li'l Bit herself, however, represent a simultaneous process of subjectification and objectification. Peck, for example, tells Li'l Bit that she is a “very beautiful woman,” and Vogel writes in the stage directions that “Li'l Bit looks up, blushes,” while Peck photographs her in view of the audience (62). A few photographs later, Li'l Bit tells Peck that “the boys in school don't think,” that she is beautiful and Peck reassures her saying, “it's gonna take them a while to catch up” (62). As Peck “clicks another shot,” the audience sees “a faint smile on Li'l Bit on the screen” (62). Peck builds Li'l Bit's self-confidence, then, even as he objectifies her.

Because this objectification makes Li'l Bit aware of what Dolan writes as “a budding sexuality that's powerful,” Li'l Bit must quickly determine how and when to incorporate this power into her life away from Peck. Once Li'l Bit begins to understand Peck's process of objectification then, she also learns to recycle objectification into a form of insulation. In the scene leading into the photo shoot, Li'l Bit stands against a wall during a school Sock Hop while Uncle Peck “stands and stares at [her] body” in a “strange light [while] setting up a tripod” (55). In the stage directions, Vogel writes that Li'l Bit “tenses, aware of Peck's gaze” (56). When a classmate, Greg, asks her to dance, however, Li'l Bit turns Peck's gaze on herself. She tells another girl from her school, “I think he asks me on the fast dances so that he can watch me...jiggle” (56). By learning to think “five steps ahead” of her Uncle then, Li'l Bit has also learned to think several steps ahead of the “Neanderthals” in the gymnasium (62). In this sense, Peck's objectification has given her some sense of self-protection by teaching her to anticipate the motives of men who ask her to dance with (or for) them¹³.

¹³ Li'l Bit's perceived sense of self-protection is different from her vulnerability. To argue otherwise—to argue, in other words, that Li'l Bit could protect herself from sexual violence by regulating how men objectify her—follows the same logic as the argument that women can protect themselves from rape by changing their clothes.

When Li'l Bit begins to sort through her confusion over this objectification and self-protection with her classmate, however, she imaginatively reconstructs her body as a site of both power and vulnerability. She tells the teenage Greek chorus, "Sometimes I feel like these alien life forces, these two mounds of flesh have grafted themselves onto my chest, and they're using me until they can 'propagate' and take over the world and they'll just keep growing...until I collapse under their weight and they suck all the nourishment out of my body" (57). A moment later however, the metaphor changes and she says, "Maybe someone's implanted radio transmitters in my chest at a frequency I can't hear, that girls can't detect, but they're sending out signals to men who get mesmerized, like sirens, calling them to dash themselves on these rocks" (58). Joanna Mansbridge has noted that the two metaphors in the scene recall "the campy terror of 1950's sci-fi films" (138). Because Li'l Bit is "both alienated from her body and shackled to what it signifies...she becomes, in these scenes, acutely aware that her body is not entirely hers, but the property of a cold and unfriendly culture" (138-9). In this sense, the very alienation that allows Li'l Bit to view herself through the lens of Peck's camera, also requires her to replicate her Uncle's misogyny by continually compelling her to read her body as a cultural object.

As a result of this replication, Li'l Bit often divorces herself from the immediacy of bodied experience in order to outthink the "cold and unfriendly culture" of men who objectify her. Throughout the play, Vogel traces this bodily alienation through imagery of flight to signify both the security of escape and the bodily alienation in escapism. In her final monologue, for example, the adult Li'l Bit sits in Peck's lap enduring the physical trauma of her uncle's abuse while the teenage Greek chorus stands just outside the car "trying not to cry" and narrating the spoken exchanges with Peck (90). Once Peck and the teenage Greek chorus exit the stage, Li'l Bit steps out of the car, saying, "That was the last day I lived inside of my body. I retreated

above the neck, and I've lived in the fire in my head ever since" (90). Timothy McCracken and other critics have spoken of this retreat in the psychological language of "dissociation" though it is clear that Li'l Bit frames that emotional detachment in the less pathological language of empowerment (136). Li'l Bit tells the audience, "The nearest sensation I feel—of flight in the body—I guess I feel when I'm driving" (91). Moments later, Li'l Bit looks in the rear view mirror and "floor[s] it" (91) and there is a sense of authority in this flight that Peck has already anticipated in an earlier scene when he tells Li'l Bit that he wants to give her "something...that nobody can take from [her]. A power," the power, perhaps, of a car accelerating into the sunset (Vogel 50). In her interview with Arthur Holmberg, Vogel would speak of the power, too, telling him that Li'l Bit "learns to move on" (436).

Vogel's imagery of flight however, is not consistently associated with embodied empowerment in *Drive*. When Li'l Bit tells the audience that she "retreated above the neck" to live in "the fire of [her] head," she makes it clear that survival has been a process of not only intellectual strategy, but bodily alienation. By choosing not to dance with Greg, this retreat into her mind gives her some sense of insulation even as she continues to find herself alienated from the students in her class. As an adult, she describes a similar experience of alienation as she witnesses the physical activity of other people. She tells the audience, "I know I'm lucky. Although I still have never known what it feels like to jog or dance . . . I do like to watch people on the dance floor, or out on the running paths, just jiggling away" (91). Though Li'l Bit has found a powerful means of self-protection through self-objectification, in other words, that alienation also manifests in her reluctance to occupy her body in all of its physical power.

Ultimately, this self-protective bodily retreat also begins to threaten her very existence. Vogel, of course, makes it clear that many of Li'l Bit's family members have a similar history of

conflict aversion and retreat. As I discuss in chapter one, Li'l Bit's Grandmother once retreated from the emotional discomfort of a parent-child sex talk by sending Lucy to a priest for sexual education. After Li'l Bit was born, Li'l Bit's father retreated from his wife and child and Li'l Bit began her relationship with Peck in the shadow of this family history. Peck, however—who Aunt Mary tells us is “so *good with* [girls] when they get to be [Li'l Bit's] age—also retreats from emotional discomfort even as he offers sincere emotional sensitivity to his niece (19). One Christmas Eve, Peck confesses to a “fire in his heart” that leaves him to contend with such emotional turmoil that he numbs himself to reality with alcohol (70). There are not, as Aunt Mary tells the audience, “rap sessions,” for men to speak about combat trauma and Peck has resigned himself to this logic and speculation so thoroughly that he is willing to let a thirteen-year old girl play his AA sponsor. Ultimately, he trades alcoholism for sexual abuse, retreating from one method of flight to another. In Li'l Bit's memories of her uncle, she consistently frames his abuse and alcoholism in this flight imagery.

During the moments after Li'l Bit refuses Peck's marriage proposal, she imaginatively reconstructs his breakdown by drawing on the tension between emotional evasion and emotional support. The stage directions read, “We see Peck sitting, carefully and calmly downing shot glasses,” while Li'l Bit says, “I never saw him again. I stayed away from Christmas and Thanksgiving for years after (85). It took my Uncle seven years to drink himself to death. First he lost his job, then his wife, and finally his driver's license” (85). Peck has lost, in other words, the very power of flight that he worked so hard to give to Li'l Bit in their driving lessons together. As Li'l Bit talks about her uncle's escape plan, Vogel returns to the language of “retreat” once again, but—this time—she frames flight imagery in Peck's alcoholism. Li'l Bit tells the audience, “He retreated to his house, and had his bottles delivered. One night he tried to

go downstairs to the basement—and he flew down the steep basement steps” (85). In this moment, she reimagines him as an emblem of American masculinity just as she recognizes that this version of masculinity is a social construct. The stage directions read, “Peck stands, and puts his hands in front of him—almost like Superman flying,” (85). One moment, Peck is at the top of the staircase, *Man of Steel*, flying-higher-than-any-airplane. The next moment, he is a “very ordinary men” at the base of a flight of stairs (29) “steps away from his dark room” (85).

Li'l Bit then begins to look at Peck's other form of escapism and her metaphor shifts again just as it did when she was fifteen at the Sock Hop. She asks, ‘Who did it to you, Uncle Peck? How old were you? Were you eleven?’” The imagery softens. She tells the audience, “Sometimes I think of my uncle as a kind of Flying Dutchman. In the opera, the Dutchman is doomed to wander the sea; but every seven years he can come ashore, and if he finds a maiden who will love him of her own free will—he will be released” (86). In this imagery, Li'l Bit rewrites Peck's flight with a kind of sympathetic fatalism for the “fire in his heart,” that he tells her that he has struggled to put out. But Li'l Bit is not merely making excuses for Peck's apparent entitlement to sexual encounters with children; she is also gesturing toward the opera's ending. In Wagner's work, *The Flying Dutchman* is only ever released from his curse after his beloved takes her own life in order to be with him. Fearing the maiden's betrayal in his final moments ashore, he returns to his ghostly vessel and begins to ascend into the clouds. His beloved, in desperation, throws herself from the cliff then ascends with him into heaven as a ghost. Her body is lost in the sea. In order to love Peck of her own free will, Li'l Bit must make a similar decision between ascent and descent, but that ascent—that loyalty to Peck—will require her to relinquish her own claims to survival.

For Li'l Bit, the imagery of flight in her own life is forever bound up in this tension between outright emotional evasion and emotional evasion as a means of survival. To unite with her Flying Dutchman, then, Li'l Bit must abandon subjectivity in exchange for the objectified Li'l Bit of Peck's imagination. As I mentioned in chapter one, Vogel especially uses objectifying language in her comparisons between Li'l Bit and the automobiles she drives and, for much of the play, Li'l Bit is content with her uncle's objectification and with living outside of her body. When she asks her uncle why his car is "a she," he tells her, "When you close your eyes and think of someone who responds to your touch—someone who performs just for you and gives you what you ask for—I guess I always see a "she" (51). Li'l Bit agrees with him, saying, "I closed my eyes—and decided not to change the gender" (51).

Though Li'l Bit will ultimately outgrow Peck, she is not as quick to outgrow his methods of flight and retreat as she finds herself taking on other objects of control in the performative position of the Dutchman. On a bus ride upstate, for example, she turns an objectifying gaze onto a "young man," with "huge ears at a defiant angle, and she thinks five steps ahead of him (40). Just as she once learned from Peck how to "perform just for [him]," she now treats the objectification as a kind of performance, framing their sexual encounter in theatrical language (51). She tells the audience, "There was the briefest of intermissions and an extremely capable and forceful and *sustained* second act" (441). After the "general denouement," however, Li'l Bit makes it clear that her motives were more emotional and intellectual than physical, saying, "I lay on my back in the dark and I thought about you, Uncle Peck . . . this is how the giver gets taken" (41).

Li'l Bit, however, does not only replicate Peck's abusive sexual behavior, but his alcoholism as well. When she tells the audience that "most nights" she "cruise[d] the back roads

of Maryland..in a 1965 Mustang....[fully tanked]” with “gasoline for [her] car and whiskey for [her],” Vogel points back to the flight-as-power and flight-as-escape imagery that she has touched upon in earlier scenes by conflating the two meanings of “tanked” (21). Li'l Bit has both enough gas in her car to keep her on the road for a few hours and enough alcohol in her body to numb her to her own emotions. Li'l Bit, then, drinks and drives to escape the reality of her emotional discomfort and pain. Though she credits Peck for her survival saying, “I never got so much as a ticket. He taught me well,” Vogel looks to the example of Peck's own death to indicate that Peck's methods of flight are not really meant for long-term strategies of survival. Li'l Bit nearly succumbs to the same fate as Peck, while speeding “past the churches and trees on the bend, thinking just one notch of the steering wheel would be all it would take” (21).

Though Li'l Bit survives Peck, then, she also loses nearly every outside source of autonomy in her life. Regardless of how many times her uncle disrupts Big Papa's dinner table, anti-education assertion that Li'l Bit has “all the credentials she needs [to succeed] on her chest,” it is clear that his own objectification of his niece nearly costs her her time in the classroom. Regardless of what Peck teaches Li'l Bit about “get[ting] away from” her family and going to school (19), her objectification—her inability to fully occupy her body in the present tense—directly compromises her plan to “rise above [her] cracker background” (17). Whatever Peck has been teaching her about living in the fire of her mind, it is clear that he really only endorses her intellect insofar as it grants him access to her body. In view of this mind-body split, Li'l Bit learns, from Peck, not an endurance of trauma, but a flexibility towards it. Working in the shadow of gendered spaces, Li'l Bit finds a (dorm) room of her own in order to process her relationship with her uncle where she learns—not how to overcome abuse, but how to remove

herself from it. Once she is finally able to look beyond her position as an object of Peck's imagination, she turns the flight he taught her against him.

After inviting him to a hotel room on her eighteenth birthday, she downs several glasses of champagne to steady her nerves. She encourages him to have a drink, too, by recycling his language from their visit to the inn years before. At sixteen, he told the waiter that "the lady" at his table wanted a drink (25), and, at eighteen, she tells him that it is "not polite to let a lady drink alone" (77). Li'l Bit, though, isn't just recycling Peck's language but her own methods of conflict resolution as well. In the course of their evening outside of the inn, Li'l Bit once took advantage of her own intoxication to speak more directly to her uncle about the moral implications of their relationship. While struggling to think coherently, she tells him with some lucidity that "It isn't nice [what they're doing to] Aunt Mary" and Peck abruptly retreats from this conversation by saying, "You let me decide what is or isn't nice to my wife" (31).

As an adult, Li'l Bit "doesn't want to do what she has to," as Vogel writes in the stage directions, and she turns to Peck to ask for another glass of champagne. Two glasses later, she finally does what she "doesn't want to do," by telling Peck, "I don't want to see you anymore" (80). Here, Peck "downs this rest of his champagne" and Vogel makes the differences between student and teacher clear (80). While Peck only ever learns to use alcohol as a means of temporarily escaping confrontation, Li'l Bit learns to use alcohol in order to work through the pain of confrontation itself. Peck, as an alcoholic and a pedophile never makes the choice that Li'l Bit does. As Andrew Kimbrough explains, "As an adult L'il Bit has come to learn that the cycle of deferred responsibility and denial of complicity has got to be broken. Her well-being dictates that she must escape the trap of blaming and scapegoating another for her own mistakes and misdeeds, no matter how excusable they may seem" (57). By merely replicating Peck's

behavior, in other words, Li'l Bit nearly succumbs to Peck's demise, but—by using Peck's escapism to her advantage—she finds a means of escaping him.

A moment later, Peck attempts to negotiate with her again and Li'l Bit finds a means of escaping the cycle a second time. Peck says to her, "Before you say anything else. I want the chance to . . . hold you. Because sometimes the body knows things that the mind isn't listening to" (81). Li'l Bit's body is not yet, of course, so alien to her that she feels nothing for her uncle at all in that moment. As she joins him on the bed, Vogel writes that she "starts to lower herself to kiss him—then wrenches herself free" (83). She tells him, "I have to go" and he asks, "Didn't you feel anything?" She lies, saying, "No nothing" (83). Suddenly, Peck pulls a ring box from his pocket, saying, "I want you to be my wife," and Li'l Bit says, "This isn't happening" (84). She has, of course, used this language before when Peck touched her for the first time, but she is no longer trapped in her uncle's lap. She flies across the room, telling him "family is family," before grabbing her coat to leave. Her retreat into her mind, in other words, has enabled her to leave him and her replication of bodily alienation given her her freedom.

To return to Robin James' language, then, Peck objectifies Li'l Bit until she learns to "perform just for him" (51). In the context of that performance, however, Li'l Bit must abandon any claim to her own subjectivity by rejecting the immediacy of her bodied experiences. In order to leave Peck and to use "damage as a resource" for subjectification, Li'l cannot merely replicate this bodily alienation without also replicating the power structures that she has inherited from Peck. As an object of Peck's imagination, Li'l Bit succumbs to both sexual perpetration and alcoholism. When she finally chooses to lay claim to her own subjectivity through Peck's abuse, she subverts the inheritance of bodily alienation in order to destroy him. With regard to the questions I raised at the beginning of this essay, then, Peck has not, as Bigsby conjectures

“forged [Li'l Bit] into a weapon against himself,” since Peck is quite capable of destroying his life all by himself” (324). Peck has “not . . . intentionally taught [Li'l Bit] how to reject him,” as Hull speculates, because Peck himself has no strategy for self-protection that is not also self-destruction. (40)

Peck has proven himself incapable of the kind of independence through which Li'l Bit makes a life for herself without him. Vogel writes that Peck “lies down on the bed for a moment, trying to absorb the terrible news” and he “almost curls into a fetal position” (85). When Peck encounters emotional pain, he resigns himself to alcoholic numbness rather than confrontation. When he registers that his “body knows things that [his] mind isn't listening to,” he resigns himself to the perpetration of sexual violence (138). By presenting Peck as a fetus in the stage directions, Vogel makes it clear that Li'l Bit has found her independence from him just as he has discovered his dependency upon her. He has only ever learned to endure pain by separating body and mind with alcohol or sex, while Li'l Bit has learned to separate body and mind in order to reject him. As Li'l Bit prepares to do so, he “stands upright” from the bed “with a discipline that comes from being told that boys don't cry” (85). He mimics Li'l Bit's behavior in other words, but never manages to subvert bodily alienation into any means of longer-term emotional regulation. Over the next several years, he will drink himself to death.

Just as Robin James concludes in her writings on feminist resilience narratives, the mere replication of patriarchal power dynamics “reinforces and strengthens patriarchy,” so that—in Vogel's play—Li'l Bit comes to turn Peck's power against her own body. Peck, too, in this final scene turns his own destructive masculinity standards against his own body even to the point of death. Ultimately then, Li'l Bit proves herself a far more eager and capable student than her uncle is a teacher with all of his misinformation and in, returning to Jill Dolan's writings on

theater and hope, I hope that this essay foregrounds Li'l Bit's creativity and survival, instead of her Uncle's moral equivocations.

4 CONCLUSION

In *Witnessing Girlhood*, feminist theorists Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall begin their examination of the intersection between life writing and girlhood studies by reflecting—as I have in the previous three chapters—on the trial of Larry Nassar. Gilmore and Marshall observe that Nassar’s victims “exposed how practices of discrediting girls and young women coincide with a narrative of protecting, even caring for, children” while “shield[ing] a sexual predator from exposure and prosecution” (2). The authors go on to examine a “long tradition” in which “adult women return to the experience of their own girlhoods” “to offer fine-grained and strategically shaped accounts of childhood that allow new audiences to understand their vulnerability and suffering, but also the role that authorities played in enabling violence” (2). As I conclude this thesis, I draw from Gilmore’s and Marshall’s analysis of Una’s graphic novel *Becoming Unbecoming* as a means of examining Li’l Bit’s ethical positioning in simultaneous temporalities of childhood and adulthood.

Una, as the authors summarize, is “a pen name meaning ‘one, one life, one of many’ taken by a feminist academic and comics artist living in the UK” (Gilmore and Marshall 75). In *Becoming Unbecoming*, Una represents one life in two temporalities by drawing herself as a child while narrating her experiences of girlhood sexual violence through the speech bubbles of an older adult self. At the start of the novel, Una draws herself as a little girl, carrying an empty speech bubble up a hill without, as Linda Alcoff has put it, “the language to name what [has] happened” to her (25). In a later drawing, however, she begins to provide an adult’s speech and insight for her childhood experiences by “repurpos[ing] material artifacts of girlhood for dissonant affective purposes” (Gilmore and Marshall 75). In one drawing, she deconstructs *what-were-you-wearing* police interrogations by recreating the clothing in which she was

sexually assaulted as a two-dimensional outfit for a paper doll. Below the paper doll clothing, two voices narrate components of her experience in speech bubbles. Her rapist tells her, “It’d be a lot easier next time if you wore a skirt” and an older Una—in reflective disbelief—says in another bubble, “Yes, that is actually what he said” (83). In a footnote to this bubble, another *still-older* Una explains to her presumed audience, “I have not used the word rape to describe this incident, even though that is what it was. This was because I didn’t name it as rape until many years later” (83). That adult reflection echoes Linda Alcoff’s explanation that “the word rape wasn’t in [her] vocabulary” as a nine-year old girl (83).

In *Drive*, Li’l Bit ends her narrative in a similar way, reflecting—as a thirty-five year old—on her experience as an eleven-year old. As in the work of Alcoff and Una, Li’l Bit’s “adult voice accompanies [a] younger self to verify the perspective of the child witness” (Gilmore and Marshall 83). This double-representation, however, is not symbolic of a division, but of “one life, one of many” (75). In chapter one, I discussed how critics have come to separate Li’l Bit’s younger self from her older self in examining the backwards-moving chronology of Peck’s abuse. That division is not always explicit in criticism even though it often entails an implicit privileging of Li’l Bit’s older adolescent experiences over her younger adolescent experiences. To that end, Andrew Kimbrough has modeled Peck’s and Li’l Bit’s encounters on other cultural paradigms of May-December romances, writing that “except for the early instance of molestation,” the relationship mirrors the “real life example of Woody Allen and Soon Yi Previn” (51).

Over the course of this thesis, I argue that we cannot make such exceptions for Peck’s later encounters with Li’l Bit, given his initial encounter with her. We cannot, in other words, separate “the early instance of molestation,” from the later instances of molestation even if Li’l

Bit frames her portrait of Peck with empathy, and even if she finds some emotional security in their relationship. By contextualizing Li'l Bit's later encounters in her earlier encounters, I argue that her dependency upon Peck for sexual, legal, and emotional guidance throughout her adolescence means that she is exempt from ethical analyses of complicity. Furthermore, by framing the text in Kennedy's writings on adolescent identity formation and Kutz's writings on adult-child, subject-object relationships, I provide a more general basis for the legitimacy of consent laws as "products of social evolution" rather than mere "indicat[ors] of our own discomforts" (Kennedy 50).

In chapter two, I evaluate Li'l Bit's transition from victim of trauma to survivor of trauma. My aim, in making these cultural distinctions, is not to separate components of Li'l Bit's identity by age or experience, since—as I have pointed out in chapter one—Li'l Bit's self is one of many. Instead, I frame Li'l Bit's survival in Robin James' writings on "damage as [a] resource" for overcoming trauma in order to demonstrate how Li'l Bit frees herself from Peck by turning his lessons of bodily-alienation against him. In doing so, I evaluate how Li'l Bit survives in spite of Peck's teaching, not because of it. While Peck certainly offers her other lessons by encouraging her to take her life into her own hands then, I argue that he grounds these lessons in a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps logic of choiceless choices between, in at least one instance, sexual abuse and death. Ultimately, Li'l Bit outsmarts Peck by learning, not just how to protect herself in the short-term, but how to protect herself in the long-term by reordering the language of Peck's speech bubbles. While Peck teaches Li'l Bit emotional numbness then, she also sees that numbness as an anesthetic, a means to an end goal rather than a means for merely coping with the present.

In returning to Una's image of a child climbing a hill under the weight of an empty speech bubble then, we are long overdue for an analysis of complicity and blame in *Drive* without the additional burden of ethically-chaotic critical footnotes. In concluding this project, I hope that we can begin to challenge some of the implications that critics have made about Li'l Bit and her survival and about Peck and his serial victimization of children with regard to the vacillating power dynamics in their relationship. I hope that we can also begin to interrogate how Peck's position as guardian of Li'l Bit's emotional security renders him both her protector and her overseer and it is through our refusal to reconcile these two positions of power that we perpetuate rape culture. Like his niece, Peck has the capacity to both protect and harm just as Li'l Bit has the capacity to feel both safe and frightened in his presence. Neither position should cancel out the other. In making that critical cancellation, we not only add our own speech to bubbles already overcrowded with the language of perpetrators of sexual violence, we add to the traumatic burden of those figures like Una, still climbing up-hill.

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