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Marya Hornbacher's Wasted as an American Punk Feminist Autobiography

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MARYA HORNBACHER'S WASTED

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This thesis explores Marya Hornbacher's 1998 autobiographical work *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*. As a complex and layered American autobiography, *Wasted* will be placed within three American traditions of autobiography, namely, the self as morality play, in which the writer deals with matters of good and evil, virtue and vice, next, the self-made man, which is related to the bildungsroman and ideas of "self culture," and finally, feminist confession, which does not seek an exoneration of sins but instead offers personal and societal truths. As a memoir of anorexia and bulimia, *Wasted* is discussed as a study of American girls and their bodies. Autobiography and the body are both means of communication, and are both treated as such in the third chapter. As a transgressive memoir, *Wasted* is discussed in Chapter 4 as part of a trend that alters and propels American feminism, not unlike the works of other feminist punk writers such as Kathy Acker and punk musicians such as Le Tigre and Slaeter-Kinney.

The introduction addresses the neo-conservative movement, which includes Wendy Shalit's 1999 book: *A Return To Modesty*, in which she argues that embarrassment is required for a woman's safety; the loss of embarrassment, and subsequently modesty, is the cause of contemporary damages to women, such as eating disorders, promiscuity, drug use, and rape. She uses *Wasted* to propel her arguments, citing Hornbacher as a woman lacking in modesty and embarrassment, a condition which, according to Shalit, leaves her open to self-destructive behaviors and victimization by
others. This argument is dangerous in its simplicity and in its desire to place blame.

Shalit's function is enabled by our society's lust for public spectacle, such as daytime talk shows in which the stranger the guests and their issues, the higher the ratings of the show. This circuitry works together to reduce women such as Hornbacher to objects defined by their sex and gender, thus providing a shallow critique of surface sexuality. Instead, this thesis strives to analyze Wasted in its proper interpretive matrix; a more appropriate and useful analysis would be to examine how the book fits into established American forms of autobiography, how the book uses both the body and its genre to tell the story, and finally, to question how this memoir fits into and changes American feminism. Wasted is an American autobiography, it is a woman's autobiography (with all the potential negative and positive connotations that accompany that adjective) and it is a transgressive memoir, continuing through nonfiction a punk feminist agenda.

The conclusion of this thesis examines the reasons why Wendy Shalit's interpretation of Wasted in A Return to Modesty is reductionistic and anti-feminist, and that her suggestion to rediscover the lost virtue of modesty simply works to place blame on the victim, which in this case blames Hornbacher for her anorexia. Instead, I maintain, this memoir needs to be analyzed as a complex American autobiography, transgressive in style and content, and as a text that works in conjunction with the current wave of American feminism.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Feminism, 2002

To be sure, I had heard of those who claimed that being a woman was not all fun and games, but those people were called feminists, and as every budding conservative knows, feminists exaggerate. Indeed, that is how you could tell that they were feminists--because they were the ones exaggerating all the time.

-Wendy Shalit (emphasis hers)

You hear young women today saying they're not feminists, but that they'll decide if and when to have children. It's like, "Honey, you think you could've made that decision without feminists?" I don't think so.

-Cyndi Lauper

Imagine hearing the phrase: "And justice for all"-- if pronounced by a male politician, this phrase receives applause. When spoken by a woman, only jeers. But why? Those who adhere to a political agenda bent on freedom for all, not just for men or whites or Christians, are feminists. And in our culture, there is still an irrational fear of that word.

Complicating the issue is that "feminist" has a slippery definition. There are perhaps as many definitions as there are feminists. In my teaching, I have been
simultaneously fascinated, made curious, and saddened by my female students' fear of that word. They do not want to be considered or labeled feminists, mostly because they have no idea what it means-- perhaps they hold onto the outdated and oversimplified notion that feminists are man-hating militants. Of course, those are the radical, vocal minority. While the majority of American feminists fall into the "liberal feminist" camp, defined by Chris Weedon as a feminism which "aims to achieve full equality of opportunity in all spheres of life without radically transforming the present social and political system" (4), I believe in a less specific notion of feminism, away from radical or liberal feminism, such as Nicola Pitchford's definition. She states that a feminist is one with "a commitment to achieving social justice for women" (28-29). I would push her definition one step further and say that the goal of feminism should be to achieve social justice for everyone (an approach commonly called materialist or Marxist feminism). Pitchford's definition allows for all the contradictions in feminist politics in the United States today as many feminists have their own opposing ideas about how this justice is to be attained, causing problems, standstills, and even backsliding in the movement. I could almost feel this reversal when liberal feminist Ann Coulter appeared on Politically Incorrect, wearing a suit and a law degree, arguing against "feminism," which she incorrectly equated with liberalism. Positions like hers only reinforce the misguided notion that all feminists are anti-male. Ironically (and unbeknownst to her and countless members of the neo-conservative movement), she would not hold her position without the power of liberal feminism. As part of my discussion on Hornbacher's Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia in this thesis, I take issue with the neo-conservative (or "neo-con") movement of which Coulter is a member, among many others including
Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Wendy Shalit. Members of the neo-con movement have much in common with each other such as whiteness and privilege and the propensity to use anecdotal "evidence." For example, Sommers argues that boys read less than girls because of "misguided feminism" and regards feminism as a movement against boys, claiming that the "mood" in the United States is "shaped by girl advocates" and is unfriendly to boys (16). She states, "[t]he description of America's teenaged girls as silenced, tortured, voiceless, and otherwise personally diminished is indeed dismaying. But there is surprisingly little evidence to support it. If the nation's girls are in the kind of crisis that Gilligan and her acolytes [including Pipher] are describing, it has escaped the notice of conventional psychiatry" (18). Not surprisingly, Sommers doesn’t mention eating disorders in her book The War Against Boys, as acknowledging them would negate her entire thesis: eating disorders are indeed the crisis she is denying. (This is a direct contradiction to her previous work, Who Stole Feminism? in which she does recognize the existence of eating disorders, but her discussion of them is primarily used to establish feminists as exaggerators). There is some disagreement among neo-cons; Shalit actually acknowledges that women and girls are more often victimized than American boys, and with her 1999 book A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue, she argues that the loss of embarrassment, and subsequently modesty, is the cause of contemporary damages to women, such as eating disorders, drug use, promiscuity, and rape. This stance is not unlike gender essentialist Camille Paglia, (and was probably inspired by Paglia) who states that it is feminism, not the perpetrators of rape, that has put women in danger (49).
While to my knowledge Shalit has never called herself a feminist (although Paglia does consider herself one), by Pitchford's definition, Shalit is a feminist in that much of her argument focuses on her desire for social justice and safety for women. She gives a call out to conservatives asking them to take the claims of feminists seriously instead of "snickering" and "tittering about 'those crazy feminists'" (9). She says,

All of their claims, from the date-rape figures to anorexia to the shyness of teenaged girls, even the number of women who say they feel 'objectified' by the male gaze [. . .]. I want conservatives really to listen to these women, stop saying boys will be boys, and to take what these women are saying seriously. (9)

The ultimate goal of feminism is to strive for social justice for all. Unfortunately, the United States has far to go to achieve this goal. This is obvious through uncountable examples in our society; for example, unequal pay for equal work, parental leave generally only available to women, (although laws are changing in some more progressive states) and one state out of fifty that legally recognizes same-sex relationships. While the status quo, the media, the neo-con movement and the Christian Right try to convince our culture that feminism has "happened" and that women have no right to complain, one very clear and obvious sign that equal rights are not here is anorexia nervosa. While there are many ways depressed people hurt themselves, many teenaged girls are starving themselves. There is significance in this choice of self-destruction; Western culture, in the past and in the present, encourages female control of the appetite. The two especially notable times in Western history when this has occurred: the Middle Ages and, to a much larger extent, the past 30 years, when eating disorders have become commonplace, especially among young white women. Perhaps one fifth of
female American students suffer from anorexia (Wolf 181). (Although, it should be noted, Wolf is one of the "exaggerators" that frustrates Sommers). As even Shalit remarks, feminists and anyone concerned with social justice for women should be concerned about eating disorders. Naomi Wolf suggests that if the disease affected young, white American men, there would be government task forces assigned to search for solutions (179-180).

Wasted

In 1999, at a bookstore in Minneapolis, a friend recommended a book to me entitled Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia. He knew the author, Marya Hornbacher; they were both from Edina, Minnesota and had attended the same church growing up. He warned me that it was graphic and that I would learn things I had never wanted to know about eating disorders. He warned me that she discussed with candor hospitalizations, heroin use, and promiscuity. I wondered why I would want to read it when my own life was depressing enough. It wasn't until a couple weeks later when I heard Hornbacher read from her book at that same bookstore that I actually wanted to begin reading. I was struck by how young, small and intelligent she was and by her amazing understanding of society and how it conflicted her sense of self. And although she was aware what her society was doing to her, she couldn't stop it from happening.

At first, the memoir feels like a confessional tell-all, telling the story for the sake of the story, and possibly, as Dorothy Allison suggests on the cover, to "save lives." But before long, it became evident to me that this memoir is so much more, not only is it an American autobiography in the same sense that Benjamin Franklin's is in that it reflects its contemporary American culture, but it is also a woman's text in its subject matter and
in the way it is told. Hornbacher deals with eating disorders and her own issues of drug and alcohol abuse, sex, and family problems, all of which are interrelated. In the book, she describes episodes with drugs as extreme as shooting heroin, and those that relate directly to her eating disorder, like using caffeine to alter the metabolism. She describes sexual activity, both regrettable and pleasurable. She says, "I was used to sleeping with people because I endlessly found myself in identical situations where it was easier to just fuck them than to say no. Obviously I was in those situations because it gave me a rush to get there" (226). One such episode startles her:

I took him home. We made a fire, lay on the floor making abstract plans, lying to each other because we could. We went to bed and stayed there for the weekend. I don't know what happened, precisely, but something did, and I found myself rolling around in the sheets with a man I knew only as Dave and having, arguably, the best sex of my life. The most raucous, noisy sex, shocking me in the moments when I would see myself from the outside, unrecognizable . . ." (225)

This event startles Hornbacher because to her, sex had always been just a game; she remarks that usually it was "staring at the ceiling and saying oh-baby oh-baby and thinking about the size of your thighs" (226). Ironically, in the event described above, as Hornbacher drops "Dave" off at the café where she met him, she feels guilty and like a slut for the first time in her years of promiscuous sex, because this time she enjoyed the encounter.

She describes her family in these terms: "one absent and emotionally closed-off mother; one overbearing, invasive, needy father; one strange, anxiety-ridden, hyperactive aggressive child trying very hard to be an adult" (25). Later, she remarks that her parents
were volatile (65) and that her father was desperate (228). She gives so many different
descriptions of her family that it would be impossible to name them all, but they all have
one thing in common: through her descriptions of her family and herself, she refuses to
sugarcoat the people or experiences in her life. Even when she is being kind in her
descriptions of her parents, the text is never without some level of criticism. Early in the
memoir, she states: "I was born in Walnut Creek, California, to a pair of exceptionally
intelligent, funny, wonderful people who were perhaps less than ideal candidates for
parenthood" (17).

In style and content, this is a feminist text that affects, or at least participates in,
American feminism. It is searing and blunt, critical and analytical. Hornbacher faces her
own shortcomings as well as the cultural climate that affects girls especially, breeding
low self-esteem, and ultimately eating disorders. Around the time Hornbacher becomes
bulimic, she also becomes ashamed of her fascination with sex, living in a home where
sex was a taboo and belonging to a “culture that has a highly ambiguous, conflicted view
of female sexuality” (40). Along with attaching shame to issues of maturation and sex,
she remarks that our culture holds the pre-pubescent shape up as ideal, and when a girl's
body suddenly refuses "to adhere to cultural requirements," and if her "personal
chemistry is right," she will go "head-to-head with nature" because "a body that begins to
look exactly opposite of what it's 'supposed' to look like is an uncomfortable body
indeed" (51-52). Perhaps Hornbacher's chemistry is "right" and early puberty is the
catalyst for her obsession with her weight. With the exacerbation of cultural standards
and ideals, along with the fact that her "whole family is totally fucked up about food,"
(241) she has found a faltering cause for her eating disorder.
The memoir begins in 1979 when Hornbacher is just 5, living in Walnut Creek, California. Shortly thereafter, the family moves to an affluent white suburb of Minneapolis where much of the plot unfolds. Hornbacher discusses the onset of her bulimia at age 8, coinciding with early stages of puberty. She states, “At puberty, what had been a nagging, underlying discomfort with my body became a full-blown, constant obsession” (41).

Bulimia is an eating disorder in which the sufferer overeats and often forces herself to vomit (called bingeing and purging). Bulimics go through periods of little or no bingeing and purging, but generally abuse laxatives and/or diuretics most of the time. The word anorexia means "loss of appetite," which is actually quite a misnomer for anorexia nervosa, as anorectics (or anoretics) starve themselves, often becoming addicted to the feeling of hunger. Because of a pathological fear of gaining weight and/or being perceived as fat, anorectics follow strict rules of diet and exercise, allowing themselves to eat a specifically calculated number of calories per day. Their habits, including strict calorie counting, exercise, and daily rituals, are often similar to symptoms of obsessive/compulsive disorder, which is usually catalyzed or exacerbated by the effects of starvation.

Multiple theories exist on why eating disorders occur, and Hornbacher herself offers many of these reasons in her memoir. Perhaps the most widely accepted view is that anorexic girls fear becoming fat because they have digested society's message that looks are paramount, fat is ugly and that contentedness, as well as self-worth, comes with achieving a perfect body; in essence, the super-skinny supermodel is to blame. Hornbacher frequently makes note of times in her life when she thought that losing
weight would be her panacea, for example at age 12: "Nothing was so bad, I kept telling myself. Nothing that losing weight wouldn't cure" (59). While I don't doubt that there is truth in this hypothesis, additional factors must play in, or nearly all North American teenaged girls would have anorexia.

Some suspect that as children, future anorectics live in chaos and feel that they have no control over their lives, so they fixate on the one thing they can control: their bodies. Hornbacher gives examples that may give credence to this theory. She states, "When I was between the ages of five and seven, my parents' marriage deteriorated faster, as did the vacillation between calm and chaos" (32). She describes superstitious actions on her part, many ascribed to food, that she never let go of. Hornbacher explains, "it's not uncommon for children to develop elaborate self-protective systems to give themselves a sense of control over their surroundings" but they lose them gradually as they gain security in their environment (20). As a child, Hornbacher's self-protective systems include naming and arranging her stuffed animals, precise arrangements of knickknacks on her dresser, and eating an "apple sandwich in precisely twenty bites, no more, no less" with the belief that if she follows these self-designed rules, she will be happy (20). As a 19 year old anorectic, she prescribes elaborate rules and the specific amount of time it takes to eat a specific thing, in this case a small fat free frozen yogurt every day from the same yogurt shop across from her office (254-255).

Others assume that anorectics fear puberty and/or sex, thus become anorexic in order to stave off physical maturation. This theory is especially applicable in the cases of girls who hit puberty earlier than their peers. Hornbacher goes back and forth on this one: puberty was very rough on her and she remarks that her body "defected" (40), but
other times she argues with this theory, stating that when anorexia caused amenorrhea, she missed having her period. She states, "[a]ll the literature on eating disorders claims that anoretics hate menstruation. I loved it. I thought it meant that I was much closer to being grown-up and getting out of the house. I missed it a great deal when it stopped two years later" (49). Perhaps she primarily resents the outwardly visible changes during puberty, understandable considering the cruel teasing (see Hornbacher 51).

Hornbacher describes yet another risk factor when she cites research that a "strong desire for academic achievement may be as significant as sexual maturation, if not more so, in the development of eating disorders in young women" (54). She cites herself as especially susceptible: "My physical and intellectual development were careening far ahead of my emotional development" further explained by her "excessive self-imposed pressure" and "unusual levels of academic ability and intelligence" and her parents' "high expectations of achievement" (54).

Although researchers and specialists may never know exactly what causes eating disorders, we can be sure of the following: young girls are ashamed to be hungry, they are ashamed to eat, and they want to disappear, or at least reduce their physical selves, even if (and sometimes because) death is a side effect.

Anorexia mirabilis is similar to anorexia nervosa in that, due to societal messages, the individual is compelled to eat very little. Most documented cases of anorexia mirabilis consist of women whose ability to live on very little or no food is considered miraculous. Many women who were canonized as saints in the Middle Ages are said to have had anorexia mirabilis, notably Catherine of Siena, who was said to have subsisted on twigs and a handful of herbs each day (see Chapter 3 for more on anorexia mirabilis).
Women weren't allowed to preach in the Middle Ages, and were even discouraged from teaching their own children about faith, religion and morality, for that was the father's job. The silencing of women forced them to find another way to communicate their religious beliefs; while a few notable medieval religious autobiographies written by women exist, religious messages were largely told instead by the body through anorexia and stigmata.

*Wasted* follows Hornbacher through adolescence, her indecision between bulimia and anorexia, five hospital stays and one mental institution, and finally her collapse in Washington, D.C. in 1993, at 53 pounds. Although I have found numerous newspaper articles and reviews regarding Hornbacher and *Wasted*, Shalit's is the only book-length text that deals with the memoir. She uses *Wasted* to propel her arguments, citing Hornbacher as a woman lacking in modesty and embarrassment, which, according to Shalit, leaves her open to self-destructive behaviors and victimization by others. Unfortunately, Shalit misses the seemingly obvious, namely, that Hornbacher *is* embarrassed; she is embarrassed to be sexual, she is embarrassed to take up physical space; this embarrassment and shame cause her to destroy her physical self. Shalit also refuses to acknowledge the autonomous nature of art; she treats classic books, magazines, and films as though they are historical documents which accurately depict "the way things used to be" between men and women instead of simply as independent creations from the mind of the author. For example, she visits Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-48) for modesty etiquette (Shalit 49) and "the 1909 man" who wrote to *The Ladies' Home Journal* for advice on the proper way to call on a woman (47). She forgets, or perhaps is altogether unaware, that etiquette has historically been, and is currently, a class issue and
cannot be used to make the oversimplified (and largely untrue) blanket statement that all men respected all women in the past. In the same way that she is unable to see a distinction between representation and real life in older texts, she is unable to make a distinction in the current culture. She does not recognize that the pop culture representation of male/female relations and women's issues on talk shows, in rap and rock songs, and in women's magazines such as Glamour and Cosmopolitan are merely representations of extremes and not real life. She even treats romance quizzes from such magazines as YM (37) and articles on dating and shyness from Cosmopolitan (63) as though they are scientific documents, and not merely the products of an editorial board looking to sell magazines. (Another neo-con, Danielle Crittenden, regards magazines similarly in her 1999 book What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us). Because a defining characteristic of the media's current culture is to discuss matters of sexuality openly (see Chapter Three for a discussion on current sexuality discourses), Shalit suggests that being inexperienced sexually has become embarrassing for American girls and women, whereas experience formerly had been cause for embarrassment. Comparing Cosmopolitan to her romanticized vision of the past, such as novels by Richardson and the man from the advice column in The Ladies' Home Journal, comprises part of the basis for her argument that women should "return to modesty."

Wendy Shalit would have us believe that Hornbacher's collapse is due to her lack of modesty and even the loss of female modesty in general. She might also like us to believe that the blame lies with Hornbacher's father, claiming (referencing Mary Pipher's book Reviving Ophelia) that girls can escape self-mutilation and eating disorders if they are not sexually active and if they have "paternalistic" fathers (7). However, Pipher does
not praise "paternalistic" fathers. In fact, she says that the healthiest daughters come from families with "strong mothers" (117) and families in which the fathers are "nonsexist" and are able to confront their own lookism (117).

Female behavior, for Shalit, is the compass by which a society's acceptable limits are gauged, and unfortunately, girls are acting, in Shalit's opinion, immodestly. She argues that "what women will and will not permit does have a profound way of influencing the behavior of an entire society" (Shalit 98). She simplifies the problems in society by stating, "I propose that the woes besetting the modern young woman--sexual harassment, stalking, rape [. . .] are all expressions of a society which has lost its respect for female modesty" (Shalit 10). Unfortunately, Shalit is simply arguing that women need to alter their sexuality and regain their reputations as "modest." This neo-conservative stance goes against all that feminists have worked at for decades and reduces women to sexuality for definition and importance. This also sounds dangerously as if Shalit is suggesting that women are responsible for all behavior and actions in a society. She states, "female modesty gave men a frame of reference for a woman's 'no'" (43). Not only is this unfair to the women who choose to say yes, it is also unfair to men. She is in essence saying that men are clueless, and that they need a "frame of reference" for a one-syllable word. (Shalit isn't the only neo-con to suggest that men are simple. Camille Paglia states that rape is "biologically programmed into male sexuality" [51] and the authors of the successful "Rules" books claim that the rules work on "all men from all walks of life" [Fein and Schneider 178]). Shouldn't individuals, male or female, simple or complex, be responsible for their own behavior? If one woman consents to go to bed with a man at a party, does that make it okay for that same man to force a different
woman to have sex with him at the next party? Shalit states that there is a "connection between female modesty and male obligation" and goes on to ask, "How can we expect men to be honorable when a large number of women consistently send them the message that they do not have to be?" (Shalit 105). This kind of logic blames the first woman for the rape of the second woman, which is unacceptable. Shalit is not the only neo-con to suggest that women's behavior is the compass to all behavior in a society. In her book *The Surrendered Wife*, Laura Doyle defends her suggestion that women should alter their behavior in order to gain more freedom, money and intimacy out of marriage because a woman can only change herself and not her husband (25). Part of "surrendering" is keeping the plan secret from the husband for six months (64). I suggest that the only marriage worth having is based on communication and not manipulation. Doyle has not written this book to help women have more intimacy and joy in their marriages; she is arguing for complacency. Disguised as a book to help women, I suspect this neo-conservative book is actually an attempt to bring the divorce rates down.

What Hornbacher has shown us through her memoir is that there is no greater danger for women than complacency. As a result of a problematic society, girls are seeking to destroy themselves instead of seeking solutions or changes. As Hornbacher's memoir and punk bands like Le Tigre suggest, women need to start yelling, not covering up. As Hornbacher states, "I did not keep quiet. I started to yell" (2).

Shalit seems to think that for most women, the goal of finding a good man is paramount. She refers to it as "our highest hope" (95). She also implies that only modest women can find faithful men who will "stick by" a woman (95). Unfaithful men dash
women's hopes, something Shalit suggests men did not do in her romanticized past when women were modest. She states:

For modesty armed this special vulnerability—not to oppress women, but with the aim of putting them on equal footing with men. The delay modesty created not only made it more likely that women could select men who would stick by them, but in turning lust into love, it changed men from uncivilized males who ran after as many sexual partners as they can get [sic] to men who really wanted to stick by one woman. (95)

Shalit may be exaggerating the power of modesty here, not only by stating that modesty turns lust into love, but also by suggesting that modesty will make a bona fide playboy want to be faithful. This reasoning is specious at best. Also, nowhere in the book does Shalit acknowledge that women lust and that some women choose to act on lust, nor does she acknowledge that women might want to have relationships with men other than those resulting in nuptials. Shalit perpetuates outdated, unfair, and dangerous beliefs that women are not driven sexually, that sexual drives are strictly the man's realm. As Linda Williams, in her seminal work Hard Core, reminds us, "even though Foucault can argue that 'sex' as an entity is radically discontinuous from one culture to the next, the fact remains that the pleasure of women is alien and other to both systems" (4).

Spoken like a true neo-con, despite her youth, Shalit argues that modesty is the answer, not feminism: "With feminism, it often seems as if nothing will get better until we overturn all of society. The beauty of sexual modesty is that by an individual's behavior, things can get a little better now" (Shalit 105). But what cost for this slight improvement? And what does she offer as evidence?
Shalit brings *Wasted* into her argument in the subject of intensity. She states that a "typical specimen of our times is writer Marya Hornbacher who whittled herself down to 52 pounds to rid herself of 'an excess of general intensity'" (169). Indeed, while this may be partially true, her discussion is an oversimplification of Hornbacher's eating disorder. What Shalit seems to ignore in Hornbacher's text is that the narrator's conflicts rise out of feelings of shame over being a sexual individual while belonging to a society and family with an ambiguous view of female sexuality (Hornbacher 40). Hornbacher states, "I personally was not afraid of sex, merely ashamed that it so fascinated me" (40). This is a contrived fear of sex produced by a society that encourages females to be embarrassed of their sexuality. Contradictorily, the modesty that Shalit proposes is simply another way to rid one's self of "general intensity." Shalit quotes from *The English Gentlewoman* by Richard Brathwait:

Their answers milde without tartnesse, their smile pleasing, mixt with bashfulnesse, their pace gracefull without too much activeness; their whole posture delightfull with a seemly carelessnesse. These are such mirrors of modesty [. . .]. (Shalit 101)

While I agree with Shalit that the right for a woman to say "no" should be preserved (or restored, as Shalit would suggest) in this society, it is my contention that a woman's right to say "yes" (to sex, to food, or to anything else) should be equally respected. One of feminism's goals should indeed be to ensure women's safety, especially from harassment and rape; however, this should not be accomplished through neo-conservative repression. Williams comments that "for women, one constant of the history of sexuality has been a failure to imagine their pleasures outside a dominant male
economy" (4). Ergo, while I praise Shalit for her commitment to improve social justice for women via safety and respect, these conditions cannot be improved through neo-conservative recommendations, which reduce women to marriage-seeking predators, objects of sexual desire, and individuals with no sexual drive of their own: "To deny a woman's sexuality is certainly to oppress her but to portray her as nothing but a sexual being is equally to oppress her" (Greer 332).

Because of our society's lust for public spectacle and easy answers, Shalit's function is enabled by the shallow critique of pop culture feminism offered by the media. I fear that Wasted does lend itself to a certain amount of "Oprahcizing," that is, a pop culture examination for shock value, ratings, or entertainment. Current examples of this phenomenon include daytime talk shows featuring strange guests and even stranger situations, magazines that offer ridiculously simple and recycled sex advice, and pop culture psychology books and "experts" like Dr. Phil, all of which stereotype the sexes into two easily identifiable genders. All issues relating to women and culture are analyzed on a surface level. This circuitry works together to reducing women, such as Hornbacher, to objects defined by their sex and gender, thus providing a shallow critique of surface sexuality. In her books The Surrendered Wife and The Surrendered Single, Laura Doyle equates women who make decisions to controlling shrews, claiming that "control and intimacy are opposites" (Doyle, Surrendered Single 15). She even asserts that paying for one's own dinner on a date is a form of rejection to the man (Doyle, Surrendered Single 125). Not only do I find it disturbing that neo-cons like Crittenden, Doyle, Shalit, and Sommers are, through their writing, reducing women to sex objects (the very thing they appear to argue against on the surface), and arguing that women
should be passive in order to be happy and safe, but Shalit's particularly easy reading of 
Wasted is startling to me; an accurate and successful reading of Wasted should result in something quite different. It is not simply a victim story filled with explicit sexuality, nor a story of overcoming adversity, typical topics exploited by shows such as Oprah's. Not only is Wasted a woman's autobiography (with all the potential negative and positive connotations that accompany that adjective) it is truly an American autobiography, and it is a transgressive memoir, continuing through nonfiction the punk feminist agenda established by such American fiction writers as Kathy Acker.

**Thesis Overview**

Wasted is a layered and complex memoir, which can, and should be read as an active feminist work as well as a traditional American autobiography. Chapter Two, "Control, Industry, and Confession" discusses American autobiographical traditions. In order to emphasize the book's importance and role in American literature, I place Wasted within three different standard American genres of autobiography. According to Diane Bjorklund, in Interpreting the Self, American autobiographies follow several established types. I will discuss Wasted within the framework of the two longest standing American autobiographical traditions, as described by Bjorklund: the "self as morality play," in which the narrator deals with matters of good and evil, virtue and vice, within the self; and the "masters of fate," a type of American autobiography entailing the self-made man, and related to the bildungsroman.

While Hornbacher's memoir does follow traditional American tropes of autobiography, there is present a tone of insolence, in which Hornbacher is "talking back" to the dominant culture. This is the memoir's feminism, and in order to discuss Wasted
within the realm of women's writing in the current culture, I have gone to feminist confession, outlined in this context by Rita Felski. Feminist confession signifies a type of autobiography in which intimate details of the female author's life are given in order to "elucidate their broader implications" (83); confession is working to disclose personal and societal truths, perhaps not only on the writer's behalf but also, in Hornbacher's situation, to speak for other eating disordered persons who are not inclined to write their own stories; she is not writing for an exoneration of sins. In confession, the questioning of the self is inspired by a personal crisis that acts as a catalyst (Felski 83). For Hornbacher, the catalyst is living after a severe medical emergency; she writes her memoir four years after she is told by doctors in an emergency room that she has one week to live (276).

In the third chapter, "A New Medieval Culture," Wasted is discussed as an eating disorder research work and a scholarly, scientific study of American girls and their bodies, while linking some history of the Western female body and the ways in which it has been used and mutilated as a result of cultural attitudes and behaviors. I will argue that, like autobiography, the female body in general has long been used as a means of communication in Western culture. In medieval Europe, anorexia mirabilis and stigmata emerged because women were verbally silenced. Medieval women were not to speak about religion, thus requiring their religious statements to be voiced by the body. A striking similarity between the medieval woman and the contemporary woman is the use of the body as a means of communication. While anorexia mirabilis and anorexia nervosa differ in their origins, one very key similarity remains: Western culture is one that, at certain times, creates an environment that encourages female control of the
appetite. Throughout the majority of her life, Hornbacher's statements had been made through her body, but with the memoir, she has changed her approach and is now speaking back to the culture with the written word.

I will refer to Joan Jacobs Brumberg’s *Fasting Girls*, which is a history of anorexia in Western culture from medieval Europe to contemporary studies of anorexia nervosa in the United States. Susan Bordo does extensive research on the contemporary female body, especially in her book *Unbearable Weight*. The female body continues to express cultural issues, especially concerning the complicated construction of the self. The anorectic strives for a split between mind and body, which is untenable. The tension between these categories remains unresolved.

The fourth chapter, "New Feminist Punk," tackles yet another layer of this textured work. I will discuss how *Wasted* fits into the surrounding culture and the memoir's participation in feminism, namely, within the role of punk feminist writing. The book also fits into a current feminist punk aesthetic. Similar to what Kathy Acker and Kim Addonizio do with their transgressive fiction, and what all-female emo-punk bands like Le Tigre and Slaeter-Kinney are doing with their music and live performances, Hornbacher is also pushing the notions of body, sex and self, placing punk writing in the public sphere while propelling American feminism. Contributor to *Bitch* magazine Marisa Kula suggests that the most effective way for feminist artists to "make change for women in the larger culture [. . .] is to make their criticism of the larger culture crystal-clear" (92). This can be true, but blatant criticisms can often be unsuccessful, as audience members can be made defensive by such tactics. Only readers already open to more radical viewpoints will read overly slanted texts in the first place. Unlike Acker and
Addonizio, Hornbacher's text is much more mainstream, her criticism more subtle, but *Wasted* has reached a broader audience than works by Acker or Addonizio. Perhaps this is credited to the "helpfulness" of the genre--if a story is true, it is remarkable, something to learn from or be inspired by. If a disturbing story is fiction, it is considered pornographic or as filth. Thus, even though Acker and Hornbacher describe some similar unsavory female behavior, Hornbacher's survival makes her a heroine whereas Acker's imagination makes her a deviant.

I seek to discuss many facets of transgressive feminism including writing, music, and political statements, to show the validity of feminist punk in all realms. I have been drawn into *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia*, although I had never been particularly interested in studying eating disorders before I embarked on this project, nor have I ever been the victim of an eating disorder. However, I am a feminist; the book's interaction with American feminism has motivated me.

Transgressive fiction has been stated by some to be "twisted," "sick," foolish," "trendy" and "about lifestyles" (Chun). These seem to be reductionistic and visceral reactions. While some listeners of Slaeter-Kinney or some readers of Kathy Acker may indignantly refuse to acknowledge their work to be "art," my focus is not on punk music or punk writing's artistic merit, but instead my focus is on these works as products of an exciting, tireless American feminism.

The body has long been a means of communication for Western women; similarly, autobiography is being used to this end. Hopefully, with the end of female silence, the end of anorexia (and other means of exploitation) will follow.
The final chapter, "Is Modesty The Panacea?" reiterates the reasons why Shalit's interpretation of *Wasted* is reductive and dangerous. Her suggestion to rediscover the lost virtue of modesty simply works to place blame on the victim, which blames rape victims for their own assaults, for example, and in this case, blames Hornbacher for her anorexia. This last chapter also reiterates the complex, layered meanings and societal implications of *Wasted*: it is a memoir that fits into established subgenres of American autobiography, a memoir that reflects its culture and offers a productive response to a culture hostile towards women and their bodies, a memoir that propels American feminism and should not and can not be used to push a neo-conservative agenda.
CONTROL, INDUSTRY AND CONFESSION:
WASTED AS AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Added to the slush pile of mental contradictions was the association of female sexuality with sexual voracity, weakness, an inability to control one's physical appetites one's hungers, one's needs. It has been argued that food and eating have replaced sex as our foremost cultural taboo. To some extent I agree with this but would point out that the taboo is not against food, or sex, or flesh, but against a loss of control (Hornbacher 52-53) (Emphasis hers).

Marya Hornbacher's Wasted is a complex American autobiography, a product of the American autobiographical tradition, complicated by its presence in the current culture. Some scholars, such as Timothy Dow Adams, suggest that distinctions ought not be made between types of American autobiography, such as confession, autobiographical novels, mock autobiography or straight autobiography, simply because autobiographical subgenres tend to blur together (7). While subgenres do overlap, this chapter will place Wasted within three different American subgenres of autobiography in order to show the memoir's complexity, context, and relevance to American literature; autobiography deserves to be understood as a human, cultural and, at times, religious activity (Gunn 10).

Firstly, using Diane Bjorklund's Interpreting the Self, I have placed Wasted within the framework of the two longest standing American autobiographical traditions, as described by Bjorklund: the "self as morality play," in which the narrator deals with matters of good and evil, virtue and vice, within the self; and the "masters of fate, " a type of American autobiography, like Benjamin Franklin's, entailing the self-made man, and
related to the bildungsroman. The final section of this chapter seeks to place *Wasted* into the realm of women's writing in the current culture; therefore, I have gone to Rita Felski's discussion of feminist confession in literature. In addition to older, established types of autobiography, I argue that *Wasted* can also be discussed as feminist confession. Like Franklin's autobiography, *Wasted* is talking to a national audience. However, following the defining characteristics of confession, this autobiography offers intimate details of the female author's life which are given in order to "elucidate their broader implications" (Felski 83). Through Hornbacher's *confession*, she is working to disclose personal and societal truths, perhaps not only on her own behalf but also in order to speak for other eating disordered persons who have been silenced and shamed by the culture and by the sheer ugliness of eating disorders. In this way, Hornbacher's function differs from Franklin's in that she is talking back to the culture she is addressing. In confession, a personal crisis acts as a catalyst (Felski 83). Hornbacher's catalyst is living; she writes her memoir four years after doctors in an emergency room estimate that she has one week to live (276).

**The Self as Morality Play**

Medieval English morality plays personified the conflict between good and evil in the world; in *Interpreting the Self*, Diane Bjorklund argues that many American religious autobiographies can also be classified as morality plays, but instead these American versions portray battles occurring within the individual. These autobiographies seek to answer the question of how to "gain control over the passions or appetites that impel people toward sin" (Bjorklund 44). The genre of autobiography is thought by many to have originated with St. Augustine's *Confessions* (Bjorklund 43) and gained enormous
momentum in the United States starting with the New England Puritans who were generally expected to give a public account of their conversion. Later, evangelical Protestants were required to share their conversion narratives to gain membership to the church (Bjorklund 44). Bjorklund credits the ascension of Methodism, which allows for all those who have faith to enter heaven instead of the "chosen ones" view in Calvinism, for the rise of conversion narratives in the United States (44). While Wasted is not a religious work, per se, the characteristics of the self as morality play may be applied to this memoir. Hornbacher uses a fair amount of religious imagery and language throughout the text, showing that the patriarchal, Judeo-Christian paradigm has permeated her existence and patterned her writing (although she does frequently remark that she does not believe in God). Aside from the religious wording, the important feature of the internal conflict to gain control over the passions and appetites has a strong presence in the memoir. This desire to gain control over the passions is seen, in autobiography, as an admirable accomplishment because of the established, articulated "idea of human nature as sinful and weak" (Bjorklund 46). In this tradition, those who are admirable and strong deny themselves pleasure through the strength of their enlightened character. Human beings, especially children, are wont to pursue their "passions" beyond acceptable limits (Bjorklund 47). In this way, the bulimic can be defined as succumbing to "human nature." (See introduction for definitions of bulimia and anorexia). The bulimic eats to excess, beyond acceptable limits; as she begins her binge and purge cycle, she realizes that the amount she is about to consume is beyond reasonable, as she drives from fast food drive through to fast food drive through, purchasing what would be acceptable at each place, but bingeing on food from five or six
different sources. Hornbacher's brief stint as a McDonald's employee contributed to her following this pattern (Hornbacher 91). For Hornbacher, ultimate sin is bulimic behavior.

Bjorklund further defines many common features of the religious autobiography including confessions of childhood sins and wickedness, soul-searching and the casting off of unworthy friends, a conversion, an episode or two of "backsliding," and finally, the successful conversion (Bjorklund 54-56). All of these stages, or features, of religious autobiography can be applied to Wasted.

Hornbacher describes her voyage from bulimia to anorexia, and finally towards some semblance of health, and as she does, her aspirations parallel those of American morality plays. She sees eating, and especially bingeing and purging, as sins, and wants to be anorexic to avoid the dirtiness of food and eating all together. She argues that when one thinks of bulimia, thoughts of greed and Roman feasts enter the mind, whereas when one thinks of anorexia, one thinks of voluntary famine: holy medieval women affected by anorexia mirabilis who have mastered the physical self (Hornbacher 153).

I distinctly did not want to be seen as bulimic. I wanted to be an anoretic. I was on a mission to be another sort of person, a person whose passions were ascetic rather than hedonistic, who would Make It, whose drive and ambition were focused and pure, whose body came second, always, to her mind and her "art." (Hornbacher 107)

Thus, her goal is to be higher on the eating disorder totem pole; her desire is to be a controlled, admirable anorectic as opposed to a hedonistic bulimic, a slave to her body, a slave to hunger. She says, "I wanted it (body) to go away so that I could be a pure
mind, a walking brain, admired and acclaimed for my incredible self-control"
(Hornbacher 108). (For more on the mind/body split, see Chapter 3). As she becomes
anorexic, she states, "Your ability to withstand pain is your claim to fame. It is ascetic,
holy. It is self control" (Hornbacher 124).

Hornbacher's narrator in *Wasted* starts with an episode that I see as comparable to
the first ingredient of the traditional American morality play, the disclosure of childhood
sins and wickedness. At age 5, she fights cruelly with her friend Gina. After calling
Gina's mother fat "out of pure spite," she then hits Gina:

I clock her. She cries. Baby, [sic] I say. I flounce out onto the deck, climb onto
the picnic table, pull on my blue Mickey Mouse sunglasses, imagining that I am
the sophisticated bathing suit lady in the Diet Lipton Iced Tea commercials, tan
and long and thin. (11)

While the scene Hornbacher is describing here is indicative of her childhood wickedness,
the traditional nature in autobiography is downplayed by the tone and language
Hornbacher uses, which call on the reader to acknowledge that the memoir is a product of
the current culture. The pop culture references to Disney and Lipton contemporize the
work and critique the culture. The image of this nameless and almost random model is
planted into her subconscious by the media. Hornbacher's disdain, in retrospect, for the
"bathing suit lady" is indicative of the punk nature of the memoir. The culture's effect on
this little girl is ascribed some blame for the eating disorder she acquires not long after
this episode.

Three years later, at age 8, Hornbacher begins to display bulimic behavior. Using
words like "passion," "desire," and "perversion," she describes how her sinful childhood
nature became uncontrollable and went beyond the acceptable limits outlined by Bjorklund (47) and turned into gluttony and bulimia:

Passion is strange. Mine is fierce, all-encompassing, a fiery desire for life. When I was a child, I knew it was there, and I lived it, a tendency toward explosion, flames, noise. This side of passion was my first perversion. The tendency toward excess veered out of control into bulimia [...]. (94)

Coinciding with the onset of early bulimic behavior she gets into fights and becomes increasingly volatile (44). She describes needs and hungers: "It was just a typical little girl body, round and healthy, given to climbing, nakedness, the hungers of the flesh. I remember wanting. And I remember being at once afraid and ashamed that I wanted" (14). While traditional "self as morality play" autobiographies avoided talk of childhood sexuality, admissions of early sexuality in this twentieth-century work are portrayed as another "childhood sin." Hornbacher describes her guilt after playing "doctor":

When I was nine, and indisputably a virgin, I stood in front of the mirror sticking my little belly out, wondering in panic if I might have gotten pregnant from playing doctor with a little boy when I was five, and if I was still pregnant, how would I explain it to my parents? What would they say? (74-75)

Early sexual activity becomes real and serious when it results in an unplanned pregnancy: "Five years later, at fourteen, I stood in front of the mirror and realized I was pregnant" (75). Before she determines what to do about this pregnancy, she miscarries.

Sexual activity merges with other rebellious acts during junior high when Hornbacher finds herself vacillating between being a troublemaker and a model student,
between being "nice girl/mean bitch" (70). In eighth grade she begins to have sex with strangers, often for drugs and begins to drink excessively, even in school. Her depictions of drug use and what she did to get the drugs are the most explicit and troubling of the childhood sins. Perhaps in an effort to separate herself from the situation, she lapses into second person narration. She says of herself at this time:

So many means of self-destruction, so little time [. . .]. Why be just bulimic when you can be fucked up every day in school without anyone ever noticing? Why not carry vodka in a mineral water bottle into choir and drink it between songs? Why not, since everyone seems to think you're a slut anyway, just prove them right? Why not flirt and fuck with strangers? Why not sleep with strangers who deal drugs, or have a friend of a friend who deals drugs, and ask, pouting sexily (you've been practicing "sexy" in the mirror) if you can have some? (70)

The transition to "soul-searching and casting off of unworthy friends" (Bjorklund 55) occurs in Hornbacher's story first when she decides to attend a private high school, Interlochen Arts Academy, located in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. After using heroin and cocaine (72) and miscarrying she describes a strong "need to leave" (89) her home and family in Edina, Minnesota. She needs to get away from the drugs and the promiscuity that finds her so easily in the city. Minneapolis is one of the unworthy friends she must cast off. Bulimia, she feels, is the most unworthy friend: "My hatred of the bulimia, as well, [as her body] steadily grew. That hatred became, with a little time, an absolute commitment to becoming an anorexic" (Hornbacher 82).

She becomes preoccupied with controlling her body, her hungers and need for food, as well as the power of her sexuality, as she considers, "[t]he very idea that you
could control a man's body was intoxicating; that you could make his head turn, follow your passing steps, that you could lean just so, or speak just so, or simply glance and toss your head, and he would be caught” (83).

Hornbacher's attempts at soul-searching include running away, from bulimia and from herself; perhaps part of her desire to run away stems from some of the confusion she feels about her body and its power. She describes the situation as she and her female friends discuss sex and their bodies:

I do not think we understood then that the female body is more than the sum of its mute parts. We misunderstood the power we sensed, the scent and shape of ourselves. What we were discovering, flopped across one another's warm laps, was physical, sensual, sexual, material, and it was power. (84)

She becomes frustrated with the sexist environment of her school in which the boys' work is "drooled over" and her stories, and her female friends' artwork and research projects are "given creativity awards" but ultimately ignored (84); regardless of specific reason, she craves to reinvent herself by moving. She relocates to different states three times; first by attending Interlochen Arts Academy for one school year, then when she is 16 by convincing her family that she should move to California to live with her stepmother and half brothers, and finally by moving to Washington, D.C. to attend American University at 18. Each time, she is sure that she will emerge in the new location as an improved person. In retrospect she states, "My desire to leave Minneapolis, and my family, may actually have been a desire to leave me behind and become someone else" (231). Specifically, about leaving Edina after ninth grade, the last year of junior high, she says: "I hated Edina and had no interest in going to the high
school there [. . .]. I wanted to cut my ties to where I'd been and who I was, and make up someone new" (85). Not only is suburban Minneapolis seen as an unworthy friend that should be dismissed from her life, but Hornbacher also sees the unstable junior high school girl she had become as her biggest enemy: "I was fifteen, sad, in search of balance, and trying very hard to become someone other than me" (88). She discusses the plan to dismiss bulimia, which she thinks will make her happy:

I would disappear, only to come home reinvented [. . .]. I planned to stop eating as soon as I crossed the Minnesota state line. I had had enough of bulimia. It seemed so crass, so gauche, so unlike the person I wanted to become: a woman, dark and mysterious, regal. (90)

Conversion was generally attributed to God's grace in traditional religious autobiographies, and, although this is not a religious text, Hornbacher was raised Christian and religion plays some part in her life and the text. She reads books on the saints, and her belief in God is voiced through her body, like the medieval anorectic, although her attitude is less sacred. She doesn't imagine God speaking directly to her, but rather suspects that God is on anorexia's side: "She considers God. She determines he, if they were on speaking terms, would tell her to starve for general sins" (86).

Hornbacher does convert and backslide, two necessary steps before the successful conversion that provides the climax in a morality play autobiography (Bjorklund 54-56). In this autobiography, the positive conversion is not becoming reborn in the Christian sense, but instead the discontinuation of self-destructive behaviors such as bingeing, purging, self-starvation, and drug abuse. In this context, it could be argued that eating disorder trained therapists and physicians at first hold the key to wellness, taking the
place of God's grace as the catalyst for change. Hornbacher attributes her first conversion to the people during her first lockup in a mental institution, Lowe House: "Nothing was fair. Everything was falling apart. There was nowhere I could go. And so there was really nothing to do but try to get well" (194). She comments that she liked members of the staff, and it occurs to her that she would be friends with at least one of them on the "outside" (191). Duane, the young inmate who befriends her and asks her to be his older sister while they're both there, is especially helpful: "Duane was the first to pick my brain. Beyond the simple fact that he hugged me, and made me laugh, he did something that I believe was ultimately more important: He made me care about someone other than myself" (202). Duane is the catalyst for change; he becomes the equivalent of God's grace in the traditional morality play. She admits to this change at Lowe House, piecing together her life, asking her parents about their lives and her childhood, and begins to gain insight into how and why her life happened the way it did. She states, "I wanted to understand. I sort of wanted to get better" (207).

She is making progress. She is eating well and is not so angry. Unfortunately, it is also Lowe House that provides the setting for her first major occurrence of "backsliding." She lies about being sexually abused; she inadvertently cheats and finds an easier way out of lockup. She describes the situation:

And then I did something that I have regretted ever since. One day, in the evening group [. . .] the unit was in a bit of chaos. I got up and walked out of the room, sat down in the hall, and started bawling. A Staff came after me. After a few minutes I told him, through tears and gasping, that I had been sexually abused
by men in my father's theater when I was a child. It was a lie [. . .]. I created a straw man and he took all of the blame (212).

The remaining part of her time at Lowe House is spent dealing with this non-issue, so the real problems of her eating disorders are not addressed. Many eating disordered persons have been victims of sexual abuse, so the staff at Lowe House think they are doing the right thing by attempting to deal with the abuse as at the root of the eating disorder. She is released shortly after her fraudulent confession. While she says that this move was not premeditated, she took advantage of a chaotic situation and gained, although through dishonesty, temporary control of her life. She moves back home, and maintains healthy eating habits for a time. As she keeps her weight barely above dangerous levels, she turns 18, at which point she can no longer be institutionalized without her consent or a court order. On her own in the world, she is unable to keep herself healthy, and becomes a 52 pound anorectic. She is living in Washington, D.C. working as an editor and columnist and attending American University while her eating disorder rages out of control. This episode of backsliding nearly costs her life.

Traditionally, society simply provides the "backdrop or stage for the self as morality play" (Bjorklund 59). However, for Hornbacher's autobiography, society's role is larger than a simple backdrop. She is a product of her society, born in 1974, American, Generation X, and the role of society, her family, her friends, doctors, teachers, and everything else is strong but slippery and hard to pinpoint. Hornbacher contradicts herself; she shifts the blame for her eating disorders and problems around from society to individual people. The blame sometimes rests on her mother: "We did not discuss my
mother's emotional absence, biting sarcasm, caustic comments about what I was wearing" (66). The blame lies sometimes on her father, whose behavior and parenting is problematic: "We did not discuss my father's unbelievable panic about my catapult into womanhood, nor did we mention his inarticulate and misdirected emotional needs, nor his causeless rages" (66). The blame shifts to other people in her life as an adolescent, for example, a junior high teacher who remarks, while Hornbacher is eating a bag of chips, "a moment on the lips, forever on the hips"(62). The eating disorder culture at Interlochen also takes some heat: "The obsession with weight seemed nearly universal. Whispers and longing stares followed the ones who were visibly anorexic. We sat at our cafeteria tables, passionately discussing the calories of lettuce, celery, a dinner roll, rice" (102). Hornbacher describes this overzealous dieting and obsession with food and weight at Interlochen as religious fervor, even as a cultist behavior (106).

However, there are times when she lays the blame strictly upon herself, or rather her mental instability:

I assumed . . . that there was something innately wrong with me, that I was a priori flawed in some way. I was not sad, I was not angry, I was not depressed, I was not bipolar or schizophrenic, I did not have a personality disorder, there were no events in my life that were overly traumatic, nothing external was wrong. What was wrong was me, therefore no amount of therapy would make me well. (195, emphasis hers)

Wendy Shalit reduces eating disorders to "the only way our culture allows a woman to find order in a sexually chaotic landscape" (59). If this were true, a much higher percentage of the female population would have eating disorders; however, from
Hornbacher's prospective, eating disorders do seem an understandable problem in ours, a “culture that has a highly ambiguous, conflicted view of female sexuality” (Hornbacher 40). Sex remains a taboo in our culture, which creates a contrived fear of sex. However, Hornbacher's eating disorders have more to do with control over her life and the desire for academic success than a fear of sex. She states, "I believed that my power--it was a general sort of idea--would be incrementally increased with each pound lost" and goes on to suggest that she is not the only girl to "associate thinness with both academic and social success" (85). Hornbacher contends that while some females are genuinely afraid of sex, for her and for many others, it is the fear of being perceived as sexual that drives someone to be fearful of sex. Whether direct or indirect, this fear of sexuality may encourage pubescent girls to "stave off the increasingly visible sexual signs of their bodies" to prevent others from seeing them or judging them as sexual (Hornbacher 40). This is quite different from Shalit's assumption that "[t]he anorexic [sic] disfigures her body to become unwomanly because if she has no longer the right to say 'no,' at least she has her body language at her disposal" (60). Shalit's recommendations to prolong repression (12) and embarrassment (39) would only be more damaging to pubescent girls. Bodies change and mature, and the mind should be ready and accepting of that. Thus, the solution does not lie in strengthening the sexual taboos of our culture, as Shalit suggests, but in dismissing them.

The weight of society in Wasted is generally a constant; in addition to the confusing sexual messages, Hornbacher makes passing comments regarding the occasional model or actress, for example, or ads for diet products. For Hornbacher, this begins when she is just five, regarding her mild obsession with the "bathing suit lady in
the Diet Lipton Iced commercials" who was "tan and long and thin" (11). She remarks that her "generation was raised on popular media, television, teen magazines and billboards that bellowed, 'If you could choose your body, which would you choose?'" (Hornbacher 46). She was particularly affected by the Sweet Valley High twins whose books reminded her that the ideal image of beauty in her culture was this "pair of literary Barbie dolls," who were "blond, blue-eyed, tan, and a 'perfect size six' "(46).

Hornbacher says that with her memoir, she is "trying to explain rather than excuse, to balance rather than blame" (275). *Wasted* concludes with an attempt to come to grips, realizing that she will die; she decides to try out health, all the while telling herself that if it doesn't work out she can always go back to being sick. However, she realizes that being sick gets tiresome, and since she is alive, she decides to prevent her death. She realizes "it was completely stupid and chicken-shittish of me to just check out of life because it ruffled my feathers" (277). Perhaps she decides that it would be going against nature to try to end this existing life. In this way, she describes her final conversion. "I got curious: If I could get that sick, then (I figured) I could bloody well get unsick" (277). After she decides to try health, thus enduring a long hospitalization, she gets married.

Marriage, it could be argued, is really what prompts her final conversion. She marries Julian, the boy she fell in love with at 16 during her short stay in California. Her description is much like the self as morality play in that she speaks as though she is giving herself to her marriage and her husband, the way some traditional American autobiographers could have spoken of giving themselves to God. She begins to define herself as someone with faith and Christian wifely responsibilities. She remarks:
I am married, which means many things, including but not limited to the fact that I've learned a thing or two about love, and patience, and faith. It means I have a responsibility to stay here, on earth, in the kitchen, in the bed, and not seep slowly back into the mirror. (277-278)

In the end, Hornbacher's desire to become well stems from the same place as her desire to be anorexic; she strives for control. Like the traditional "self as morality play," this autobiography has striven to determine how to "gain control over the passions" (Bjorklund 44). First, she overcomes what she sees as "ultimate sin," bulimia, and wants to be a controlled, clean anorectic. Although she sees her desire to gain control over food and the body as a cultural taboo, she is nonetheless drawn into it, and yet she holds back from placing blame on any specific factor, such as society or her family, but makes statements that contradict with her hesitance to place blame. "Our most hallowed virtue in modern society is self-control, personal 'power' (also the hallowed virtue in my own family)" (53). With her assertion: "(a) woman who can control herself is almost as good as a man" (Hornbacher 82), the reading audience is reminded of the misogyny still present in our society.

Masters of Fate

Why must the power of the female body cancel the power of the female mind?
-Marya Hornbacher

In the United States, the masters of fate subgenre in autobiography is often associated with wealth and industry, stories of "the self made man," perhaps telling the tale of a rise from poverty to fame or to become CEO of a major corporation. We are told from the time we're born that all Americans, regardless of religious, financial, or
ethnic background, can make huge sums of money if we work hard. However, wealth as
the ultimate goal is a recent bastardization of the term; the idea behind the masters of fate
subgenre comes from self-culture—the desire to cultivate one's mind by developing
intellect and "character," which one earns by having an ethic of hard work and self-
discipline (Bjorklund 67). Like the self as morality play, this type of autobiography is
meant to be inspirational and motivational to the reader. However, this change depicts a
shift in autobiography from religious to secular; the masters of fate autobiography depicts
a self that has promise, not improved only through divine intervention, but instead
through cultivation and development (Bjorklund 66).

The masters of fate, or "self made man" subgenre of American autobiography was
first introduced by Benjamin Franklin's The Autobiography, which he began writing in
1771. Although "self made" wasn't a catchphrase then, his message was most certainly
that of self-discipline and hard work. These "self made men," or "masters of fate" stories
were in the top five types of American autobiography from 1870 through the 1930s.
While Americans already held the development of character in high esteem, through the
bildungsroman, Americans became impressed with the German ideas of self-culture. In
the late 1830s, the term "self-culture" was used by many American writers, such as
Lowell and Emerson. Those who adopted this philosophy had great faith in education "to
improve human beings" and felt that fulfillment occurred when one's spiritual and
intellectual selves were developed (Bjorklund 67). Coupled with the character-
developing attributes of hard work and self-discipline, idealistically anyone can become a
master of his or her own fate.

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Perhaps the surge in popularity of the "self made man" text is due to the timing of the industrial revolution, the advent of the stock market, and possibly Darwin's survival of the fittest theory. All of these factors together strengthened the increasingly passionate adoption of the idea of the "American Dream." Attention shifted from God and God's grace to the individual. While Franklin thanks God for joy in life, he takes the credit for his own success: "And how I speak of thanking God, I desire with all Humility to acknowledge, that I owe the mention'd Happiness of my past Life to his kind Providence, which led to me to the Means I us'd and gave them Success" (489).

While the bible or other religious works are not ignored, masters of fate writings instead rely on current scientific discoveries, advancements, and writings (Bjorklund 87). This makes sense in that self-culture praises being well-read and knowledgeable of current events. By referencing current scientific discoveries, writers are offering compliments to others who display the same strong work ethic, and may serve to show off the writer's own knowledge. Moral implications are still sought, but are found in scientific writings, not the bible. Darwin's theory of natural selection played a large and confusing role as contemporary thinkers worked to interpolate evolution into their beliefs (Bjorklund 87).

*Wasted* relies heavily on scientific writings regarding eating disorders and sociological factors. There is a five-page bibliography listing only the book-length sources she has referenced in the text, which also contains numerous footnotes and parentheticals, and while these references may not be meant to flatter those who originally researched and wrote the texts, per se, they do serve to add leverage to her own points. She frequently quotes poets and other writers; these inclusions not only serve to
legitimize her intelligence, and thus the experiences in her memoir, but they also serve to pay homage to other artists in her craft. Her choices range from confessional poets such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, to male authors unquestionably from the canon such as D.H. Lawrence, Samuel Beckett, and Lewis Carroll. Many of these authors' works are featured as epigraphs, and while occasionally their use can be a bit contrived or arrogant on Hornbacher's part, they always precisely fit the plot or current emotion. For example, Chapter 6, "Lockup," begins with a section of Sexton's poem "Letter to Dr. Y." The first line "Oh there is no use in loving the dying" is a bit of foreshadowing that in this chapter, others' attempts to become friendly with her will be futile because her guard is up and she is too bent on self-destruction to be loved. Chapter 8 is entitled "'Dying Is an Art, Like Everything Else,'" and features two stanzas of Plath's poem as its epigraph (244). As expected, the chapter is about her collapse and near death by self-starvation; anorexia is arguably suicide. Thus, while Hornbacher's memoir is a morality play, because the memoir is layered and complex, applying the "master of fate" subgenre to the Wasted is not a contradiction.

Autobiographies in this subgenre, like masters of fate essays, display faith in the power of education to improve human beings, "they believed that the individual had a moral responsibility to develop his or her own self" (Bjorklund 67). Fittingly, Franklin offers reading as an inspiration for success: "There was also a Book of Defoe's called an Essay on Projects and another of Dr. Mather's call'd Essays to do Good, which perhaps gave me a Turn of Thinking that had an Influence on some of the principal future Events of my Life" (495).
Hornbacher thanks reading for having an influence on the development of her mind and her skill in writing. While in lockup, filled with manic anxiety about not being in school, she consumes whatever books the Minneapolis Public Schools had donated to Lowe House. She remarks, "I read voraciously as much Whitman and Emerson and Thoreau as I could get my hands on" (196) and quotes Roethke's "In A Dark Time" as her favorite poem. She tried to deny she had a body while she worked on making her mind fabulous. She states: "My entire identity-being was wrapped up in (1) my ability to starve, and (2) my intellect" (199).

As a well-read American, Hornbacher had probably read many examples of masters of fate texts, but simply being a product of this society, I contend, could cause parallels with previous autobiographies to exist in her work.

In fact, the idea of the self-made man is so rich in the text that Hornbacher at one point refers to her life story as the "female" version of the American Dream. Instead of impressive financial gains, or other career achievements, Hornbacher's version is definitely the story of a person who achieves success by her own efforts, but unfortunately, she has internalized society's message that a woman's worth is contained in the body, and in the ability to seize control over it:

I fell for the great American dream, female version, hook, line, and sinker. I as many young women do, honest-to-god believed that once I Just Lost a Few Pounds, somehow I would be New You, I should have Ken-doll men chasing my thin legs down with bouquets of flowers on the street, I would become rich and famous and glamorous and lose my freckles and become blond and five foot ten. I would wear cool quasi-intellectual glasses and a man's oxford shirt in a sunny
New York flat and sip coffee [. . . ]. Not to mention the fact that I was at that time five feet tall in shoes, and had no immediate future as a calm, cool, and collected woman, given my basic personality. But no matter. In America, you can have anything if you just work for it, dammit, and I was bloody well ready to work.

(91-92)

It is not just Hornbacher's ambition, described in the preceding passage, that illustrates how the memoir depicts a "self-made" woman, but also her independence and drive to move on her own depict the narrator as a master of her own fate. When she plans to leave Minnesota for Michigan at 15, she tries out new expressions in the mirror: "faces more suited to girl-of-the-world, a girl-on-her-way, a girl-on-her-own" (88). In the early days of American self-culture in autobiography, there existed a clear adventurous spirit, to "start from scratch with free land" (Bjorklund 69) or to go west, which is, as contemporary songwriter Bruce McColluch states, is still "the biggest direction of all."

This culture still romanticizes the frontier west, and manifest destiny lives on in the minds of some Americans as they, sadly, discuss ways to tame Alaska. As discussed earlier, Hornbacher attempts to start from scratch several times, including California. Her trips, which could be called soul-searching journeys in the self as morality play context, are examples of opportunities for character development in the masters of fate subgenre. Indeed, her need to attend a private fine arts high school and her drive to become a reporter and college student at American University in Washington, D.C. are clearly signs of determination and self discipline. These trips and adventures can be seen as rites of passage as well as rebellion or escape from a willful parent, both common features in a bildungsroman story (Braendlin 1-2). She especially strives to distance
herself from her parents as she describes the clever dishonesty it took to convince them she should move to California:

I would later reflect, with morbid pride, on the incredible work it must have taken to craft so careful a lie. I would reflect on the seamless, smooth surface I must have shown: the magician pulls the endless scarf from his sleeve, the slippery silk snaking on, and on, and on. I managed, somehow, to convince my parents that I was in perfect condition to move to California. The salt air will do me good, I said. (159)

She knows as she leaves that she is in no condition to be away from her parents; her behavior is self-destructive in many ways. For Hornbacher, some of this behavior could be in response to her parents. In her early teens, Hornbacher perceives her mother as resentful of her daughter, who is not thin (100), is "just like her father" and talks about herself too much (98). When Hornbacher reaches puberty, her willful father becomes "extremely intrusive" (67). She discusses how this backfired: "he became more overprotective, more anxious, more rageful. As most adolescents do, I rejected his involvement in my life. He took it too personally and did his damnedest to show me who was boss" (Hornbacher 67).

The bildungsroman also often includes a discussion of "unattractive adolescent characteristics" articulated by an older, wiser narrator (Braendlin 3). Especially vivid is her recount of junior high where "red-faced screaming matches" with her father were common. This is the time of her life that she "discovered that breaking things, including, but not limited to, door frames [. . .] was very cathartic" (Hornbacher 65). While retrospective wisdom is present in the overall tone of the work, Hornbacher shares
specifically in the afterword what she has learned and how she has matured since her hospitalization. A portion of this section reads:

[I] learned that in order to live, plants need water. That girl cannot live by cereal alone, although I go back and forth on that one still. That friends are a good source of food and soul when one has not yet gotten the hang of cooking or living (as opposed to dying) alone. That nothing--not booze, not love, not sex, not work, not moving from state to state--will make the past disappear. Only time and patience heal things. I learned that cutting up your arms in an attempt to make the pain move from the inside to outside, from soul to skin, is futile. That death is a cop-out. (278)

Hornbacher has told a motivated story. She tells an impassioned tale of a woman who seeks fulfillment and development through hard work, self-discipline, and plenty of reading. She tells the story of a woman who, in order to gain self-culture and the American Dream, strives to overcome her physical self, hungers and needs, and to become just a brain. She almost makes it; she becomes a university student, reporter, and creative writer, doing all these at once. When she finally discovers that the goal of becoming just a mind is untenable, she changes her goal and decides to work at becoming healthy, beating death, if only temporarily.

Feminist Confession

Imposed silence about any area of our lives is a tool for separation and powerlessness.
-Audre Lorde

While Hornbacher's memoir is a literary text, situated within established subgenres of American autobiography--subgenres that are traditionally male, this memoir
is written by a woman and the main subject matter, eating disorders, belongs almost entirely to Western, and notably, American, women. I contend that **Wasted** also fits into a newer subgenre of American autobiography, the feminist confession. This form of confession differs from traditional male confession. While the male version, exemplified by St. Augustine's *Confession*, is an "attempt to universalize a personal religious experience in order to share the joys of conversion" (Braendlin 25), feminist confession seeks to teach and share, but the message is not of joy or conversion, but of difficult female experiences.

This is not unlike "woman-centered" fiction that was made popular with 18th and 19th century writers (Jane Austen's work comes to mind) and has had such a resurgence in the past 20 years that new novels of the genre are being published by mainstream houses. These publishers are looking for books that feature women's experiences at the forefront (Coward 26). Hornbacher's memoir follows a convention of resolution in woman-centered fiction (although the author may disagree): marriage. As discussed in the section "Self as Morality Play," the fact that Marya marries Julian in the end is a glimmer of hope for a happy ending and follows the established tradition of resolving the narrative through marriage. In Austen's novels, as Coward points out, marriage represents the establishment of social values (27), whereas in Hornbacher's memoir, marriage represents the narrator's commitment to life and the pursuit of happiness and health over illness, which in itself is a social value. Death by suicide is not regarded highly in our culture, nor is mental illness.

Perhaps the link between Victorian woman-centered fiction, which offers certain feminine "truths," and Hornbacher's brutally honest memoir is the confessional poetry of
the American 1960s. While not all confessional poetry is feminist or even written by women, the genre of feminist confession found its advent in the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, (Gill 81) and has since essentially belonged to women, with all the positive and negative connotations that adhere to the designation, "women's writing."

Dorothy Allison is quoted on the soft cover version of Wasted as saying that it is a "book that can save lives." Indeed, the confession is often "read less for its own sake, as a literary construct, than for its content in relation to its similarities and differences in the reader's own life" (Kietel, referenced by Felski 84). The subject matter of Wasted, including promiscuity, drugs, and battling eating disorders, lends itself to categorization in "women's studies" or "self-help" shelves in bookstores. As Felski reports: "confession becomes a means of creating a new feminist audience to perform the impossible--a validation of the female experience narrated in the text" (23). Through traumatic and intimate details of the author's life, "feminist confession is concerned with delineating specific problems and experiences which bind women" (Felski 85). Thus, Hornbacher's problems become "not private but communal" (Felski 92) through this type of reading.

Felski suggests that a feature of confessional writing is the avoidance of literary language (100). Confessional writing is clear and approachable, perhaps in reaction to the chronic silencing of women, including the heroines of Victorian novels, who, according to Coward, were "profoundly silent" (28). Instead of being mild-mannered and quiet, a strong vocal presence is now required in woman-centered works. Hornbacher spoke through her body from the age of 9 (when her bulimia began) until the writing of this memoir. Now she is free to communicate through words and style. Hornbacher's writing features a level of articulateness in the text, as well as elaborate research and
footnoting, which establishes an additional level of authority to the author. Many passages are downright poetic. The vulgarity makes the memoir seem anti-esthetic; Hornbacher seems to be celebrating what Felski calls a "Foucauldian liberation from censorship and repression" (102-3). She refuses to use euphemisms; when she wants to say "fuck" or any other profanity, she does. She refers to herself as a "royal fuck-up" (195) in the text and quotes herself saying "fuck you" to her mother (185). She uses slang and avoids euphemisms in many other situations as well, often colorfully, such as "who gives a flying fuck?" (81), and calls her suicide attempts "chicken shittish" (277). She seems to be creating a tough girl personae. Perhaps on average a word or expression appears on each page which would be censored out of a movie to be shown on television. Through the combination of vulgarity, poetic language, and extensive research, Hornbacher is revamping and offering a new, multi-layered strength for feminist confession.

Critics have discounted confessional writing as "emotional pornography" (Gill 82) while others, such as James Dickey, have argued that it is "naked suffering" which simply can not be open for literary analysis (Gill 81). Some members of the feminist community are also uncomfortable with this genre, but for them it is because of the in-your-face honesty regarding unsavory topics that show women in a negative light, arguing that such works do not push a pro-woman feminist agenda. Felski, however, explains the importance of the genre: "The very point of feminist confession is to confront the more unpalatable aspects of female experience as general problems, not to present idealized images of women as positive role models" (89). Indeed, it could be argued that a frank discussion of eating disorders, drug use, and sexual promiscuity is
empowering for the feminist community, not just in that it potentially draws attention to societal problems, but also, the skill and finesse Hornbacher displays as a writer offers credibility: "Feminist confession seeks to affirm a female experience which has often been repressed and rendered invisible by speaking about it [. . .] writing promises power and control endowing subjective experience with authority and meaning" (Felski 90). The act of writing about her subject matter alone is enough to validate her experience, but it is the impressive research, skill and candor that adds the bulk of the credibility Hornbacher gives to the text.

Nancy Chodorow suggests that a feminine personality defines itself in relation to others more than the male personality does (17), thus a strong, authoritative and honest text as Wasted can actually serve as a tool for education and strengthening female bonds. Hornbacher discusses close bonds, such as with her junior high friends: "I was friends with some amazing girls [. . .]. We lay close together on beds and spoke of the usual topics of teenage angst: boys, school, future, sex, bodies, life. They helped me maintain relative sanity for a very long time (57). Later, she describes a passionate friendship with her roommate at Interlochen, Lora, who stood up to Marya because she couldn't bear to see her kill herself (127). Like other feminist confessional works, Hornbacher invites "identification and textual bonding" (Gill 87) with her readers, but the departure occurs when she makes it clear that she knows her situation is unique, even extreme. When discussing other eating disordered persons, she makes it a point to say that she can only speak of her own experience. She gives her eating disorder a personality and an identity. As she explains: "Something changed the year I entered junior high. For one thing,
bulimia took over my life [. . . ]. It began to have a force and took on a life of its own" (60).

Felski emphasizes the existence of contradictions in feminist confession--the "self" that is constructed is plagued by tensions, some of which are general problems of subjectivity, others conditions of "marginalization and powerlessness that have shaped much of the female experience" (92-92). By discussing so frankly a topic, eating disorders, that society has pushed on women by marginalizing and silencing them, Hornbacher is taking control of the problem and co-opting the power. In addition, by tackling the difficult task of self-reflexive writing and the critique of one's own discursive processes, the feminist confession is quintessentially postmodern (Hutcheon 4). (See Chapter 4 for further discussion on how Wasted is postmodern and how the memoir fits into a current feminist punk aesthetic).

Hornbacher is aware that what she is doing is confession; and although hers is memoir, it is not unlike what Plath and Sexton did decades before her in their poetry. This is clearly evident in her use of such poetry in the epigraphs to many of the chapters. As mentioned earlier, Chapter 8, entitled "'Dying Is an Art Like Everything Else,'" is borrowed from Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus," which is arguably her best known confessional poem. Also, Rich's "Diving Into The Wreck" and Sexton's "Letter to Dr. Y" and "You Dr. Martin" are used as epigraphs. Not only do her epigraphs reflect the confessional nature of the memoir, they also serve to align her own experiences with other women writers, plagued by their own demons, especially sexism, bad men, and (the resulting?) depression.
Hornbacher argues that she has "not enjoyed writing this book. Making public what I have kept private from those closest to me, and often from myself, all my life, is not exactly my idea of a good time" (275). There is little joy, if any, in her confession. However, it could be argued that by making her problems and pain communal and by taking some of the mystery away from anorexia and bulimia she is doing a service to eating disordered persons as well as to those whose pain may have been prevented. In her famous essay *Illness As Metaphor*, Susan Sontag states, "Any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious" (6). While she was speaking of her public battle with cancer, the same applies to anorexia and bulimia; taking the mystery out of the disease can help alleviate society's desire to blame and fear the victim.

*Wasted* is truly a remarkable and multi-layered text. The complexity enables it to be successfully discussed as a morality play, a master of fate text, and as feminist confession. The following chapter places *Wasted* in within the framework of body theory; it discusses how Hornbacher communicates her story through her body and again through autobiography, and how Western culture, at times, creates a misogynist climate that encourages female control of the appetite.
CHAPTER 3
A NEW MEDIEVAL CULTURE:
THE ANOREXIC BODY AS COMMUNICATION

You know these days, no one's exploited. Sorry dude can't hear ya with my head in the toilet.

-Le Tigre

She reads books on the saints. The sainted anoretics, who, in their holy asceticism, insisted that God was telling them to starve. She considers God. She determines he, if they were on speaking terms, would tell her to starve for general sins.

-Marya Hornbacher (86)

The governing power of Western culture in the Middle Ages was the church. And while the church is present in its force today, it has become merely an accessory to the governing power of capitalism, which, though industry and medical professionalization, took over in full force in the 19th century. Capitalism commodifies the body, similar to the effects of the church in medieval Europe. Women, dominated by the patriarchy, have always sought to make meaning of their lives, often in the form of an oppositional unconscious. Silenced women who sought to share their religious experiences used their bodies as languages, through stigmata and anorexia mirabilis. Through these authentic or false miracles, medieval women talked back to the governing power: the church. With the writing of her memoir of anorexia and bulimia, Hornbacher is offering a close reading of her body as a site of significance and meaning making, and in this way, she is talking back to capitalism. Her function here is what I will refer to as "neo-medievalism."
Ironically, through her commitment to anorexia, Hornbacher thought she was rejecting society, although in actuality, she was allowing society to kill her. She calls anorexia a "grotesque mockery of cultural beauty that winds up mocking no one more than you [sic]" (6). Through her body, which has been abused by capitalism, she is now allowing an insolent, sometimes sarcastic, interpretation of her life, which gives a new medieval resonance for contemporary autobiography. Hornbacher's memoir is drawing on a medieval feminism, a feminism that had the nerve, if only subtly, to talk back to the dominant culture. Through Wasted, Hornbacher is gladly rejecting the passive Victorian response that has overshadowed Western culture for too long.

**Overcoming Victorianism**

In The History of Sexuality, Foucault argued that the Victorian Age of Repression lives on, suggesting that its "triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence" continues to impose itself on Western culture (5). It is my contention that Foucault is correct, that under this heavy blanket of residual Victorianism, concepts of gender, the definition of sex, and the idea of the body have changed drastically since the birth of capitalism (Foucault 5). Sex is no longer the trivial matter that Foucault suggests it should be (5). Instead, sex is a discursive system with names and definitions that require a small, elite army of experts to explain. (The coining of the term "homosexual" in 1892 is an example of this new discursive system). The reason for this change in attitude is pragmatic and even understandable, as Foucault explains, "[a]t a time when labor capacity was being systematically exploited, how could this capacity be allowed to dissipate itself in pleasurable pursuits, except in those--reduced to a minimum--that enabled it to reproduce itself?" (6). This environment criminalizes non-reproductive sex and reduces the female
body to that of utility and reproduction. After a few generations, this minimalization of
female experience and existence contributes to, among other tragedies, eating disorders,
like Marya Hornbacher's. The repression is connected to imposed silence about sex, but
there is a contradictory complication: sex is talked about too much, but only by those who
are allowed, this small number of elite privileged "experts." About sex, the "mass media
shape popular consciousness by providing language, experts, information, and fictional
scripts" (Tiefer 26). The environment that ignores the basic emotion and drive behind
sex has introduced anorexia nervosa. Messages in the media cause each individual to
question whether they are normal or not, again, being encouraged to consult an "expert."
In a culture that equates sexuality with power, the message is mixed: being encouraged to
consult an expert about something as basic and universal, but yet individual, as sex, is
certainly not empowering (Tiefer 26). This approach takes the responsibility off parents
to teach their children about their bodies and sexuality, thus furthering the taboo. Many
parents fear they will discuss the wrong things, or they fear that others will judge their
parenting. More commonly, perhaps, parents don't teach their children about sex because
no one taught them and they don't know how to go about it, because society has imposed
a taboo about discussing sex. Thus, whatever sex education there may be is left to the
schools. Fortunately, Hornbacher's book is putting these issues on the forefront of the
minds of all who read her book; author and readers critically reflect on the story of
Hornbacher's body through the telling of it.

As we read in the memoir, when Hornbacher's eating disorders begin to spiral out
of control, she becomes ashamed of her fascination with sex, living in a home where sex
is taboo and belonging to a “culture that has a highly ambiguous, conflicted view of
female sexuality” (Hornbacher 40). A return to modesty would not solve our culture's problems with sex, instead it would further increase the taboo and the silence; the cause of Hornbacher's eating disorder is not from a loss of embarrassment, as Wendy Shalit would have us believe. Instead, it is a direct result of the confusion surrounding her body and sexuality caused by a Victorian-imposed silence.

Capitalism, while it has turned sexuality into an elite discursive system, not only brought exploitative working conditions, but also it has also turned its workers into its biggest consumers. We continue to rely on this army of experts which we pay to listen to details of our sex lives (Foucault 7), and in addition, we "pay" our consumer culture in the form of products, similarly to how we pay psychiatrists and sex therapists. Capitalism adds to the economic drive of medicine, which has been long used against women, and is now increasingly being used against men (for example, hair loss products' cruel advertisements during Monday Night Football). Naomi Wolf suggests that this commodification is caused by an atmosphere that must work against the feminism that helped to free women from the "feminine mystique" of domesticity described by Betty Friedan. Women had been the biggest purchasers of household products, and as this capitalistic culture felt threatened by the potential loss of women's spending, by necessity, it created the "beauty myth," described by Naomi Wolf. For example, when Proctor and Gamble began in 1837, it was a small soap and candle company. Now Proctor and Gamble is well known for its health and beauty products, such as Clairol, Cover Girl, Oil of Olay, Noxzema, and Pantene. Women have been targeted by the beauty industry by tactically instigating a war against fat, wrinkles, and faulty hair. Many scholars have noted the "parallels between the salvation promised by the beauty
industry's better body and that which is promised by Christianity" (Jersild 56).

Hornbacher too has interpolated this message, as she describes the quest for the perfect, controlled, skinny body in religious terms, such as "esthetic" and "holy" (Hornbacher 124). Wolf states that men's institutions and institutional power work along with "today's power structure, economy, and culture to mount a counteroffensive against women" (13). This observation is plausible, and seems adapted from Foucault's suggestions in The History of Sexuality-- women, who make up over half of the population, must be consumers. It only makes economic sense. (A strange oversight, Wolf does not reference Foucault).

Our consumer society has created a need for personal products, feeding off most everyone’s insecurities, but especially those of women and girls. Hair dyes, makeup, acne and wrinkle treatments, and uncountable diet products including herbs, pills and foods are just a few of the industries profiting from the obsession created by capitalism, that the Western female has about her body, which has become, in Joan Jacob Brumberg’s words, a girl’s “biggest project” (The Body Project xxv). Brumberg has done substantial research using data found in donated diaries originally belonging to American teenaged girls over the past 200 years. Early in the 20th century, when a girl spoke of improving herself, she was referring to personality and intelligence, or perhaps behaving in a more religious or spiritual manner. The obsession with beauty and bodies has made virtually everyone concerned with the superficial; in the late 20th century and early 21st century, “improvements” refer to losing weight, getting a makeover, or toning and perhaps even tanning the body. The body is a powerful thing; and more and more it is described by a girl as her nemesis—an enemy that prevents her from being happy.
Brumberg suggests we need only look at eating disorder statistics for proof, or the simple fact that by age 17, 78% of American girls express dissatisfaction with their bodies (Brumberg, The Body Project xxiv). In the 2000 British movie Bridget Jones’s Diary, one of the first things Bridget feels she needs to do in order to “get happy” is to lose 20 of her 136 pounds. There is a scene in which Bridget has become depressed and goes up to 140 pounds; when I viewed the film in Tallahassee, the audience audibly sighed in sympathy for her. While this is just one small, unspectacular example, it shows that it is almost impossible to imagine a time when body image was not related to mental health and happiness. Amazingly, this time was not so very long ago; it was before the industrial revolution.

For the contemporary Western woman, “the body is regarded as something to be managed and maintained” (Brumberg, The Body Project xxi) not simply as a “container for the soul” as it was before the industrial revolution and the advent of sex as a discursive system. Susan Bordo argues that there is a body/mind dualism of “disjunction and connection, separateness and intimacy” and that the “body isn’t me but inescapably with me” (Bordo 2). Grosz states, “[h]uman subjects never simply have a body; rather, the body is always necessarily the object and subject of attitudes and judgements” (81). Hornbacher describes what she told herself in the first two years of her bulimia: "The problem in your life is your body. It is defined and has a beginning and an end. The problem will be solved by shrinking the body. Contain yourself” (42). The body is a hassle, with its needs that distract concentration. Eating disordered persons echo ancient complaints from Plato and Descartes: the body is a source of confusion and inconvenience with its desires, hungers, and susceptibilities to illness (Bordo 145).
Hornbacher's complaints at times focus around the "unbearable weight" that is her body. She recalls the suicide of a girl in Edina that she read about in the metro section of the Minneapolis paper one morning when she was nine or ten. The 16 year-old girl poured gasoline around her in a circle and burned herself to death. Hornbacher says:

I know that she was an anorectic. I know that she left a note saying she couldn't go on because she couldn't stand to live inside her body anymore. Too heavy a weight to bear. My first thought: I can understand that [. . .]. I felt sad for the girl. I felt sad that she would never marry or have babies. I also understood, sadly, and apologized to God for not having thought: Oh no! How awful! How could she do that? How could it happen? Such a waste! Such a shame! Instead I thought: I could do that. (45)

It is not simply the size of the adolescent female body that causes a girl to want to escape from that body. Thanks to residual Victorian attitudes, society teaches that hungers, for food or for sex, are unfeminine. Sex is scary and female sexuality is a topic often avoided with adolescent girls. In fact, Hornbacher begins puberty before she knows what it is. Hornbacher describes a scene at age 8:

It might have occurred to someone that I was on the brink of puberty. I'd reached it awful early, so I suppose no one was really looking for it. I was caught by surprise more than anyone, having never even had sex explained to me in anything but the most abstract terms. Still, I would have appreciated some insight as to why, at the ripe old age of eight, I found three completely uncalled-for hairs at a most inappropriate spot on my theretofore smooth self while perched on the toilet . . . I had bruises on the nubs of hips that jutted where they never jutted
before. I had a spatial relations crisis, becoming increasingly disoriented in my skin and annoyed at my own height and width and elbows and knees. I turned into Alice on 'shrooms. (38-39)

Her ignorance about sexuality and puberty leave her, similar to American girls in previous generations, "unprotected against the shaming words and dirty jokes of the schoolyard" (Steinem ix). While some attitudes towards sex education are becoming more progressive, there is still, in Western culture, a taboo on female sexuality, which only encourages this idea that female bodies are to be managed and maintained. Wendy Shalit's arguments regarding modesty would only exacerbate this already difficult situation. Take for example the misogynist terms in English for female anatomy, or the negative stigma that surrounds menstruation, which is seen in our society as a hygienic concern rather than a sexual concern. Fourth grade boys are sent outside for an extra recess while the people from Proctor and Gamble (the makers of Tampax and Always) show a film to the girls, after which they are told to hide their pamphlets in their backpacks, as if menstruation is a dirty thing that should be kept from boys. In addition, at menarche, the bulk of discussion between mothers and daughters is hygienic, such as the advantages and disadvantages of tampons and pads rather than the more important issues regarding sexual maturity and the stress of puberty, especially the added annoyance that boys mature later than girls. Hornbacher describes a particularly disturbing scene involving several older boys at school who taunted her about developing breasts. They "snapped my bra in the halls or came up to me during lunch, leering, saying, 'Marya, do you wear a bra?' No, I said, staring at my lunch [. . .]." She tries to ignore them, but they do not leave her alone. She continues, "[o]ne would trace the line
of my bra across my back, his finger gentle, almost seductive, then snap it hard . . . " (51). The episode culminated in one of the boys making a lewd gesture that she didn't understand. Sexual development in this society is often equated with experience; girls are called sluts, simply because they look the part more than their lesser-developed peers: "a girl with visible breasts becomes sexualized because she possesses a constant physical reminder of her sexual potential," author Leora Tanenbaum explains in her 2000 book on sexual stereotyping entitled Slut! (8). The scene Hornbacher describes is indicative of a society hostile towards females. Her ignorance and modesty do nothing to protect her from the taunting and jeers from the "horrible creatures," as Hornbacher calls them.

The power of female sexuality is seen as a threat in a society that views the female body as something to be managed by women, consumed by men, and used by advertisers to sell marginal American beer and any other number of products. In addition to cashing in on female sexuality, companies and the medical profession continue to profit from female insecurity. For example, there is a product called FDS (Feminine Deodorant Spray) whose advertisers encourage women that underarm deodorant isn’t the only necessary deodorant. Hairy legs and armpits on women are seen as utterly disgusting in the United States. From where does this all stem? As Michel Foucault stated that we are “the other Victorians;" I would agree that much of our sexual repression is residual from the 19th century. Our culture sees a very distinct Victorian attitude towards women. Women’s medicine is still dominated by men and pharmaceutical companies. Drug companies continue to repackage and reconvince us that the everyday hazards of being female can be controlled by the pain relief and hormone regulating products they create and produce supposedly for us. The medical
profession has convinced women that normal functions of the body, such as menstruation, are actually health issues or problems. Pop culture writer Emira Mears notes, "in the myriad ads for menstrual products, rarely will you hear periods described as a normal, healthy function of women's bodies [...] it seems that women are beginning to forget this fact" (41). This mentality has also made midwives almost extinct in this culture because women are hesitant to have experienced women assist in childbirth if they aren't obstetricians. In addition, women are made to feel guilty or selfish when they question invasive or experimental procedures (The New Our Bodies, Our Selves 399).

Nineteenth century England saw the professionalization of medicine and psychiatry. Because of the imposed silence brought on by the Age of Repression, women stopped confiding in each other about their bodies and instead put full trust in their doctors. There was no freedom to talk about sex as only professionals could get away with it: "A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power" (Foucault 6). Unfortunately, these "professionals," in their ignorance, did much more damage than help. Sexuality is still treated with much the same Victorian medicalization. Female orgasms, for example, are not seen as "an arbitrary matter of talent and predilection;" medical professionals have turned them into a "matter of health and disorder" (Tiefer 27).

A second factor that enabled Victorian psychiatry to take over and impose silence on its women was the overall society’s fear of insanity. The taboo regarding sexuality left many confused because they didn't know whether or not they were "normal." The confinement frenzy was in full swing, and people, especially downwardly mobile women, feared being committed, especially after the Lunatics Act of 1845 opened the doors of
asylums to the middle class. Also, Victorians were hearing horror stories about “spasms, cramps and frenzy fits” being reported in France and they feared these ailments could be coming to England (Shuttleworth 48). The notion that “insanity could hang invisibly in the air” or could be present in the body, unsuspected, for years, reinforced faith in doctors and alienists (from the French for "insane," the Victorian term for what has since become psychiatrist) because they believed that insanity could be detected only by the “trained eye of the physician” (Shuttleworth 42-43). It is suggested that this faith was unjustified, as Sally Shuttleworth remarks, “By reinforcing women’s sense of shame, and thus perpetuating their isolation, the medical profession established their empire” (44).

Leonore Tiefer suggests that health professionals continue to work to maintain their authority over sexuality and mental health, taking measures "to ensure their autonomy, promote their economic opportunities, and increase their public status" (27). Thomas Szasz feels that in Victorian England, so-called lunatics replaced witches “as a symbol for social deviance” (Arieno 13), just as Foucault found that much earlier in France the madperson had replaced the leper (White 246).

Mental health and women’s bodies were Victorian obsessions. Menstruation was of particular interest to physicians, partially because its purpose was confusing to them, and also because, as Shuttleworth suggests, there was a longstanding preoccupation among the British with circulation in general (71). According to an 1840s medical encyclopedia, menstruation was thought to be related to the state of estrus (heat) in animals. What they did have right was that this confusing blood originated in the uterus, but unfortunately because of this, a correlation of the uterus to the dirty industrial city was created. Shuttleworth argues that Victorian thinkers saw the uterus as a sewer: “dark
and hidden recesses harbouring disease or crime, liable to burst out at any moment in excesses of passion or social discontent” (73). Although an extreme example by today’s standards, the stigma remains: a woman’s body (especially a fat body) and her sexuality are dirty. In Victorian England, male physicians knew more about the female body than women did. And while this is still true today, the feminist movement of the 1970s has helped to remove some of the mystery. Books like Our Bodies, Ourselves helped to open the dialogue between women, as well as mothers and daughters, and “consciousness raising” groups helped to lessen the taboo surrounding the female body, although the taboo survives today. A complicating issue is that, while female bodies are more celebrated now than in the recent past, "fat hatred is still deeply entrenched in American culture" (Meltzer 20).

It seems that each generation of women has an ailment special only for them. Currently, that ailment is anorexia. While it may be extreme to state, or at least hard to prove, that these conditions are contrived by the dominant culture, it certainly isn't a stretch to suggest that these ailments are convenient for it, which is, in this context, favorable to the white male. White men are not overly concerned about eating disorders, which is understandable since over 90% of those affected are female. When eating disorders kill bright, upwardly mobile girls, or confine them to hospitals, the competition is that much lighter for white men applying to universities, trying for scholarships, or looking for jobs.

In the 19th century, the debilitating illness was hysteria. The causes were always physical—the fault of the body. Puerperal and menopausal hysteria were of some concern; however, the most famous alienist from the 19th century, Henry Maudsley,
linked menstruation directly to insanity. He explained in 1873 that the menses “may become an important cause of physical and mental derangement” because during menstruation, women are “susceptible, irritable and capricious” and that a “sudden suppression of the menses has produced a direct explosion of insanity” (Skultans 231). Maudsley stated that hysterical women were prone to “laughing, singing, or rhyming” and “quasi-ecstatic or cataleptic states” and even nymphomania (Skultans 235).

What hysteria was for the female in the 19th century, the eating disorder is for the female in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, in that they are both culturally assigned to women. (The notable difference is that hysteria was often assigned to healthy women).

In the Victorian Age, women’s bodies, sexuality, and mental health were kept in check by men. Menstruation and the onslaught of insanity were always fears for women. The uterus was a fearful place, which produced curious blood, as an industrializing city was a scary thing as it piped nasty soot into the air. Today, negative feelings remain about the female body, as well as for as its hungers and sexuality.

**A Return to the Middle Ages?**

In the Middle Ages, strong distinctions were made between spirit and body, but the lines separating male and female were blurry, and at times even permeable. For medieval scientists, the line between women and men was almost permeable, mainly because of sex organs: Male and female genitalia were thought to be basically the same, just that for males the equipment is outside the body, and in females the organs are internal (Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* 220). They were so convinced of this that there was a fear that non-missionary intercourse (namely, with the woman on top) could result in impregnating the male (Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* 221).
Anthropologist Brian Morris suggests that Western philosophy has long been misogynistic and has ignored those central concerns of human life specifically associated with women, such as childbearing (169).

Some scientists and theologians in the Middle Ages adhered to Aristotle’s theory of conception, which maintains that the mother provides the material matter for the fetus and the father provides the spirit. This contributes to the idea that “medieval thinkers associated the body with women; they therefore expected women’s expressiveness to be more physical and physiological than men’s” (Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption 200-202).

The woman is regarded as the half who creates the body of the child, but the father supplies that child with the superior half of a human being—the soul. Because the body was seen as inferior to the soul, women were affected negatively by their culture (Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption 235-236). Bynum suggests that the reason the female body was seen as inferior was because it was seen as more changeable than the male and closer to decay. Women were seen as nutrition, not only for fetuses in the womb, as Bynum asserts, but for breastfeeding infants as well (Resurrection of the Body 221). Morris suggests that "a woman's physiology and more specialised reproductive functions make her appear closer to nature," (172, emphasis mine) therefore men represent culture whereas women represent nature. This explains the opposition feminists have had to biological arguments and their tendency to argue for cultural definitions of gender (Birke 21).

Medieval women spoke little of gender or equality, and the experiences they expressed that were important to them were more human than female (Bynum,
Fragmentation and Redemption 18). As Bynum reminds us, gender is the study of how roles are conceptualized, therefore to analyze female gender roles, one must regard the whole population, not just the percentage who are female (Fragmentation and Redemption 17). Frantzen argues that the only way for a woman to be “saved” is for her to perform male roles disguised as a man: “For a man to be holy is to act like a man; for a woman to be holy is also to act like a man” (466-467). By exercising reason and strength, a woman could be considered almost as soulful as a male. As it is currently, in the Middle Ages, control of the body was considered a male characteristic—in fact, married saints who rejected sex were considered closer to holy (Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption 202).

But because women were not given the authority to speak, especially about religious experience, Bynum suggests that women had to manifest religious experiences through the flesh (Fragmentation and Redemption 195). In this way (in addition to, or instead of, the option to deny their womanhood to be more “masculine”), it was possible for medieval women to strive to be more like men spiritually. While stigmata and anorexia mirabilis did occasionally occur in male subjects, these phenomena were far more common in medieval women. Brumberg, in her study of anorexia entitled Fasting Girls, mentions that between the years 1200 and 1500, many women refused food and that “prolonged fasting was considered a female miracle” (43). For these women, sustenance was achieved through the Eucharist and prayer. Or rather, these women would have rather had their sustenance come from spirituality and holiness: because the female was associated with the body, there was a desire among these women to abject unsavory bodily functions. Current day chroniclers of medieval saints are fascinated by
fasting, not merely as a "step toward God" but instead as "miraculous non-eating" (Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast 84). Bynum references contemporary chronicles of the French peasant saint Alpaïs, who supposedly lived for forty years consuming only the Eucharist; much time is taken discussing her "failure to excrete and the emptiness of her intestines" (Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast 84). Those who were unable to fast were criticized for their failure (Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast 82). Those who did fast, such as Alpaïs and Catherine of Siena, for example, were acclaimed. Saint Lutgard of Aywières did not eat or menstruate (Bynum, Resurrection of the Body 222). Female saints were expected not to display unsavory bodily functions even in death: researcher Herbert Thurston found that "proponents of female canonizations in the late Middle Ages came to assume that women's cadavers would be found incorrupt" (Bynum, Resurrection of the Body 222).

Hornbacher has internalized the current society's disdain for bulimia and bodily functions, which are quite similar to those held in the Middle Ages. For example, in treatment for bulimia for the first time, she reflects upon the embarrassment she felt of her body and its functions:

In treatment, as in the rest of the world, bulimia is seen as a step down from anorexia, both in terms of medical seriousness and in terms of admirability.

Bulimia, of course, gives in to the temptations of the flesh, while anorexia is anointed, is a complete removal of the bearer from the material realm. (153) Eating implies digestion, excretion, and female hunger in general. With bulimia the implications are even uglier: "there is nothing feminine, delicate, acclaimed about sticking your fingers down your throat and spewing puke" (Hornbacher 153). Anorectics
(sufferers of both anorexia mirabilis and anorexia nervosa) usually do not menstruate (due to low body fat and/or lack of nutrition), thus making them immune to a correlation with menstrual blood originating in the dirty, mysterious uterus. Female hungers for food and sex are certainly not the medieval idea of holiness. For the medieval woman, reverence might be found in stigmatic bleeding, virgin lactation and anorexia mirabilis, all of which may have been considered miraculous, however, there was a risk in that these women could have been accused of fraud (Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* 215). The Victorian woman neither sought nor achieved reverence. The current day anorectic's confusion between knowing the culture is wrong in its demands on the female body but still yielding to the pressures results in a neo-medieval insolent tone. Thinness and the quest for invisibility are taken too far; said thinness becomes strikingly visible. Insolence is taken a step further by Hornbacher as her memoir reflects criticism through the conceptual aid of writing.

A medieval woman’s body was also a nuisance, but for much different reasons than women of today. For example, a medieval saint may have seen her body as something that could prevent her from reaching heaven (Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* 236) and would strive to deny her femaleness. A medieval woman would see her gender as inferior to the male gender and would strive to become more “manly.” For different reasons, a woman in today’s society often sees her body as the obstacle to happiness.

A striking similarity between the medieval woman and the contemporary woman is the use of the body as a means of communication—medieval women were not to speak about religion, thus their religious statements were done through the body. Stigmata and
anorexia mirabilis were more common in medieval women than in men. Bynum argues that there is a profound connection between medieval women’s symbols and communities to 20th century gender studies and gender asymmetry (Fragmentation and Redemption 18). Being a woman is still often a burden. Female sexuality is not quite embraced with openness; women are less likely to be encouraged to voice sexual desire, although communicating their desires with their bodies is generally accepted (because the status quo enjoys the view). Women frequently speak silently with their bodies today about their tastes and desires. On the first day of a university class, it is generally easy to guess the musical tastes and past time interests of a given female student. (And unfortunately her sexual history is often speculated on as well). Not only does our culture have prescribed, easily identifiable hairstyle and clothing choices, additional decorations and fads exist through which women communicate about themselves. Take for example one that is popular with generation x-ers and of particular interest to Brumberg–the belly ring. This piercing was, at first, quite outrageous and rebellious, but is now much more common in suburbia than in the city; and thanks to several well-known fashion models, it has been adopted by sorority girls and other mainstream females, often to symbolize pride in their flat stomachs and the desire to show them off (Brumberg, The Body Project 133).

Our society's obsession with image is comparable to the medieval obsession with Jesus. The medieval variety of anorexia has been replaced with anorexia nervosa, a completely different phenomenon but one that displays the same truth: Western culture is one that, at certain times, creates an environment that encourages female control of the appetite. Perhaps the most famous example of medieval anorexia is Catherine of Siena.
Some have stated that she was the first victim of anorexia nervosa. But to argue that she or Alpaïs suffered a disorder, let alone the same disorder as Marya Hornbacher, (as some scholars have done) is reductive and erroneous. Bynum suggests that in the High Middle Ages "fasting and Eucharistic devotion were expected of saints, especially hermit saints and women" (Holy Feast and Holy Fast 82). The difference is illustrated by Brumberg:

The medieval ascetic strove for perfection in the eyes of her God. In the modern period, female control of appetite is embedded in patterns of class, gender, and family relations established in the nineteenth century; the modern anorectic strives for perfection in terms of society’s ideal of physical, rather than spiritual, beauty.

(Brumberg, Fasting Girls 48)

Hornbacher concurs with Brumberg; she relates in retrospect how her white suburban society affected her: "[i]n our culture, thinness is associated with wealth, upward mobility, success" (46). She goes so far as to state that anorectics' "whittled bodies are admired as the epitome of feminine beauty" (Hornbacher 153). She goes on to explain how having money makes it possible for someone to have a perfect body--including the time to devote to fitness and the means to pay for plastic surgery, a personal trainer, or at the very least, membership at a health club. Also, thinness has become a sign of self-control in general, but, Hornbacher argues, is also a sign of sexual self-control and management (46) and is "an active realization of religious and cultural ideals" (Hornbacher 154). This is anorexia nervosa.

Bulimia, then, is the duality between the desire for thinness against the inability to control the body's hunger. The bulimic wants it both ways. Bulimia proves that a mind/body split is impossible:
Bulimia acknowledges the body explicitly, violently. It attacks the body, but it does not *deny*. It is an act of disgust and of need. This disgust and this need are about both the body and the emotions. The bulimic finds herself in excess, too emotional, too passionate [. . .] the anoretic operates under the astounding illusion that she can escape the flesh, and, by association, the realm of emotions.

(Hornbacher 93, emphasis hers)

The anorectic wants to believe that she is just a mind, and that the body is not her, but merely attached to her. She believes that she can categorize herself into two parts, however, the timeless mind/body split is untenable. The tension between these two categories is unresolved, but, regarding bulimia, the body wins small battles. In the years that Hornbacher is anorexic, occasionally she binges and purges in a blackout, sometimes for an entire weekend. The body's need for survival overpowers the mind's need for control. About one such weekend, Hornbacher states, "There are reasons people binge. One of them is malnutrition. That's what was going on and I knew it" (224). Bulimia scares Hornbacher because of this loss of control. She refers to anorexia as "disembodied," "imperceptible," and "socially sanctioned," (223) and easy to cling to the belief that "there's nothing wrong with it" (224) but "the minute you stick your fingers down your throat," she says, "you know damn well something's wrong" (224).

Dangerous and unhealthy, yes, but what scares Hornbacher is the loss of control, the body taking over and forcing her to eat. She likens the need to eat with other hungers:

Added to the slush pile of mental contradictions was the association of female sexuality with sexual voracity, weakness, an inability to control one's physical appetites one's hungers, one's needs. It has been argued that food and eating have
replaced sex as our foremost cultural taboo. To some extent I agree with this but would point out that the taboo is not against food, or sex, or flesh, but against a loss of control. (Hornbacher 52-53, emphasis hers)

The issue of Hornbacher's fear of sexual maturation ties in with her eating disorder; about puberty, she states, "I was already utterly terrified of my needs, my passions, and, admittedly, my derriere" (53). She resented her body for maturing; she remarks: "My body, which I felt unruly to begin with, suddenly did what I had always feared it would do: It defected. Without permission, and without warning, my body began to 'bloom'" (40). By placing the words "defected" and "bloom" together to describe puberty, Hornbacher is depicting resentment, purely incited by society, for an event that should be joyful, or at least experienced with apathy. She also perceives changes in the way others treat her when she develops breasts: "It was as if people could see, just by the very presence of my breasts, that I was bad and sexual and needy" (53, emphasis hers).

Later, as an anorectic she desires, but is ultimately unable, to obtain a mind/body split; she has sex to prove that she is in control of her body. "The power game is the mental foreplay, the sex itself is almost irrelevant, and when the sex takes over your body, makes you lose control, you've lost the game" (226). Sex is sometimes used as a diversion from hunger, but that backfires, as Hornbacher says "because the desire for sex is a hunger in and of itself" (226).

Medieval, Victorian and current times are marred by negative effects on women due to the patriarchy and sexism. Sexuality and the body are on the forefront of continuing debates regarding feminism. Gender essentialists such as Camille Paglia disagree with feminists who maintain that gender is culturally constructed and assigned.
Neo-conservative "feminists" continue to blame the victim. What I find hopeful is the refreshing medieval, "talking back to culture" response articulated in Hornbacher's text. After almost dying because of her response to the culture, she has changed her approach and by the symbolic writing this memoir, she is talking back to this culture that almost caused her death.
CHAPTER 4
NEW FEMINIST PUNK

What is Punk?

They hand you the world's smallest microphone. It's still too loud and you're asked to go home.

-Slaeter-Kinney

Cameron: Here's this (unfolding a list). Likes: Thai food, feminist prose, and angry girl rock of the indie rock persuasion. Here's a list of CDs she has in her room.

Patrick: So I'm supposed to buy her some noodles, a book, and sit around listening to chicks who can't play their own instruments?
-10 Things I Hate About You

In this section, I argue that Wasted is a feminist punk, or transgressive, memoir.

Writing that follows a punk aesthetic is a current definition for transgressive writing.

Defining something as punk in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century is tricky business. When one thinks of punk, 1970s British images flood the mind-- perhaps The Sex Pistols, or a crowd of angry teens disenchanted with the racist, classist, and sexist ideals held by the status quo, so they sport safety pins through their noses and swastikas and other co-opted symbols on their shredded clothing. Punk has always been about style, text, and subtext. The message is clear through their clothing and behavior that from a punk's perspective, something is wrong.

A new incarnation of punk lives in the realm of American feminism, including transgressive writing. This transition of style and text from song to literature is a logical one; music and literature are tied together through linguistics. While the writer may not
look punk, (although some do) transgressive writing is inherently punk. There are two main punk functions fulfilled by transgressive literature, including *Wasted*, that I will focus on in this chapter, the political call for an active, not passive, reading and writing which is directly reflective of the body in order to force the reader or viewer to question the functions and implications of the body. Through *Wasted*, Hornbacher has placed a feminist issue into the mainstream public sphere. Parents have bought this book in the hopes of preventing their daughters from the tortured existence of eating disorders, and have, perhaps inadvertently, introduced their daughters to a rebellious, punk writing that questions society and the status quo: a text that questions the culture that teaches, even forces, girls to hate their bodies.

Transgressive literature and punk intersect in postmodernity. Dick Hebdige suggests that part of the "self-consciously profane and terminal aesthetic" of punk lies in incorporating random juxtapositions and literary avant-garde into records and stage acts (27). Punk and postmodernism share similarities in their disregard and disrespect for the formal; these shared cutups and anti-melodies encode a politics. Similar to punk, transgressive writing will mix high and low art, change genre midway or even mid-paragraph, and the narrator (or even the language) can vary throughout the work. While some critics and readers describe postmodern literature and objects as "weird for the sake of being weird," in this sense, postmodern transgressive writing is not just "weird," it's political. There are social, economic, and other political reasons authors choose to transgress the "rules" of literature, perhaps write a postmodern work, and write in a punk fashion. Though it is sometimes considered just a trend in literature, critic Michael Silverblatt defines transgressive writing as having "violation at its core: violation of
norms, of humanistic enterprise, of the body” (Chun). His assertion is partially correct; transgressive literature implores the reader to question norms, perhaps breaking down the foundation of the dominant culture, but the violation is not aimed at the body: transgressive literature is, however, obsessed with the body and representations of the body. Punk is obsessed with not so much violating, but stylizing the body. What Silverblatt hasn't explored are the reasons behind the art of transgressive writing, and I contend that, like punk, transgressive writing is purely political.

The general ideology is the same between the punk movement and transgressive writing: pushing the notions of body, sex, and self: subverting the ideals of the status quo and showing, not just telling, that something is wrong by transgressing the rules of society or mainstream culture and writing. The "prettiness" of the mainstream is avoided (Laing 407) for the more noble work of "truth telling at all costs" (Laing 414). The dominated or marginalized subculture seeks "counterhegemonic validation" (Braendlin and Braendlin 2), meaning, it wants recognition outside of the subculture as well as knowledge and adherence of the rules within the subculture. American transgressive writer Kathy Acker broke those rules ascribed by the authoritative mainstream culture. She is often identified as the best known American transgressive writer; thus, I feel that a discussion of her and her work would be beneficial before placing Wasted in the context of American punk feminism.

As a former member of the mainstream (Pulsifer), much of Acker's work is a vocalization of her distrust of Reagan's America. (It is common for punks to come from privileged backgrounds). Her startling appearance, including piercings, short bleached hair, and multiple tattoos, blurred the line between transgressive writing and punk culture
(Pulsifer). She forced people who saw her to question how a woman from a considerably wealthy family from Manhattan should look. In her writing, by appropriating works of classic male artists, she combined high and low fiction, refusing to discriminate between the canon, the self, the body, the reader, and the narrator. Stallybrass and White define low art in terms of class structures; that which is vulgar or earthy is low (8). There is no shortage of earthiness or vulgarity in Acker's works. Her most famous novel, *Blood and Guts in High School*, best illustrates transgressive writing. It is a postmodern novel about a ten year old girl, Janey, who finds herself "dumped" by her father, who is also, startlingly, her boyfriend. The novel jerks along with Janey as she moves from Mexico to New York City after the breakup, and as she eventually falls in love with her Persian pimp. Because Janey is incapable of imagining love or life without pain, and frequently mixes the two, the strong feelings, including fear, she has for her pimp become translated into love. The novel is stylistically postmodern and its subject matter is punk. Janey's perspective of a tortured jealous girlfriend at age 10 (especially the sex scenes between her and her father) is subversive and disturbing. Adding to the confusion and postmodern elements, there are sections of Janey's poetry written in Persian.

Acker's approach at transgressive fiction places her deep into the margins outside mainstream American fiction. The novel is profane, confusing, and even in places sickening, purposefully, to capture the essence of the sickening nature of child abuse and abuse of women. The message is through its subversive nature that this book, due to its content is theoretically banned by the same elementary schools that "Janey" could have attended. Acker points out that our culture strives to protect the reader, in this case, the child, from dirty language but not from the abuse that requires profanity for its adequate
description. Gabrielle Dane suggests that Acker "utilizes this schizophrenic array of styles and modes of discourse in order both to enact the permeable boundaries of a sexually abused child and to try to express that for which no ready words exist" (248).

Acker's career began in New York City as part of the punk movement. In fact, she was known not only as a novelist, but also as a performance artist. She performed at bookstores and clubs, including CBGBs, a club famous for the American punk groups launched there, from Blondie to the Talking Heads (both forerunners of the more radio-friendly version of punk dubbed "new wave" by radio execs). Through her use of plagiarism so blatant it can hardly be called plagiarism, her use of the "open, pathetic body" and much vulgarity, Acker pursues a linguistic, "semantic revolt" (Hulley 174). In doing this, not only does Acker's writing work for a purposeful conscience in the reader, it also works to subvert the patriarchal assumptions of the Western canon (Moran 140). Many feminist critics, such as Judith Fetterly, have voiced dissatisfaction with the canon, stating that "American literature is male" (561) and that the experience of being American is equated with the experience of being male (562). The result, Fetterly argues, is that the female American reader feels estranged from her own experience (567). By "plagiarizing" segments of male texts, Acker is reappropriating them as women's texts, but by allowing the segments to feel strange and not flow into easily into her work; she shows the continued alienation between women and "male" texts, as well as the communication breakdown between different class structures. Richard Walsh suggests that through its blatancy, Acker has elevated plagiarism into a "formal strategy, emptied of its pejorative connotations" (149). Blood and Guts in High School offers a segment
with the heading "A book report" in which the narrator and protagonist, Janey, gives her interpretation of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*.

Hester Prynne, Hawthorne tells us, had wanted to be a good girl. I remember I wanted to be a good girl for my father. Her loving husband sent her to the New World to prepare a way for him. Travelling in those days was dangerous - there were no roads - and her husband never showed up. Two years passed. Hester was being a good dead girl. Suddenly a little unsuspected ecstatic crazy-making overtaking wildness like a big King Viper spreading his hood, rising up and spreading everything, that's what love's like, snake-insane rose up in Hester she fucked. Pregnancy made her wildness or evil (that's the religious word for *wildness*) public. The child was the sign of her nastiness and disintegration and general insanity. (67)

Whether Acker takes the work verbatim or invents a paraphrased version, the result is the same. A long insertion of a canonical text by a male author in an Acker novel is for punk literature the equivalent of a safety pin decorating a punk's jacket or face: both work to subvert what is expected. Novels by women should be romantic or otherwise "speak to women" in some stereotypical way, and jewelry should be pretty and not an ugly, functional object. As Terry Brown discovers, Janey's attempts to write her story, thus to create an identity for herself, backfire, and her narrative becomes "progressively fragmented, as if to suggest that her identity itself were shattering" (169). Through her plagiarism and inter-weaving of texts, Acker has created a new kind of language which can only be understood "through context and association" (Peters 150). Some critics have defined Acker's works as science fiction or fantasy because of its
dramatically different language. Sharon Stockton, for example, refers to Acker's protagonists as "cyberpunk heroes" (588). Because of the visceral implications of women only being as important and individual as their genitalia (Acker would say "cunts"), I contend that Acker takes Cixous's "writing of the body" concept further perhaps than Cixous intended-- Acker takes it to the level of punk.

Dick Hebdige, in his seminal work on the punk movement Subculture: The Meaning of Style, argues that punks detach themselves "from the taken for granted landscape of normalized forms" and push profanity to "startling extremes" (19). Namely, just as punks of the 1970s were vocalizing their genuine frustration, aggression and anxiety through their startling styles of dress and music, punk feminists of the early 21st century are also vocalizing these frustrations through their styles and the content of their work. This frustrated call for change exists in the musical arena with such groups as Sleater-Kinney and Le Tigre. While the original punk movement strove to either shock or enlighten recipients (Laing 414), Corin Tucker of feminist punk group Sleater-Kinney clearly strives to enlighten listeners. In an interview for Bust magazine, she asked the rhetorical question: "What's the point of being successful without changing anything?" (McAndrew 78). Through their style and lyrics, Sleater-Kinney encourages girls to create, because, as band member Carrie Brownstein suggests, "... when so many things are available to you, and you spend your energy consuming rather than creating or inventing, you're more willing to accept the status quo" (78). This idea shows clearly in the song "#1 Must-Have": "For all the ladies out there I wish/ We could write more than the next/ marketing bid/ Culture is what we make it Yes it is/ Now is the time/ To invent." At a Le Tigre concert in August, 2002, in Milwaukee, the lyrics to the feminist
anthem "FYR" (Fifty Years of Ridicule) were projected on a large screen and the
audience, male and female, were ordered to chant the lyrics with the band. For those
three minutes, an entire theater full of people voiced their frustrations over continuing
sexism.

Kim Addonizio's 1999 collection of short stories, In The Box Called Pleasure
contributes to current punk feminism. Her story "Emergency Room," for example,
pushes the idea of the profane while voicing concern over the safety of women in
relationships, especially confronting the issue of reasonable and available family
planning. In the story, an unnamed couple's condom breaks during sex. The woman
knows she's ovulating and does not want to become pregnant, so she calls the local
hospital to find out about emergency contraception. She is held on the phone for an hour
and a half trying to reach Doctor X. She is finally connected to Doctor X who tells her
she must come in to get the pills. There is desperation in the text: "I don't want to have
the baby, I say. I want the pills. If they don't work I'll have an abortion. Please, I say.
Can't you call it in?" (Addonizio 76). Addonizio is criticizing the current situation: there
is emergency contraception available, which is safe, legal, and effective and has the
potential to prevent crisis pregnancies and, in turn, many abortions, but the status quo
with all its red tape and judgement makes it difficult to receive. By putting the couple in
a truly understandable predicament (a broken condom), Addonizio also challenges a
stereotype that women who require abortions are irresponsible and "use abortion as birth
control."
**Wasted as Feminist Punk**

Hornbacher has written *Wasted* in a feminist punk fashion; the genre of nonfiction combines with the political elements of transgressive literature described above. The articulation of her life is punk, not the anorexia. Hornbacher is writing about taboo subjects, including female sexuality, bodily functions, and attempted suicide, unflinchingly and without apology. While Acker and Addonizio both choose to subvert the status quo and diminish the idea of the "good girl" by choosing anti-heroines, their characters are fictional, and in the case of Acker the plot is especially exaggerated and unfeasible, even, aside from metaphor. In Hornbacher's book, she is the subject. Truth in autobiography is a matter not for this thesis; however, the fact that she is telling the story of her life and body as truth is of importance. Whether or not the memoir is completely "truthful," her main character "Marya" is not fictional, her physical body is proof of that, and because of the unsavory, unflattering depiction, "Marya" is perhaps more transgressive than characters in fictional punk writing. Contradictorily, the genre allows for her to "get away" with more transgressions than are allowed in fiction. (Perhaps this is why Hornbacher is having a hard time getting her fiction published by HarperCollins, the house that published *Wasted*).

Hornbacher is attracted to the notion of transcending the body, and by making the reader aware of this essentialism, she is asking the reader to question it-- the first part of the punk agenda of *Wasted* is writing which is directly reflective of the body. As Hornbacher reminds us, currently, in medieval and in Victorian times "some of us [women] use the body to convey the things for which we cannot find words" (125). She uses her body, and her feelings about her body at different junctures, as storytelling
devices that push the plot along. About ballet practice Hornbacher states, "at four I
stood, a tiny Eve, choked with mortification at my body, the curve and plane of belly and
thigh. At four, I realized that I simply would not do"(15). Later, in elementary school,
she describes spending time in front of the mirror: "pinching my thighs hard, harder, until
welts rose, slapping my ass to see if it jiggled, so I could say, Fat bitch" (41). As her
eating disorders take control in high school, she states, "we forget that it (bulimia and
anorexia) is a violent act, that it bespeaks a profound level of anger toward and fear of the
self" (123). Hornbacher describes feeling separated from her body, and imagines seeing
herself from the outside. Exacerbating the situation is that she enjoys aspects of
malnutrition, from her lanugo: "I liked my fur. I felt like a small bear" (109) to the manic
masochism brought on malnutrition: "I was very proud of myself for forcing my body to
run" (109).

The memoir also broaches the second, but equally important, agenda of
transgressive writing: the political call for an active, not passive, reading. Hornbacher
offers this:

I wrote this book because I believe some people will see themselves in it--eating
disordered or not--and because I believe, perhaps naively, that they might be
willing to change their own behavior, get help if they need it, entertain the notion
that their bodies are acceptable, that they themselves are neither insufficient nor in
excess. (5)

What better way to make a bold political statement about anorexia than from the
perspective of a sufferer! On the surface, the depiction is allowed by the status quo
because it seems that the responsibility is on the victim; after all, anorectics starve
themselves. She doesn't overtly blame society and advertisers for her anorexia; the reader has to work for it. However, the confusion on behalf of the narrator is useful for the political message because it shows the deep confusion and slipping sense of self that society has caused. Her message that she isn't sure who to blame for her anorexia illustrates the slick job on the part of society that successfully makes women hate their bodies. She offers dozens of alternatives throughout the memoir, suggesting that her "mother's eating habits verge on the bizarre" (Hornbacher 12) or that eating disorders are a means of "stopping time" (229). She offers that anorexia was possibly an apology to her father "for having become a woman" (229) or a reaction to a "fear of sexuality" (40).

While it is not certain why she offers so many explanations for her eating disorder, Hornbacher does give a more definitive answer: "the individual does not exist outside of society" (5). She continues,

[H]ad I lived in a culture where 'thinness' was not regarded as a strange state of grace, I might have sought out another means of attaining that grace, perhaps one that would not have so seriously damaged my body, and so radically distorted my sense of who I am. (6-7)

Just in the way that Acker wrote not simply to offend us, but to spread uneasiness, or "dis-ease" (Hulley 175) Hornbacher doesn't simply want to shock her readers with disgusting details of her eating disorders, but she also wants the reader to feel the horror of eating disorders. She describes what it's like to have lanugo (109), gastric rupture (171 & 222), blacking out while driving (219) and includes many vivid scenes of purging, the following at a junior high party:
You will beg God to keep your face normal after you puke as you turn on the water full force to drown out the retching and splashing, hoping to hell that the walls are thick so nobody hears. You will lift the toilet seat, carefully slide your fingers inside your mouth and down your throat, and puke until you see orange. The Doritos. You ate them first because you, like most bulimics, have developed a system of "markers," eating brightly colored food first so you can tell when it's all out, and it all comes out, in reverse order: the pizza, cookies, Ruffles, pretzels, Doritos, all swimming in dark swirls of coke. (61)

Hornbacher's use of second person is this section is stylistic proof that the author is attempting to draw the reader into the experience of being bulimic. Part of the loud political call in Wasted consists of making the reader wonder how bulimics can daily put themselves through something that non-bulimics can only understand as the worst flu or most hideous hangover imaginable.

This is also a message directly reflective of the body, in this case, an anorexic/bulimic body that almost saw its death. She describes the act of writing Wasted as "trying to translate a material object, a body, into some arrangement of words" (275). The first phase, or "initial rebellion" of punk existence is a "force for education and personal change" (O'Hara 38). Although Hornbacher thought she was rebelling by having an eating disorder, stating that there were "millions of ways in which I could have responded to a culture that I found highly problematic" (6), Hornbacher's true punk existence comes with her decision to become well. Hornbacher states, "I was really annoyed when told I was going to die and rather petulantly went, Well fuck you then I won't" (277). According to pop culture critic P.J. Nebergall, for a punk, there is a
realization that society's materialism is hierarchical, status crazy, domineering, and manipulative (14). As anorectic Abra Fortune Chernik explains, "I dismissed feminist alternatives as foreign and offensive, swathed as they were in stereotypes that threatened my adolescent need for conformity" (76). Hornbacher describes her decision to stop being anorexic as a punk rebellion. She, somewhat jokingly, states that one reason to give up anorexia was because "it struck me that it was entirely unoriginal to be starving to death. Everyone was doing it. It was, as a friend would later put it, totally passé. Totally 1980s. I decided to do something slightly less *Vogue*" (Hornbacher 277).

The second phase of Hornbacher's punk rebellion is in her decision to write it all down in order to educate others. *Wasted* is both a pedagogic project and a transgressive project. It was not therapeutic for her, but actually very difficult (275). Hornbacher uses such descriptions for what she is doing with the book as "cultural heresy" (5) and states that in order to eat and enjoy the thump of her steps, she has to "ignore the cultural cacophony that singsongs all day long, Too much too much, too much" (5). Much in the way that Acker's novels were banned in order to protect the reader from profanity, Hornbacher's memoir points out the obvious-- our society is abusive to women through its perpetuation that thinness is beauty and that there is nothing more important than beauty. The unapologetic approach with which she reports the disease, as well as her use of second person narration, contribute to the subtle way in which *Wasted* makes it clear that the blame is with society. Advertisers still choose dangerously thin models as the rate of eating disorders continues to climb. Hornbacher mentions specific models who had an effect on her, from the "bathing suit lady" in Diet Lipton Iced Tea commercials (11) to the models in Seventeen (44). In much of Victorian literature written by women,
a "woman's heroism is dependent on a rejection of the mirror" (La Belle 174). Today, as made clear by Wasted, a woman's heroism is still dependent on her rejection of the mirror, but her mere survival is dependent on a rejection of society and the cultural cacophony.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Is Modesty the Panacea?

I felt cheated by the culture of our fathers, the culture that promised to take care of us, keep us safe, somehow, from the other men who might "ruin" us. Instead, that culture ruined our sense of ourselves.

-Laurel Gilbert

I did not keep quiet. I started to yell.

-Marya Hornbacher

When Wendy Shalit goes to college in 1993, she realizes that "the feminists" are not exaggerating about the problems women face in the United States. She becomes friendly with anorectics and bulimics, girls who excuse themselves to the restroom immediately after dinner in the cafeteria. At first, she is skeptical about the adversities her college sisters claim to have endured, but then she "hears stories of women raped, stories with too much sadness and detail to be invented" (2). Struggling to find the answer, the way out of this morass, as she calls it, she (naively and arrogantly) finds the solution: modesty. Like most neo-conservatives, the proof she offers is anecdotal. She introduces to the reader the laws of tzniut, which are Jewish laws of sexual modesty (4). As she gathers from smiles in photographs, she describes the joy of being a
"modestynik." They wear long skirts and hats and have an "undeniable glow" (6). Although she is not a "modestynik" and doesn't seem to know any personally, she is convinced that the definition-- having no physical contact with boyfriends and wearing clothing that covers up much of the body and all of the hair-- is the path to happiness and safety for women. (Interestingly, she does not address the issues of rape, assault, and other abuses of women in Islamic countries who follow similar modesty laws, nor does she address the fact that Hornbacher's bulimia begins at age 8, long before her first sexual encounter). Wendy Shalit's interpretation of Wasted is reductionistic and anti-feminist, and her suggestion to rediscover the lost virtue of modesty simply works, as most neo-conservative stances do, to place blame on the victim, which in this case blames Hornbacher for her anorexia.

Instead, I maintain, this memoir is a complex American autobiography, transgressive in style and content, and as a text that, along with her punk contemporaries, changes American feminism.

The memoir's many layers allow for multiple readings. It is clearly an American autobiography, and as I've shown with Chapter 2, the memoir follows established American subgenres of autobiography such as the Self as Morality Play, traditionally thought of as early Protestant American conversion stories, and the Masters of Fate, of which Benjamin Franklin's autobiography is a notable member. The Masters of Fate subgenre enforces the ideas of self-culture and personal enrichment through education and experience. Hornbacher's memoir is also a feminist confession in which she uses her personal experience to elucidate its broader implications. In this way, Wasted talks back to its national audience.
**Wasted** illustrates that, at certain times, Western culture is hostile towards women and girls, and creates an environment that encourages female control of the appetite. Medieval women were verbally silenced, ordered to not speak about religious experiences or teach their own children about religion, thus, having no alternative, their religious experiences were voiced through the body through stigmata and anorexia mirabilis. Victorian women were silenced by a general fear of insanity and institutionalization. The contemporary Western woman, especially the American, is controlled by her society, a society that teaches that fat is evil and looks are paramount. Hornbacher's text illustrates a mental illness and horrific self-destruction resulting from a culture that she found problematic.

The patriarchy's attempts to silence medieval women have backfired as canonized saints from the Middle Ages are more notably female. In this way, medieval women have "talked back" to their culture. Hornbacher's sometimes subtle, sometimes scathing criticism of her culture through *Wasted* is her way of talking back to her culture. Writing this book, she states, is "cultural heresy" (5). She is disenchanted with the culture that almost killed her. Through her memoir, the insolent way in which she is talking back to her culture is reminiscent of medieval women, and refreshing after too many years of Victorian repression. In fact, the book falls into a new pop culture movement of feminist punk. Through *Wasted*, Hornbacher has joined the ranks of other groundbreaking American punk feminists, such as Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill and Le Tigre, and postmodern novelist Kathy Acker.

Neo-conservative messages offered by white, mostly Protestant, men are nothing new. Startling and upsetting to me, however, is the current trend of privileged women
voicing these same misogynistic, conservative stances, complicating the lives of women and causing a greater challenge for current feminism. An example of this is Wendy Shalit's assertion that feminists are "exaggerators" (1) filled with empty complaints. After all, if she can graduate from college and write a book, feminism must have already happened, and it must be over, right? Danielle Crittenden even compares feminism to communism, and sarcastically asks if, without feminism, "might we even lose the vote?" (17). The media has a clever way of convincing the American public that things are okay, in politics and regarding women's issues, by diverting our attention (see for example Michael Moore's Stupid White Men and Mark Crispin Miller's The Bush Dyslexicon). My hope is that the readers of this thesis and books like Marya Hornbacher's memoir understand the problems besetting young girls today --harassment, stalking, crisis pregnancies, rape, and especially anorexia--fester in a culture that is increasingly hostile to them, their choices, and their bodies.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Denise Du Vernay was born in the Twin Cities in 1973. She began college at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minnesota in 1993. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of South Dakota in 1998, with a major in English Literature and an Earth Science minor. In 1999, Denise began graduate study at the Florida State University, where she emphasized autobiography and feminist theory. She taught for three years in the First Year Writing program, including a self-designed course on satire and *The Simpsons*. Denise has presented her work on Margaret Atwood, pedagogy, and feminism, film & Shakespeare at several conferences, including Northeast Modern Languages (NEMLA), Toronto, 2002, Pop Culture Association & American Culture Association Conference (PCA/ACA), Toronto, 2002, and the Florida State Conference on Literature and Film, Tallahassee, 2001 & 2002.

Upon completion of her M. A. at Florida State, Denise returned to the Midwest with her husband, Jeff, and their special cat, Chloe. She is working on several projects, including an article on satire in *The Simpsons* and a text on using comedy in the classroom, with collaborator and friend Karma Waltonen.