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STODDART

## Analyzing Mad Men



# ANALYZING MAD MEN

Critical Essays on the Television Series

EDITED BY  
**SCOTT F. STODDART**

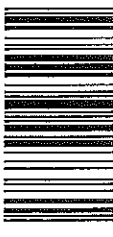
AMC's episodic drama *Mad Men* has become a cultural phenomenon, detailing America's preoccupation with commercialism and image in the Camelot of 1960s Kennedy-era America, while self-consciously exploring current preoccupations. The 12 critical essays in this collection offer a broad, interdisciplinary approach to this highly relevant television show, examining *Mad Men* as a cultural barometer for contemporary concerns with consumerism, capitalism and sexism. Topics include New Historicist parallels between the 1960s and the present day, psychoanalytical approaches to the show, the self as commodity, and the "Age of Camelot" as an "Age of Anxiety," among others. A detailed cast list and episode guide are included.

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On the cover: (top) Key; art from Season 1 of *Mad Men*, 2007  
(AMC/PhotoFest); (bottom) Manhattan skyline at night (Shutterstock)

  
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## 6. *Mad Men* and Career Women: *The Best of Everything*?

Tamar Jeffers McDonald

The Fifties were hypocritical and secretive ... on the surface it was such a happy, lovely time, but it wasn't like that at all, it was what we pretended, and underneath was exactly what's happening today: the broken hearts, the looking for love, the lies, the fears... [Jaffe cited in Monaghan, 2005].

While author Rona Jaffe is here recalling the historical context for her first novel, *The Best of Everything*, published in 1958, her words have resonance for viewers of Matthew Weiner's hit television show, *Mad Men*, despite the show's storyline beginning in 1960. "The Fifties" lasted longer than the decade from 1950 to 1959, and are not bound by those end-dates. As Wini Breines has noted, "...eras do not commence and close in neat, round decade numbers; the fifties as a cohering cultural entity is an intellectual construct" (xii). Similarly, W. T. Lhamon, Jr., in his examination of cultural changes wrought by and in the year 1955, defends his decision to treat the year inclusively:

I imagined my mid-decadal year more like a sieve than a bucket because I wanted to catch a particular tangle. My 1955 would include *Invisible Man*, for instance, even though Ralph Ellison began his novel in the late Forties and published it in 1952. My 1955 would also expand to welcome Thomas Pynchon's novel *V* (1963) ... [which] wore its fifties dependence on its sleeve [xv].

Fifties fashions, jokes, novels, movies, automobiles, advertising slogans, music, did not all change on 1 January 1960, and indeed it is the fifties fashions, jokes, novels, movies, automobiles, advertising slogans and music — the cultural ephemera we rely on to date a specific period — that play such a large part in creating the feeling of authenticity in *Mad Men*, a show which, as Lhamon comments of Pynchon's novel, wears "its fifties dependence on its sleeve," sometimes literally.

Jaffe's quotation about surface and depths evokes the duality at the heart of *Mad Men*. The tension between attractive appearances and disillusioning realities is present not just within the narratives unfolding within the show, but is also inherent in the series' own makeup. The program operates a curious attraction/repulsion mechanism: the glossy surfaces, adorable outfits, fabulous furnishings and glamorous everyday objects draw viewers in, yet the characters' sexism, racism, selfishness and snobbery, as casual as it is endemic, repel. This push/pull response is part of what makes the show so fascinating, and it relies very much on the perceived authenticity, as well as the allure, of the artifacts displayed.

*Mad Men* can be celebrated for its acute conjuring of mid-century zeitgeist: from costumes to cars, catchphrases to cocktails, the show meticulously evokes the sights and sounds of its historical period, summoning up scenes of conformist suburbia and *populuxe* Manhattan familiar from Richard Yates' novels and Doris Day movies. Like the central characters of *Revolutionary Road* (1962), *Mad Men* has its philandering husband working in New York City in an advertising job, while the wife tends house and children, brooding over lost chances, in an upstate suburb. Like, too, the second Day-Hudson outing, *Lower Come Back* (1961), the advertisers' control over the everyday decisions of thousands of Americans is the source of mocking glee for the execs at *Mad Men*'s Sterling Cooper. Embedding the show within the historical contexts vouched for by well-known contemporaneous texts lends the series a kind of verisimilitude, but also an insubstantiality. Riffing off famous contemporary films and books, *Mad Men* is the copy of a copy, a media text based not only on history but on other media texts. Shimmering with self-reflexivity and allusion, it can, however, also elevate some of its time capsule souvenirs to a position beyond that of merely providing authenticity as period objects or topical references.

This chapter proposes to discuss one such example of the well-chosen artifact which reveals a deeper interest than just displaying the show's pop culture awareness. Rona Jaffe's bestselling novel *The Best of Everything* and the 1959 film version are referenced in one episode of *Mad Men*. This text acts here as a physical artifact—a garish paperback—invoking a particular era; it also functions symbolically in its specific episode, since musing about the aging Joan Crawford's role in the film betrays Betty Draper's anxieties about herself. Beyond this, however, the text acts as a key to wider issues central to the series as a whole: ideas about female agency and desire, not only sexual desire and the search for fulfillment, but also—and equally transgressively for the time—the desire for intellectual and career satisfaction. *The Best of Everything* thus provides *Mad Men* with a touchstone for exploring assumptions about women's relations with sex and career, especially through the character of Peery Olson.

### *The Best in "Babylon"*

Jaffe's book and the Jean Negulesco-directed film based upon it are both referenced in "Babylon" (1:6). Don Draper is in bed looking at the book, which his wife, Betty, has presumably been reading. When she comes into the room, they discuss the book and the film, Don finding the former—seemingly with approval—"dirtier" than the movie. Betty says she likes the book more than the film. *The Best of Everything* seems to be included here as zeitgeist: the film was released in October 1959 and this scene takes place on Mother's Day, May 8, the following year. However, although no other mention is made of either book or film, *The Best of Everything* can also be seen furthering various themes developing throughout the show. For example, countering Betty's feelings that Joan Crawford is too old to be on screen, Don notes that Salvatore Romano, Sterling Cooper's art director, is obsessed with her. For the modern viewer who knows about the movie star's gay following, this serves as a sly hint about Sal's closeted homosexuality, regularly intimated across the show's episodes. Beyond this, musing on how Crawford was once, but is no longer, a great beauty, Betty is prompted to think about her own inevitable aging and this, in turn, brings her to muse about her mother's death, a subject Don is anxious to avoid as he believes it is making Betty "melancholy." As the couple cuddles up in bed and Betty tells Don how aroused she is by thoughts of him during the day when he is at work, the text which initiated the couple's conversation seems forgotten. But Betty's confession of strong desires actually links back to the novel and its film rendering.

Betty tells Don about her everyday routine at home: every mundane task seems both undertaken in order to dissipate, and yet shot through with, an all-pervasive sexual longing. Betty confesses that "I never let my hands idle"; as performed, the line seems to suggest that were Betty not occupied in busy-work she would be masturbating. She *dare* not let herself stop working, or her desires will overwhelm her. Don seems amenable to hearing his wife's fantasies about his homcoming, moving in to take advantage of her erotic mood. But he has missed the point: as she insists that she *wants* him, he assures her, blandly, that she *has* him. But it is not Don *per se* that Betty desires so much as his recognition that she has strong sexual feelings demanding fulfillment. Betty is not telling him she is aroused and ready for sex now, so much as insisting he see her as a sexual being with equal needs and frustrations. And this is both a transgressive notion for a 1960s housewife and the very point that leads us back to *The Best of Everything*.

Again, as the scene shifts to the agency and a normal Monday at work, the Jaffe text may seem to have been forgotten, or at best, meant to resonate

slightly in the memory again when Don is presented by prospective clients with another topical best-seller to read: *Exodus* by Leon Uris. The two books existed both side-by-side on the popular book lists, and at opposite extremes of a spectrum built round quality and "taste," with Jaffe's lurid pot-boiler at one end and Uris' worthy, weighty tome at the other.<sup>1</sup> But although the more worthy read can be seen to prompt Don to contact Rachel Mencken again, in order to probe her about Israel, thus leading the story on to Don's next romantic entanglement, it yet remains that the sensationalist text carries the most significance within both the episode and the series as a whole.

This is because the "Babylon" episode turns out to be a key one in the first season. Positioned almost exactly halfway through the first series, it provides the moment where Peggy distinguishes herself from the mass of secretaries, at the Belle Jolie lipstick trials, and takes her first step across the line from secretary to copywriter. We also learn that Joan and Roger Sterling are sexually involved, thus fulfilling our assumption of Joan's toying with the men in the office. Her mature sophistication about sex has been hinted at in her costume, dialogue and in Christina Hendricks' sensual performance, but is now confirmed by the program as Joan and Roger are seen after sex in a hotel room.

As regards Don, this episode shows him realizing that his sometime-lover Midge has friends and a lifestyle outside his ken. As noted, he is positioned moving towards Rachel instead; when he meets her for a drink she allows him to hold her hand briefly, thus hinting at their future intimacy, and, in helping him with his task of selling Israel as travel destination, talks about the idea of "utopia." Rachel insists that while she sees herself as an American, the idea of establishing a nation-state for the Jewish people is important to her. Having been in exile for so long, the Jews are entitled to a home at last. Don comments dryly that this sounds like "utopia" but the educated Rachel is not put off by his put-down. Instead, she one-ups his show of learning by demonstrating she knows the linguistic roots of the word: Utopia had two meanings to the Greeks—both "the good place" and "the place that cannot be."

Within the context of the scene, Rachel's comment seems to imply that her being with Don—which both desire—must be classed as the second form of utopia. In the program as a whole, however, it has wider significance, as well as suggesting why the episode's title is "Babylon," the first place of Jewish exile. Many of the characters can be seen to be in exile, remote from the place or people they would like to be with, or just be, including obviously Don Draper himself.

For the women in the episode, however, being in exile, and yearning for "the good place," is presented in different ways. The series does not assume

they all want the same thing; contrary to the notions of women all yearning for a house, husband and children perpetuated throughout traditional fifties media. As the episode shows, Betty wants sex; Peggy wants career fulfillment; Joan wants freedom and a life of her own outside of her sexual affairs; Rachel wants Don as her lover.

Foregrounding the females' desires, in all their variety, the show thus links back to *The Best of Everything* since that text too is all about what women want. Before we can more closely tie the text into *Mad Men*'s characters and narratives, an examination of the text itself proves necessary.

### *The Best as Text*

Jaffe's novel tapped into a well-established trope of both literature and film: "*take three girls...*" Multiple heroines give authors and film-makers a range of career and romance options for their female characters, allowing creators to diversify their fates: as Laura Jacobs describes the formula, "one girl wins, one draws, one dies" (204). *The Best of Everything's* three protagonists largely conform to this pattern, although it might be difficult to tell who "wins"; there are divergences between the book and film which complicate this issue, making the film, perhaps unusually, the less conservative text. As such it will be the master narrative described here.<sup>2</sup>

Caroline Bender (Hope Lange) arrives for a job interview at Fabian Publications in New York City. She re-reads the advert that brought her there:

SECRETARIES! You Deserve The Best of Everything!

The Best Job — The Best Surroundings

The Best Money — The Best Contracts!!

Promptly at nine a stramped of secretaries arrives in the office. Caroline attracts the attention of office manager Mary Agnes (Sue Carson), who sets her a typing test while talking about her impending wedding. As Caroline is typing, a hung-over man comes in and stares at her. He is Mike Rice (Stephen Boyd), head of a teen magazine which Mary Agnes says keeps the whole company going.

Caroline is hired, getting a desk and a boss to serve for the day: Amanda Farrow (Joan Crawford), head of Derby books, and scourge of secretaries. Caroline reviews her reasons for being in the job: she is no careerist, but willing away time until her fiancé Eddie returns from a scholarship abroad. Caroline's reverie prevents her hearing Farrow calling her. Farrow issues conflicting orders and patronizing remarks, but Caroline endures their first meeting and escapes back to the typing pool, where she meets April Morrison

(Diane Baker)—it is her first day too. At lunch Caroline meets Farrow's usual secretary, Gregg Adams (Suzy Parker) who has been playing sick to attend an acting audition.

After lunch Caroline has more run-ins with Farrow, while April spends the afternoon taking dictation from Mr. Shalimar (Brian Aherne), one of the top bosses, who makes it clear he would be happy to give her more *physical* work. After his pass is rebuffed, he gives the tearful April sandwiches and some taxi money, considering the matter closed. April runs out of the office, but on reflection is impressed by Shalimar's nerve. The final scene of the first day shows Caroline sitting up all night to read an unsolicited manuscript.

After this carefully worked out beginning, establishing key characters and hinting at future intersections between them, *The Best of Everything* speeds up. Gregg auditions for Broadway director David Wilder Savage (Louis Jordan), but is unsuccessful; after they meet again, an affair begins, netting Gregg a role in one of Savage's plays. Caroline submits her ideas about manuscripts to an encouraging Shalimar. One evening she is at work late when Eddie rings: he is back in the States but has married an heiress. Caroline is heart-broken; Mike Rice happily helps her get drunk and takes her home with him, but when she passes out while he is kissing her, honorably leaves her un-molested. The next day at work Mr. Shalimar makes Caroline a Reader, despite Amanda Farrow's disapproval.

During the Fabian annual picnic, with Caroline enjoying her new job and Gregg enjoying her affair, April meets Dexter Key (Robert Evans) who entrances her with his spontaneity, willingness to break rules, and good looks. Mike accuses Caroline of becoming too career-minded.

At Mary Agnes' wedding, April, who has caught the bride's bouquet, almost faints; she tells Mike and Caroline she is pregnant, and leaves to inform Dexter. All this femininity gets to Caroline: she takes Mike home and cooks him dinner. As they kiss, the phone rings: it is Eddie. Mike realizes she is still hooked on her former beau and leaves.

Dexter, arriving to take April "to get married," is perturbed she has told Caroline. The reason for his annoyance becomes clear when, in his car, Dexter admits he is really driving her to an abortionist. April is horrified, jumps out of the car, and miscarries.

Amanda Farrow leaves Fabian's. She had been having a relationship with "a certain married Vice President" of the company; breaking with him, she goes off to marry a widower with two children and a farm, and Caroline is promoted:

CAROLINE: Isn't it wonderful, Mike?

MIKE: You have everything you want now, haven't you? Miss Farrow's job,

Miss Farrow's office, and in another month or so you'll have the rest of Miss Farrow's life.

CAROLINE: What do you mean?

MIKE: Isn't that when your married boyfriend comes to town?

Gregg is sacked from the play, dumped by Savage, and goes slowly insane at the dual rejection. Caroline and Eddie meet: he confesses he still loves her. After a few days—and nights—together, however, he offers to make Caroline his mistress, rather than get a divorce. She refuses. Amanda Farrow returns, having found business has ruined her for marriage. Caroline happily gives back her office and clients, although she retains her editor status.

Gregg, snooping outside Savage's apartment, backs out a window and falls to her death. Caroline, April and her new boyfriend—the doctor who attended her after the accident—rush to the scene. The film concludes, as it began, at Fabian's. It is the end of the working day: Caroline gives some tasks to her own secretary to complete before close of business, but then relents. April has plans with her new beau, so Caroline leaves the office alone. But Mike Rice is waiting; the two exchange smiles and walk off together.

I have related this narrative in some detail both because *The Best of Everything* is not particularly well-known, and since so many of the incidents and details seem to me fruitful for discussion in connection with *Mad Men*. Before I explore the character and story strands from the Fifties text which seem to resonate with the recent one, I want to open up a few more of the film's specific points to greater scrutiny.

The film follows its source novel by providing Caroline with a reason to be in the Fabian offices: in neither is she looking to become a career woman, but is simply passing the time productively. Thus she is not to blame for her career success, or indeed having a *career*—as opposed to a job, a wage-generating occupation—at all. The idea that blame could be attached to a woman seeking success at work is a particularly pertinent one for *Mad Men*, and is fully supported by a mass of media material from the late forties onwards in America. Hollywood took a full part in this suspicion of the professional woman; whenever possible from mid-century onwards, films took pains to show that while many "business girls" on the loose in the city were not really looking to better their career prospects, just their marriage ones, those who *were* genuinely intent on a career ultimately became unhappy with this choice.

A young woman was generally shown as a "scheming ingénue," in Brandon French's phrase (31), that character often played by Debbie Reynolds and Maggie MacNamara, who attempts to parlay her way to a husband without bestowing her physical favors, using a job as a means of passing the time until *He* wanders into her trap. Similarly, the tagline for *Ask Any Girl* (1959) suggests Shirley MacLaine's character is on "the jobhunt that is really a man-

hunt," and Helen Gurley Brown, in her 1962 best-seller *Sex and the Single Girl*, confirms women's ulterior motives in seeking employment: "What you do from nine to five has everything to do with [men].... A job is one way of getting to them. It also provides the money with which to dress for them and dress up your apartment for them" (80). Brown contends that most working females choose a job both to meet men and to cover their living expenses, clearly dividing the workforce, as do the films of the time, into those with jobs and those with *ambitions*: "Many companies do not allow dating among co-workers and clearly they are not with it! Why else do they suppose you are working except to cover a few items like food, rent, car payments, bank loans and other trivia? (Bona fide career girls notwithstanding)" (30).

These contemporaneous media texts tie in closely with the image seen within the first few moments of *The Best of Everything*, when Caroline contemplates the job advert for Fabian's. The advertisement claims that, amongst other things, the job will give her "the Best Contacts!" But why should a secretary need contacts? An advertising executive would need contacts because she would need to build her links within the industry — often, as *Mad Men* shows, through bibulous expense account lunches. But what would a secretary need contacts for? The work she needs to do is handed to her by her existing bosses.

"Contacts" makes sense if it actually means, in this context: "males." While Mary Agnes may have found her fiancé outside the office, many of the women in the typing pool at Fabian's might be hoping for "contact" with one of the male executives which they can convert into marriage. This is perhaps why the office workers all assume Caroline is out to get Mike Rice. Uninterested in manoeuvring Mike into marriage, Caroline runs the risk of becoming, in Gurley Brown's evocative if perhaps sneering phrase, a "bona fide career girl." Partly *The Best of Everything* sees this fate, as other mid-century texts did, as the road to ruin. For example, a 1962 *Cosmopolitan* piece damns "The Non-Woman: A Manhattan Enigma" as "Sexy but sexless, ravishing but ruthless," adding that this monster "is female but about as feminine as the steel and glass skyscrapers" (149). The "Non-Woman" is a career woman, an unnatural urban creature criticized by the (female) author of the piece for pleasing herself rather than men: "[New York] offers most single women the greatest opportunity for glory. Not with men, but with positions of power in a variety of businesses" (Bartelle 62). The phrase "Not with men" indicates the author's assumption that men are the appropriate sphere for female opportunities, the hunt for the right man and marriage to him forming the whole gamut of women's proper endeavors. Bartelle assigns the misleading of these unnatural, de-sexed creatures to the allure of the trappings of success: "So undoubtedly [they] ... are the products of the age. They are the college graduates, the mid-

dle-class women with smart wardrobes and attractive homes or apartments, who have fallen victim to what might be termed the emotional fallout resulting from the great emancipation explosion" (63). *The Best of Everything* is ambivalent, however, about Caroline's particular successes in the business world. It is careful to show that she does not enter Fabian's in order to become an editor; rather her natural curiosity about books leads her to read manuscripts Farrow has rejected. Shalimar also comments that she "has a gift" for finding gold in the slush pile, which reinforces that it is not graft but *instinct* that propels her upwards at work.

Furthermore, although the film implies a connection between Caroline's romantic disappointment and career success, the latter incident follows the former so rapidly that no causality can be assumed. Caroline is dumped by Eddie, passes out at Mike's apartment and then comes into work the next morning to be told she has been promoted. Her status elevation thus seems more like life dealing her a good hand straight after a bad one than the result of her own ambitions.

However, the film does seem to try to join the mass of mid-century anti-Career Woman propaganda, condemning Caroline for forgetting her femininity and being taken over by ambition when, at the picnic, Mike denounces her new changed persona. Although she utters protests throughout his entire speech, his condemnation is louder on the soundtrack and remains a coherent sentence despite her interruptions:

Caroline, do you know why you're doing all this? ... It's because the man you thought loved you, loved someone else.... When you tried to forget with the first guy, you passed out instead ... and now you've closed the door, being a woman is too painful so you're not going to be one ... men aren't lovers, they're competition, so let's not join 'em, let's lick 'em!

Despite the virulence of this attack, the film undermines its support for the view of Caroline as misguided career woman in two main ways. First, this is by allowing *Mike*, an embittered alcoholic, to be the one to chastise Caroline. Second, the narrative has shown no signs of her having "closed the door" to her femininity. The breakneck pace of the story has not left time for Caroline and Mike to have become estranged by her new career commitment; by not showing an incremental waning of their friendship and concomitant waxing of her career interest, the film undermines Mike's comments so that, instead of acting as the cool voice of reason, he comes across as a disappointed lover. Because all the criticism of Caroline as career woman exists in Mike's perceptions rather than screen-time, the film renders its own potential condemnation of the woman's inappropriate ambition rather nebulous.

The figure of Amanda Farrow is a similarly ambiguous one. Although she appears to be a stark warning of the dangers of ignoring feminine concerns

and promoting career ones, the film actually makes her an example of a woman happy and fulfilled once she realizes her proper place is in the office, rather than the home. Farrow differs here from other fifties and sixties representations of the career woman; they are generally shown regretting the time wasted in headlong pursuit of the attention and glamour attending a good job, as this defeated speech from Sylvia (Celeste Holm) in *The Tender Trap* (1955) shows, as she muses over what brought her to the big city:

A career! Glamour! Excitement! And this is the place to find it. So we come to New York. And we do pretty well. Not great, but pretty well. We make a career. We find the excitement and the glamour. We go to first nights. We buy little mink stoles. Headwaiters call us by name. It's fun. Wonderful. Till one day we look around and we're thirty-three years old, we haven't got a man....

While Sylvia is regretting not finding a husband, *The Best of Everything* allows Farrow to get one, and then to realize that being a wife and mother is not for her. When she reappears in the film, after trying family life, she is softened, but any expectation that it is marriage which made her happier is overthrown: it was a disaster. Her new calmness comes instead from being allowed back into her career, from realizing she was not missing anything in not being with a man. The film shows Amanda to be happier in her job than toiling for the husband and adopted family: the only thing that has changed (since she comes back to same job, even the same office) is her realization that she can have more fun with her career than housework. The borderline hysteria of Farrow before her exit from the office—visually matched by the fussy, oversized jewelry which insists on her femininity even as her masculine-cut suits and high powered job unsettle it—is replaced in Crawford's performance by a new relaxed persona when she returns to Fabian's. Her anger and her big costume jewelry have disappeared—replaced by calmness, and understated pearls. Above all, her permanently closed office door which stood as a sign of her alienation from societal pleasures—and, as Mike Rice had warned Caroline, of her own closed-off femininity—now remains firmly open, so that she can greet her colleagues.

While the film seems to hint at its end, therefore, that Caroline might follow in Farrow's footsteps, it also removes the sting from this possible fate by closing with Amanda both careerist and kindly. Caroline walking off with Mike Rice into Friday evening Manhattan offers a way of confirming the woman's commitment to her job without ruling out the possibility of romance too; while the voice of Johnny Mathis on the soundtrack urgently pleads that “romance is the best of everything,” the film has not, as he sings, “proven” this fact, but surely the reverse. The women lost whenever they dedicated themselves to love—April lost Dexter and her baby, Caroline lost Eddie, Gregg lost Savage and her life. Amanda and Caroline emerge as winners how-

ever by keeping their eyes on their jobs. Whether or not Mike and Caroline spend the weekend together, the office will be waiting on Monday morning—but the film makes this seem a triumph.

### “Are you putting me up for your club, Miss Farrow?”

#### *Mad Men and Career Women*

While *Mad Men* can be seen making similar use of several of the themes and characters present in *The Best of Everything*, the series (so far, at least) has adroitly sidestepped the more lurid aspects of Jaffe's plot, although borrowing its narrative template and main characters.

It is easy to see Joan Holloway as a version of Gregg, another sexy redhead who thinks she is using her sexuality to get what she wants, but often finds herself being used instead. Comments indicate she formerly had a relationship with Paul Kinsey but ended this when he gossiped about her. Joan, as a sexually active but unmarried young woman, requires discretion in her lovers, and hence perhaps prefers married men who have as much to lose, reputation-wise, as she does. Gregg too is obviously no virgin, prepared instead to use her sexuality to secure dramatic roles; she is certainly not insulted or surprised when David Wilder Savage proposes sex. Gregg seeks to be smart, to parlay this one-night stand into a dramatic role, and a future career. But she loses her part for over-acting, and is soon replaced as Savage's lover.

While Joan seems to play her games more skillfully, there are hints throughout the series that she too is subject to disappointments, in both career and romance. Joan may conduct her love affairs more calmly, without the dip into melodramatic posturing which marks Gregg's behavior, but there are hints in her relationship with her doctor fiancé that she too has chosen unwisely. Dr. Greg Harris seems a perfect catch: handsome, well-to-do, professional and caring; he is summed up by Peggy as “a keeper.” But this word has a more sinister edge to it which the show also suffers Joan to experience and us to witness: while a “keeper” may be someone worth holding onto, the word also implies a possessive and controlling persona. After he insists they have sex in Don's office, violently forcing Joan against her will, Greg's handsome features seem just a facade hiding an ugly nature. Although she regains her pose of pride in the man, boasting about him to Peggy, the long thoughtful pauses Joan enacts also intimate she is now worried about being trapped in a marriage with a violent and unpredictable man.

Joan also has her share of career slights. While she seems scornful of Peggy's attempts to rise out of the typing pool, Joan too experiences the thrill attending a job well done in “A Night to Remember” (2.8). Asked by the



head of the new television department to help out by reading scripts, she gladly takes the work home with her and finds herself swiftly adept. Although she is skilled and on site, however, Joan's sexualized image prevents her being taken seriously by the male executives and she is passed over for the full-time position in favor of a man. Joan's fortunes here slightly echo those of Caroline, as she is prepared to put in unpaid hours at a task she finds interesting. Unlike the central woman of *The Best of Everything*, and unlike Peggy, however, she cannot transfer across the line between secretary and executive.

While Joan thus seems a fairly straightforward rendering of Gregg, the series' most interesting move is not simply to reproduce the characters of Caroline and April within the show, but to *amalgamate* them in Peggy. In *The Best of Everything*, Caroline loses her fiancé but gains a career, moving from secretary to editor by virtue of hard work and single-mindedness. Peggy inherits Caroline's shrewdness and career trajectory, just as she takes over April's sexual naïveté. Blending Caroline and April in the single person of Peggy fleshes out the latter: instead of acting as Joan's prudish opposite, reducing both women to stark polarizations, Peggy's absorption of characteristics from both women makes her a more rounded character, and thus a more interesting one: sexually both innocent and desirous, career-wise both eager and ruthless.

In her April-aspect, sexually innocent Peggy is similarly seduced by a suave playboy who never intends to commit to her. She too becomes pregnant while unmarried. But in its handling of her pregnancy the television series ups the ante of the film's use of this plot device and, significantly, its mode of representing it.

At the time the film version was made, the disgrace of unmarried pregnancy was still so great that even mentioning it in a movie seemed risqué. Although the Production Code, which had held sway throughout Hollywood since its rigid imposition in 1934, had undergone a recent partial relaxing around the mid-fifties, now permitting the use of such terms such as "virgin" and "mistress" (Leff and Simmons 225), these words and their sexualized storylines were still regarded as highly inflammatory. In keeping with this, April's seduction by Dexter and her announcement of the resultant pregnancy are both performed off-screen. While this would be normal practice for the former event, not permitting April even to announce her impending motherhood seems extremely squeamish.

The consummation scene between Dexter and April directly follows one of sexual harassment at the office, when Mr. Shalimar accuses divorcee Mrs. Lamont (Martha Hyer). As he is led drunkenly away, the sounds of mocking laughter ring out from the party-goers, so that the scene which brings about the end of April's sexual innocence begins with a sound bridge of this laughter:

this audio hangover colors the seduction, picking up the party moment's sense of prurience, sexuality and unwanted physicality. At first it seems that Dexter's attentions to April are, by contrast, only too welcome, as the scene fades in with the pair kissing passionately on a heap of cushions. However, April pulls away, telling Dexter they must stop. He demolishes April's argument that physical consummation would ruin their relationship, insisting that she is ruining it by *not* yielding. April indicates her conventional ambitions when she asks the man she loves, haltingly, "Would you ... ever marry a girl ... who wasn't ... pure?" Dexter's equivocating response — he would *if he really loved her* — should not, but does, satisfy April and she sinks back on the cushions, her arguments and her virginity equally vanquished. The seduction fades out with another sound bridge: this time the sound bleeding in is applause. Although the viewer quickly catches up and realizes that the clapping attends a performance of the play Gregg is in, it seems at first as if the film is sardonically applauding Dexter's smooth manipulation of April, the artful way in which he switches expertly between a variety of roles — skilled sensualist, importuning lover, angry suitor — in order to assure her compliance.

April's loss of virginity thus occurs in the interstices between two visible scenes, an invisibility which serves to underline its illicit nature. Her acknowledgement, to Caroline and Mike, of her pregnancy, is similarly elided, occurring also within time represented — or indeed *unrepresented* — in a cut. April catches Mary Agnes' wedding bouquet. She is thrilled as she wants to marry Dexter, but then becomes faint. Mike and Caroline see her distress and escort her outside; after the cut, the next moment has Caroline asking "Does Dexter know?" and April, confirming he does not yet, determining to go to him at once.

What we can presume is Peggy's loss of virginity is accomplished in a similarly invisible and swiftly accomplished scene, in the very first episode of *Mad Men*. Pete Campbell appears drunk at her apartment door, on the eve of his marriage. Peggy calls out to her roommate that she is going to bed, and takes Pete with her. Their second sexual encounter, however, when they conceive their child, *is* screened for the viewer.

While the sex is shown, the announcement of pregnancy in *Mad Men* is not, since Peggy refuses to deal with the real reason for her very noticeable weight gain. Elisabeth Moss, who plays Peggy, noted in an interview that she felt sure the young woman knew in some part of her mind what was happening to her body, but managed to compartmentalize and ignore this knowledge (Nussbaum). *Mad Men* thus follows *The Best of Everything* in having its innocent character become pregnant, but increases the drama of this plot development by having her deny it, even to herself. While the announcement of April's baby is accomplished silently and invisibly in the cut between two

scenes, Peggy's baby is entirely elided for and by its future mother. This escalation of denial — not just on the part of the text but the woman involved — dramatically indicates the stigma attendant on unmarried motherhood in this period.

While Peggy can be, therefore, seen as a version of the innocent April, one factor points out that her character is actually more hard-willed and practical than her filmic forebearer. Peggy does not go to Pere with her pregnancy or, after its arrival, the resultant baby. She does not need a version of Dexter to tell her what to do. Although it is possible that she agonizes about what to do with the child, the fact that we do not see this, but rejoin her, at the start of the second series, with her life seemingly unaltered, indicates that whatever her suffering over giving the baby up for adoption, it is not for us to witness. Though she has not kept her secret from her sister or Don, Peggy has successfully managed to move forward without letting the baby impact on her career, and it is this aspect of her persona — the iron in her soul being necessary for work success — that demonstrates the show has modeled her after *The Best of Everything's* Caroline, as well as April.

The parallels between Caroline and Peggy are from the start numerous, and come in both overt and more subtle forms. Obviously, both young women arrive for their first day at the new job in the office at the start of the respective narratives, both are secretaries, and both eventually elevate themselves from this position through a combination of natural talent and hard work. We have already seen how Caroline becomes a reader for Fabian's, based on her willingness to read manuscripts from the slush-pile. Peggy's first step towards creative duties occurs in the "Babylon" episode under consideration. Unwilling to contemplate the arcana of color on which Belle Jolie seem to be basing their current campaign, the male execs under the leadership of Freddy Rumsen decide to consult their on-site lipstick experts, and get Joan to organize a "brainstorming" session using the office women. When Freddy collects the lipstick-smudged tissues later, he gets into conversation with Peggy, who passes him the waste-bin, calling it a "basket of kisses." Freddy immediately reveals his inherent disdain for the female brain: he asks her who told her that.

Perceiving the aptness of her comments on the lipstick, Freddy Rumsen later muses to Don that it resembled a dog playing the piano. This echoes — although no doubt unconsciously on Freddy's part — Samuel Johnson's *bon mot* about seeing women in the pulpit: "A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all" (Boswell 235). The series frequently highlights the sexist beliefs of the period in which *Mad Men* is set; comparing Peggy to a trick animal is a concise yet devastating way to evoke the advertising men's astonishment

that women could have enough creativity to invent potential ad slogans, while the echo of eighteenth-century scorn also shows both how archaic and how ingrained such prejudices are.

The equivalent patronizing moment in *The Best of Everything* occurs at the Fabian picnic, just before Mike and Caroline begin to quarrel. Mike finds Caroline playing croquet and talking business with Shalimar and another boss, animatedly conveying ideas, confidently quoting figures and percentages. Although she is engrossed in the conversation, Mike grabs her arm and hauls her away, just giving her time to call back to the other men, "Your costs would be less and your profits greater!" Shalimar chuckles at the display of he-man tactics on Mike's part before noting meditatively, "You know, there just *might* be something to what she says...."

Although Mike is soon to attack Caroline for indulging her "hot-eyed ambition," she has behaved respectfully to her business superiors here, suggesting ways to improve turnover and couching her ideas in a style which, while confident, does not imply that she herself has anything to gain: she does not say "our costs and our profits," but is careful to maintain a respectful distance in her language. Nevertheless, Mike ignores the fact that she may have an important idea, and Shalimar dismisses her by his condescending attitude. Peggy too has to face such behavior at work, even once she makes it into the executive ranks, asking Roger Sterling if she may inherit Freddy's old office in "The Mountain King" (2.12); Peggy apologizes if she has been impolite — even aggressive; however, Roger interprets her request as simply "cute." This combination of being belittled even as she is granted what she wants is the price Peggy pays as a career woman in the business world of 1962.

*Mad Men* further pursues the parallels between its characters and those of *The Best of Everything* in allowing Peggy to become, not just like Caroline, but also like Caroline's own eventual role model, Amanda Farrow. And as *The Best of Everything* does at the end, it shows that Peggy in Farrow-mode is happy and fulfilled being at work. In the same episode where Peggy makes a successful bid for Freddy's office, she is earlier seen exploring the open-plan secretarial floor late one night. A close-up reveals Peggy searching through someone's desk drawer; she filches a cigarette, lights it and exhales happily. Then a longer shot shows her stretch luxuriously and sensuously, before wandering off across the office space, usually public, but at night her own private playground.

When she inherits Freddy's former office, Peggy's pleasure is even greater. She enjoys moving in, having an office boy carry her things, having the other male creatives envy her. She also inherits Freddy's bar, and is found later by Pete enjoying a solo whiskey. She asks Joan about getting the name on the door changed too; the door exactly recreates Caroline's too — same dusky pink

shade, same silver lettering — reminding us that Caroline too earned her own nameplate. Pete also prompts us to remember the aspects of Caroline's success when he asks Peggy if she is now getting her own secretary with the new office. When she supposes so, his immediate response is that "she's in for it." Pete's insinuation is, presumably, that Peggy will be an even harder task mistress than an executive who had not risen from secretary status, a shared background not being sufficient to breach the gap between boss and secretary now, and the former with every reason to ensure the latter never forgets the differences and distances between them. But if Peggy showed that she could be ruthless — as with her dismissal of a woman chosen to voice an advertisement in one episode (1:8) — Caroline did not, when she relented and let her secretary leave without finishing on a Friday evening, thus perhaps offering hope for Peggy's adjustment to her newly exalted position.

It is Gregg who voices the sneer used as the title for this section; Farrow has warned that her relationship with Savage will finish, and she too will end up alone. While Gregg does not want to be inducted into "Farrow's club" of single, marrying business ladies, the film gradually, and almost despite itself, removes the sting from this slur, and ends by showing Caroline a full member. She has the responsibility as well as the trappings: office, secretary, suit, hat and pearls; but she also has Mike Rice and the promise of a weekend of non-work excitement to come. Thus despite its own intention to damn Farrow with the successful professional/failed woman pairing familiar from other mid-century media texts, *The Best of Everything* shows that Caroline could do worse than become just like Amanda. Perhaps *Mad Men* is similarly endorsing Peggy's ability to become a female executive without "closing the door" on romance and femininity. Peggy's willingness to leave her office door open symbolically suggests that she may be an exec in the mold of the fulfilled Amanda Farrow of the film's conclusion.

### The Best of Everything?

While *Mad Men* borrows and then complicates Jaffe's characters, its co-option of the office as key locus of action justifies the writer's emphasis on the women's career ambitions, her insistence that these are as significant as their romantic ones. *The Best of Everything* can thus be seen to provide the television series with a contemporary cultural artifact which can act as both window and, perhaps, as mirror: while it can offer a glimpse through to a former time, it can also offer reflections of our current one.

The mirror was an image which attained specific cultural currency regarding advertising in the period under discussion. A lead article in *Time* from

1962 defended the profession from various charges of amorality and manipulation, insisting that it did not drag down, but merely reflected, as a neutral looking glass, the morals and mores of its society: "Allowing for occasional flaws in the glass, advertising is simply a mammoth mirror of the world around it" ("The Mammoth Mirror?"). A further reference to mirrors within the article proves even more pertinent to *Mad Men*, however:

Admen overreact to any criticism of their industry — however casual, ill-informed or unimportant. This has caused John Crichton, president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, to tartly and correctly chide his fellows for spending too much time "staring into the mirror to count the pimples, broken veins and wrinkles on the serene, handsome and competent face we hope to present to the public." ["The Mammoth Mirror?"].

On the one hand it is easy to see that Don Draper's "handsome and competent face," one which viewers of *Mad Men* know may not be marked with visible blemishes, is actually a mask. On the other hand, this duality returns us to the central theme of appearances/reality with which this chapter began, and which the series seems to find so fruitful to explore, that attraction/repulsion which reels viewers in with the gorgeous facades and then appalls at the cruelties and prejudices seemingly permissible on the cusp of the 1960s. Here however is the crucial point: the show does not merely mirror the times in which it is set but our own contemporary moment. *Mad Men* prompts us to be repelled by the careless institutionalized sexism it shows and then ask ourselves if our times are so different. Is it easier now for women to get ahead in business? Would Peggy Olson or Caroline Bender receive better treatment today?

While Jaffe's scandalous text does not overtly ascribe blame for its women's career failures and disappointments to "the glass ceiling," *Mad Men's* adoption, co-option and enlargement of *The Best of Everything's* themes can be seen to offer a commentary on contemporary employment practices — perhaps even within its own arena, the entertainment industry. It was noticeable, for example, that when *Mad Men* was nominated for 16 Emmy Awards on 16 July 2009, this included four out of the five nominations for "Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series" — and that two from the team of five nominated writers were women. As Melissa Silverstein, blogger of *Women and Hollywood*, pointed out, *30 Rock*, which secured the same number of nominations for "Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series" has no women writers on its team (Silverstein).

While the text from "the Fifties" therefore seems at first used by the current television show as a period artifact, to authenticate its historical setting, *Mad Men* actually employs *The Best of Everything* to and for greater effect. It borrows the template of the narrative, revisiting key events as well as the

book/film's archetypal characters. But by combining and complicating them, it moves beyond simply utilizing a garish paperback as set dressing, to operating the text as a prism, refracting its more lurid colors and using it to shed a clear light on practices and assumptions not only from the past, but in today's workplaces.

*This essay is dedicated to Svelinos Christodoulou, Jan Langebein and Paul McDonald in gratitude for their kind assistance in its preparation.*

## NOTES

1. *The Best of Everything* spent a respectable total of 31 weeks on the combined book best seller lists, but *Exodus* remained there for an astonishing 151 weeks (Justice 276, 441).
2. While there is not room to go into all the differences between source and filmic adaptation at this point, one significant detail in particular should be noted: the fate of Caroline, arguably the main central figure. The book has her suddenly and rather uncharacteristically give up her job and morals to become the very public mistress of an entrepreneur; the film maintains the novel's predominant bittersweet tone and finishes with the woman possessing success at work and holding the promise of imminent romance too.

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