



BEING THE ONE IS LIKE BEING IN LOVE: BREAKING THE BONDS OF PATRIARCHY

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The Matrix Trilogy is in many ways a bold comment on the state of modern society. After Neo chooses the red pill, his journey into reality begins, revealing a very different world. Within Zion, it is difficult to overlook the prominence of people of color. However, throughout the course of the three films, there is no dialogue drawing attention to this fact. Indeed, the unplugged population of Zion appears to have reached a state of unquestioned racial equality. The same cannot necessarily be said about gender. From the very beginning, it is clear that these films reveal something about the perception of women in modern society—even when it has become “enlightened.” Though women are shown frequently in various positions of power,

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significant amounts of dialogue are laced with sexism in and out of the Matrix. *The Matrix Trilogy* exposes the pervasive and persistent existence of patriarchal ideology in modern society as well as proposes a way to fight against it.

The Matrix Trilogy is undoubtedly a love story. Reminiscent of fairytales in many ways, Neo's journey is as much about saving the world as it is about the power of true love. Though Neo and Trinity continue to mold their relationship to near androgynous perfection throughout the course of the films, there are numerous relationships present in and out of the Matrix that sharply contrast their unique connection. Nonetheless, some have argued that Trinity ends up occupying a subservient role that is typical of female characters anyway (Freeland 209). At face value, *The Matrix Trilogy* looks like a story about a passably white man who saves the world with a little help from his girlfriend and Black friends. From this perspective, even though Trinity and Morpheus seem like complex characters, they ultimately take a back seat to Neo's greatness. Martina Lipp argues a similar conclusion and notes that "on [her] badass feminist days," she will see if it is possible to swap the male lead with the female supporting character. She ends up asserting that in the trilogy, this can't work because Trinity is just not "the One" (Lipp 14). She concludes the trilogy is just another incomplete manifestation of a white male hero and his sidekicks (Lipp 29).

However, this is not necessarily true. If the character roles stayed the same, but the actor and actress simply switched places, the films would have an entirely different feel that is arguably less empowering. Picture it: a film series about a white woman who, although she is destined as "the One," must be initially rescued by a Black man, receive the kiss of life from a white man, be saved numerous times by this white man, seemingly cannot function without this white man, continually makes "irrational" decisions based on her love for him, and then finds out that her role as "the One" is actually just another method of control. Even when she manages to beat the symbol of "the Man" (Agent Smith), the method she used actually makes the Man a bigger problem, and the only way for her to fix this problem is to die. That doesn't sound empowering at all. Instead, it would merely be a reinforcement of the idea that when a woman is powerful, she is only as powerful as the males in her life cause her to be. She simply cannot do anything without male help and then must die for her transgressions.

Now look at the trilogy as it is. Neo is a passably white man who is hopelessly lost in a world that he doesn't feel fulfilled by. Morpheus and Trinity appear to have been watching him for quite some time and see great potential in him. Morpheus has believed in others before him, but what those people lacked turns out to be the love of Trinity. Indeed, it is not Neo that is particularly special; he would have died at the hand of Agent Smith, even after all his training, had Trinity not made him feel what was real. As the films progress, Trinity and Neo take turns saving and serving each other, and he requires the assistance of many different kinds of people as well. It turns out that his purpose is not to end the war, but to perpetuate it. If it were not for Trinity, he would have done just as the others had done before him. The bond that they share is the only thing he is certain of—the only truly real thing he has ever experienced—and he is freed

by this feeling. He is able to *choose* a path that was not predetermined—the “irrational” choice—and he would not have been able to make this decision had Trinity not *chosen* to be “irrational” as well. When she sacrifices her life for him in the end, he sacrifices his own so that others will have the chance to feel as they did: free. This is not a story in which Neo must merely overcome obstacles along the way to destiny; it is a story in which the connection of love leads to the freedom of the human race. There are certainly a great number of impressive battle sequences in the films, but it is not his superhuman fighting skills or the army of Zion that lead to freedom. It can *only* be love.

This goes from being a corny Hollywood plot to making perfect sense when the Matrix and all it encompasses is interpreted as a representation of the Patriarchy. Feminist writer bell hooks argues that the Patriarchy operates off of a blind obedience that comes from “the repression of all emotions except fear; the destruction of individual willpower; and the repression of thinking whenever it departs from the authority figure’s way of thinking” (*The Will to Change* 23). There is absolutely no room for love in this system. The Architect describes love as an emotion “designed specifically to overwhelm logic and reason.” Indeed, love threatens to ruin the entire system and therefore must be suppressed at all costs. Love could cause a profound attachment to others or provoke someone to make a decision that deviates from the intended path—in other words, through such a connection, someone might become free. The general sense of love that the One is meant to possess is dangerous, but ultimately acceptable because it will facilitate the continued control of humans. The machines play on fear, the one emotion that is encouraged, and use this to manipulate the One into submitting to yet another system of control, all because of his/her love for humankind. The continuation of the cycle of violence is presented as the *only* way to calm the fear of annihilation. In other words, they present the One with the *illusion* of choice. Save some people and repeat the rise and fall of Zion or take responsibility for the end of the human race. That the five previous Ones did not see the possibility of creating their own path illustrates a fundamental truth about the freedom Zion offers: it is incomplete. What made Neo’s freedom complete is that aforementioned connection: love. However, this connection only came with a break from the ideology that enslaved the rest; an ideology that insidiously stays with humans even after they’ve been unplugged and enlightened. bell hooks describes this value system of the Patriarchy as one that “insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” (“Understanding Patriarchy” 1).

On the surface, it is a system which seems to privilege all men and works in their favor in all things. However, this is the false promise of patriarchy. Only *certain kinds* of men are privileged. Therefore, it is not necessarily based on a love of men and a hatred of women, but instead a specific understanding of which traits are valuable to keeping the status quo in check. Aggressiveness, brute strength, and rationality are rewarded, and men who are essentially “emotional cripples” reap the most benefits (*The Will to Change* 27). Of course, all humans, regardless of gender, have the potential to be violent. Exactly when in human history violence

was denoted male and therefore anti-female is difficult to trace. Many have relied upon the concept of biological reductionism to explain that men are “naturally” more aggressive, while women are “naturally” more nurturing. Put simply, the result of such a reduction is narrow gender roles (*The Will to Change* 18). For example, women are allowed to express their emotions, but they are restricted from acting on them. Conversely, men are expected to repress all emotion except for anger and are encouraged to act on this feeling. This is a psychological technique which divvies up half of human traits as desirable holds the other half in contempt, defining the first as “masculine” and the other as “feminine,” when in reality they are not exclusive to either gender. The results, nonetheless, are restrictive and unfulfilling gender dynamics that continue to dominate society. The very foundation of patriarchy is the alienation not only of men from women, but also individuals from their true selves. Consequently, the key to its demise is to reconnect people to one another and to themselves (“Understanding Patriarchy” 4).

However, in Neo’s conversation with the Architect, it is revealed that the patriarchal order of the 20th century is so compelling that almost every human being accepts the program. From the very beginning of *The Matrix*, it is clear that this ideology runs deep. A police officer smugly asserts that they think they can handle “one little girl,” and this happens again in the second film when Trinity is caught hacking into a computer. “Hold it right there, little lady!” the security guards command, right before she attacks them. In the first scene, Agent Smith is present and quickly rebukes the officer: “No, Lieutenant, your men are already dead.” Such short bits of dialogue reveal quite a bit. The people of the Matrix are indoctrinated with the ideology of patriarchy—that of men being better, faster, and stronger than little weak women—and it is no accident that the people who spout off this sexist dialogue are white authority figures. However, Agent Smith, who is connected to the machines, knows it is all an elaborate ruse. He knows that women can be every bit as violent, aggressive, and physically powerful as men. In on the secret of the Patriarchy, Agent Smith is well aware that neither men nor women are inherently more powerful than the other; they are both merely slaves.

When Neo meets Trinity for the first time, he too is taken back by her gender. “I just thought... you were a guy,” he says, having assumed a brilliant hacker would also be a male. “Most guys do,” she retorts. Indeed, even men of the underground subculture—presumably the kind of people who question society on fundamental levels—have not escaped the indoctrination of patriarchal ideas. Throughout the three films, little comments like these and the programs the rebels encounter serve as constant reminders and reinforcements of the dominant ideology. Even though Agent Smith informs the Lieutenant of his error in logic, he is himself a powerful visual reminder of the Patriarchy’s idea of power—white, middle aged, well-dressed, violent, and reminiscent of Secret Service agents. His presence alone as an authority figure does more to reinforce patriarchal values than his words can subtract from it. Similarly, the Architect, the self-proclaimed “father of the Matrix,” takes the form of an old, well-dressed white man who articulates himself precisely, emphasizes logic and reason above all else, threatens to destroy everything, and condemns Neo for not buying this brand of masculinity.

The Merovingian, the assumed king of the exiles, seems in many ways to be like a younger version of the Architect. He is white, well-dressed, and has the ability to manipulate the Matrix as well. However, he has adopted a French accent simply for the beauty of it and enjoys fine wine and women. While the Architect is contented to be alone with his computer screens, the Merovingian surrounds himself with people who indulge in the sensual side of life—be it in a fancy restaurant or a BDSM club. When he first meets the rebels, the way he addresses them reinforces the dominant ideology subtly. He refers to Neo as “the One,” Morpheus as “the legendary,” and Trinity as “so beautiful it causes me pain.” While the men are valued and recognized for their accomplishments, Trinity is valued for something as trivial as her beauty. Additionally, one of the Merovingian’s ghost twins blows Trinity a kiss when they are leaving, an unwanted and subtly threatening romantic advance that underscores her as, above all else, female.

An exile himself, it is assumed that the Merovingian no longer fulfills his purpose completely. Instead, he exercises his sense of agency by enjoying power over anyone he can, a typical masculine pursuit. Much to his wife’s dismay, he demonstrates determinism by causing a “boring” and “bourgeois” woman to perform fellatio on him, a degrading act of total submission in the absence of choice. He manipulates her sense of arousal to serve his need for domination rather than her need to, perhaps, pleasure herself. This illustrates another element of the Patriarchy: the control over women’s bodies and sexuality.

To the Merovingian, this woman’s right to choose does not factor into his equation. The only choice she seemed to make was the decision to take an innocent bite of the cake. In fact, as he tells Morpheus, “Choice is an illusion created between those with power and those without.” It is clear that in this situation, he is the one with power and she is the one without. Here the Merovingian reveals sex inside the Matrix as something almost technical. hooks argues that the Patriarchy has sought to “repress and tame erotic passion precisely because of its power to draw us into greater and greater communion with ourselves, with those we know most intimately, and with the stranger” (*The Will to Change* 183). To reduce sexual urges and acts to that of a computer program that can be manipulated and coded to fit the desires of the programmer is the ultimate expression of a repressed and tame sexuality. Despite his taste for sensuality, the undertones in this situation are violent. That he enjoys spending time in a BDSM club is not surprising, and his wife’s outfits made of constricting latex highlight her typically feminine, and therefore submissive, role in their relationship.

In the script of *The Matrix: Reloaded*, Persephone is described as a woman who is “sex and death” squeezed into a latex suit (67). She is the obviously unhappy wife of the Merovingian and thus a sort of queen of exiles. She reflects many of the characteristics that women are bound to in a patriarchal society. She is passive—or passive aggressive at best—conventionally beautiful, sexually available, and emotional. The only trait she possesses that is not prescribed is her occasional drive to be violent, but she is an exiled program, after all. In typical romance narratives, one of the two reoccurring themes is a female who is something of a child-woman, who is then ushered into womanhood by a man. When she protests, it is not regarding his

dominion over her but his promiscuity, and her complaints are seen as “hysterical fits” or “trifling demands” (Ebert 43-44). This mirrors both the Greek myth regarding Hades and also Persephone’s actions in the films. In the myth, Persephone was kidnapped by Hades when she was a young woman to be his wife, and he held her captive in the Underworld. She ends up becoming the Queen of the Underworld and is sexually loyal to her husband. Though Hades makes several attempts to seduce other women, these attempts are consistently thwarted by Persephone (“Classical Mythology”). While the Merovingian succeeds in “seducing” another woman, Persephone teaches her husband the lesson that she is neither stupid nor to be crossed by releasing the Key Maker. However, he treats her complaint as trivial, reassuring her it is “only a game.” As his anger intensifies, the Merovingian begins to refer to her simply as “woman,” emphasizing her gendered subservience.

Interestingly, when Persephone is on the opposite end of the fidelity spectrum, it is she who insists that Trinity’s reaction is hysterical. “It’s just a kiss,” she asserts. “It is nothing.” Of course, Trinity and Neo shared a life-saving kiss in the first film. A kiss is most certainly the opposite of “nothing;” it is everything. Despite the thrill she received from Neo and Trinity and the revenge she gets, the third film reveals that she remains by her husband’s side even after his trip to the ladies’ room. The one thing Persephone truly wants from her husband is his love, and she reveals that he was once like Neo. Neither Persephone’s smoldering sexuality nor her compliance with patriarchal female norms have benefited her in any real sense; indeed, what she is lacking is the feeling of love, of which she seems to be completely starved. That she cannot find love to feed off of is telltale of the state of the people in the Matrix: love is in extremely short supply. Ultimately, she doesn’t get what she really wants, and her “pompous prick” of a husband continues on his quest for power. Thus, the relationship between the Merovingian and Persephone is representative of the unfair and unfulfilling power dynamics at work in a patriarchal relationship. Despite the powers that they both seem to possess, neither of them is ever satisfied. Their indulgences in the facets of humanity have left them continually coming up short.

The Oracle sums up this unquenchable lust when Neo asks her what the Merovingian wants, “What do all men with power want? More power.” Indeed, his final demand was for the very eyes of the Oracle. As a character, she represents the antithesis of all the aforementioned programs. She is an elderly Black woman who lives in tenement housing, loves candy, chain smokes, surrounds herself with children, and speaks strictly in cryptic dialogue. Created to study the psyches of humans, she is the “mother” of the Matrix. Appropriately, in accordance with the patriarchal order, she is hidden away in a place where, as the script says, “people can disappear.” This highlights the subservient role and less-than status that motherly figures occupy in the patriarchy, ultimately out of sight and out of mind. Indeed, the Architect described the Oracle as a “lesser mind or perhaps a mind less bound by the parameters of perfection.”

When Neo meets her in the first film, she reads his confused reaction, “Not quite what you were expecting, right?” It is shocking to him that he should take advice from someone who is quite literally the opposite of those who Neo is accustomed to respecting. That she is the

integral program when it comes to helping Neo find himself is extremely appropriate, as he must distance himself from the patriarchal order. Who better to help him than a matriarch of sorts? One of the first things she shows him is the plaque above her kitchen door that reads: “Know Thyself.” She then tells him she’s going to let him in on a little secret: “Being the One is just like being in love. Nobody can tell you you’re in love. You just know it. Through and through. Balls to bones.” Even though she speaks cryptically, this reveals something much more fundamental to the essence of being the One. It is dependent upon the extent to which a person loves. The Architect acknowledges this in the second film, saying that the One is meant to love the species in a general sense. This is not the same as being *in* love, however. Right before his meeting with the Oracle, Trinity tells Neo, “The Matrix cannot tell you who you are.” This coupled with the Oracle’s insistence that Neo know himself and make up his “own damn mind” highlight the importance of being able to exercise true agency in the real world. It also implies that it’s possible to do so.

Despite this potential for enlightenment, the influence of the Patriarchy is not confined to the realm of the Matrix. It is present in the minds and hearts of the “free” people of Zion. The crew of the *Nebuchadnezzar* was promising at first glance. With Morpheus as the captain, Trinity as the second-in-command, and a crew made up of many colors and sizes, it seemed as if humans had finally gotten it right. No one spoke of race, the women held rank and didn’t adhere to restrictive gender roles, and they all seemed to work together in relative harmony despite the less-than-ideal conditions on the ship. However, most of this picture-perfect crew, with its ebb and flow of members, revealed its eerie resemblance to the patriarchal order.

When it comes to revolutionary change, the primary focus may be the oppressive situations people seek to escape. However, this is never the true focus or the most challenging. Instead it is removing “that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” (Collins). Indeed, even when people are unplugged from the Matrix, the struggle against all it represents continues. Not solely because they must engage in a war against the machines, but because the Matrix was fundamental to their sense of self. Just as the Oracle urged Neo to “Know Thyself,” a true and lasting revolution begins deep within the individual (Collins). Cypher was the most noticeable member of the crew who was still affected by the Matrix. In fact, he was so nostalgic that he struck a deal with Agent Smith in order to be plugged back into it. It is not a stretch to assume that those who chose the red pill did not occupy particularly privileged positions within the Matrix. It only makes sense that women and people of color would on some level reject the system based solely on the fact that they were, in varying degrees, oppressed by it. Since women are not men and men of color are not white, they are consequently disadvantaged in a realm where someone like Agent Smith embodies privilege. However, Neo and Cypher are at the very least passably white, male, and middle class. That they rejected the system indicates that the promises of patriarchy were not being fulfilled in their lives (Faller 161). While we see nothing of Cypher’s previous life, Neo is shown to work alone in a cubicle and receives his last warning from his boss for his tardiness. His apartment was hardly the lap of luxury, either. However, Neo’s life improves in many ways once he is unplugged. Despite the

fact that he is burdened with the salvation of the human race, he gains meaningful companionship.

Cypher was not so lucky, especially since the object of his desire happened to be Trinity. Though obvious because of his demeanor throughout the film, Cypher reveals that he used to believe he was in love with her. Once it became clear to him that Trinity liked Neo instead, it seems that he reached his breaking point. When he is having his final conversation with Trinity, he feels betrayed by Morpheus's "false" promise of freedom. "All I do is what he tells me to do," he claimed. Indeed, Cypher feels just as alienated as he did while in the Matrix. His demand from Agent Smith was to be "someone important, like an actor" whenever he was plugged back in. Although most likely a humorous stab at Ronald Reagan, it also underscores the awareness of what exactly brings privilege inside the world of patriarchy. Presumably, to be "someone important" brings power, money, and happiness. Cypher was not interested in going back to his old life. He wanted privilege, and his reaction to being denied it was rage, as he ended up murdering half of the crew.

Though Cypher is obviously a villain, his reaction to being denied the privileges promised by patriarchy is quite revealing. When Morpheus spoke of freedom, Cypher didn't think about sacrifice or hard work. He thought of a world in which he would finally get what he felt he was entitled to. The patriarchal ideology ran deep within him, bringing out an aggressive resistance to being in a subservient position under Morpheus (Faller 95). Not only did he not get to be the leader, but he didn't receive sexual gratification either. Though he claimed to have once been in love with Trinity, the way he looks her up and down as she walks away and the way he smells her unconscious body convey a predatory lust not love. That he feels entitled to her body is yet another manifestation of patriarchal ideas regarding women and their purpose, much like the Merovingian. Again, this is a sexuality that does not result in communion, but rather perpetuates relationships of domination.

They are not the only two guilty of this reduction, however. Yet another member of the crew, Mouse, engages in this same line of thinking. In the scene where the woman in the red dress distracts Neo, the people that are walking by are all duplicates of each other. The implication here is that Mouse is not only a lazy programmer in the sense that he did not bother to create a thoroughly convincing construct program filled to the brim with individuals, but that instead he spent a considerable amount of time creating this "perfect woman." Switch jokingly refers to Mouse as a "digital pimp hard at work" when Mouse explains to Neo that he can arrange a more private meeting with this woman. "She doesn't talk much..." he explains, but "to deny our impulses is to deny the very thing that makes us human." This very short dialogue reveals quite a bit about how sex is viewed even outside of the Matrix.

The idea that humans are hardwired biologically to desire and seek out the satisfaction of sexual desires is one that is widely accepted in society. However, few argue that humans are hardwired to seek out love, and if they do, these two desires are not thought to be necessarily intertwined (*The Will to Change* 76). So while Mouse asserts that sex is integral to being human, he says nothing about love or emotional needs. Indeed, he did not program the woman in red to

speak—her purpose was exclusively for sexual satisfaction void of meaningful connection. This is, of course, the reoccurring theme: love, in all its many facets, is missing, and people are ultimately lost without it.

The state of mind inside Zion is, unfortunately, not much different than that of the *Nebuchadnezzar*. Zion is a city populated predominately by people of color living quite harmoniously with white people. It is ruled by a council made up of twelve people of all races and even equally both sexes. The oldest member of the counsel is, in fact, a woman, and it is she who speaks and exercises power the most on screen. However, the presence of female voices on the council has not heralded the end to patriarchal forces in Zion, nor does the council play a significant role in the city's liberation efforts. In fact, Councilor West states, "Comprehension is not a requisite for cooperation," when Commander Lock questions one of the council's decision. This can be interpreted as an extension of blind obedience. Even the equally balanced council is perpetuating some of the ideals of the Patriarchy.

Commander Lock, a Black man, is the leader of Zion's army, which is predominately made up of men. Niobe, a Black woman, is the captain of Zion's fastest ship and his girlfriend. Consistently, throughout the second and third films, Niobe is shown to be strong-willed, independent, and a more than competent pilot. Despite her rank and skills, when the council requests that two captains volunteer to search for the *Nebuchadnezzar*, Lock seems to forget that women fight for Zion too. He says, "It is hard for any man to risk his life, especially when he doesn't understand the reason." In reaction to his sexism, Niobe immediately volunteers. After the council is adjourned, he angrily demands to know why she has volunteered. She replies, "Because some things never change, Jason... And some things do."

From her cryptic response it can be deduced that Niobe was fed up with their relationship, convinced that he would never treat her right and essentially dumped her in this scene. During a previous scene when Niobe chats with her former lover Morpheus, Lock sees them and sharply says, "Niobe!" as if she is a child being chastised or a dog being called back to its master. She obeys, nonetheless. It's clear from just these two scenes that Lock not only undervalues women as fighters, but he also attempts to exercise a patriarchal control over the woman he is intimate with. While the councilors accept Niobe's offer to search for the *Nebuchadnezzar*, it is telling that the commander of Zion's army holds such degrading beliefs. In the third film, Lock proves that he is not even aware of her profound piloting skills, maintaining that "no one can pilot mechanical." Additionally, Lock's neck is free of plugs, symbolizing that he was never plugged into the Matrix. Therefore, he must have picked up these ideas in Zion, supplying further proof of the prevalence of these beliefs in an enlightened world.

Neo's conversation with the Architect is instrumental in discerning how these beliefs were sustained throughout Zion's seemingly progressive history. Even the smallest details the Architect offers are telltale. Neo learns that in order to save the human race, he must select twenty-three people from the Matrix to rebuild Zion. The Architect specifies that there must be sixteen females and seven males. As their "purpose" is to repopulate Zion, it makes sense that more females would be selected than males, given their biological capacity to become pregnant.

However, this reinforces the very notions of inequality that form the foundation of patriarchy. This necessitates that, in order to have heterosexual companionship (there is no indication of homosexual relationships in Zion), there must be at least two women to every one man, and three women to a few. While polygamous relationships don't seem to exist in Zion presently, the initial damage that these relationships cause to the psyches of those involved sets the stage for societal attitudes; i.e., men are excessively catered to while women are neglected. Fundamentally, for one man to divide his affections between several women while he receives each of their undivided affections is to create unequal relationships that favor men (Strauss). Thus, those who were first freed by the One ultimately end up in a strikingly similar and oppressive situation.

Even if, by some twist of fate, all but seven women refused to become baby-making machines, thus creating sexual exclusivity, it is highly unlikely that, given the prevalence of sexism still circulating in Zion, *egalitarian* relationships developed among them. It is much more likely that the world of the Matrix had already made a fundamental impact on them, thus making polygamous relationships seem like a possibility. Patriarchy, when deeply entrenched, has the potential to structure the social order in such a way that those who are indoctrinated cannot perceive of an alternative (Ebert 45). Even though the council looks egalitarian, the personal relationships within Zion do not. With only a select few women asserting themselves and combating sexism when it occurs (in fact, Agent Smith is the *only* male in the entire trilogy to ever correct a sexist assumption), it is not hard to see that patriarchal ideas are alive and well. Commander Lock does not provide the only example of this inside Zion, either. Link, the new operator for the *Nebuchadnezzar* in the second and third films, is another character who was not “pod-born” and yet holds patriarchal beliefs. Several short pieces of dialogue help to bring Link's mindset into view. One example is when Trinity asks Link over the headset if Neo is okay after a fight scene. He replies, “Okay? Shit, Morpheus, you should have seen him.” Even though Trinity asked him the question, he directed his response to Morpheus. Trinity's concern for the wellbeing of the man she loves is disregarded, as if it was a stupid question—never mind the fact that she has had to save his life more than once in the past. A subtle assumption is also that Morpheus will appreciate Neo's fighting skills more than Trinity, as he does not say that *she* should have seen Neo fight. While minor, this is helpful when looking at his relationship with his wife, Zee.

When Link returns home for the first time in some time, his greeting for his lover is, “Where's my puss—” only to find that there are children in his home. This seems to be an attempt at comedy on the part of the Wachowskis, as the description for the scene in the script states: “Two women sitting at a small table turn towards him. The older woman smiles, the younger one [Zee] blushes” (*The Matrix Reloaded* 27). When the older woman gets up to leave, she says to Link, “You be careful with her.” Before he can say anything, Zee pipes up and say, “Don't worry about me. He's the one that's going to get it!” Link, clearly not good at reading sarcasm, takes this as a sexual invitation. When Zee expresses her anger and sadness that he hasn't been home as much as the other crews have, he gets annoyed, proclaiming that he thought

they were “past this.”

This scene is highly problematic in many ways. First off, to refer to a woman as a slang word for vagina and then to claim ownership of said vagina can be seen as degrading, especially when this is used as a greeting after a long time spent apart—an absence she had expressed her grief over in past arguments. Not only has Link stripped Zee of a dignified name and her sexual autonomy, much like the Merovingian, but he has also neglected to tend to her emotional needs. Just as he disregarded Trinity’s concern for Neo’s wellbeing, Link disregards his own lover’s concern for him. Yet again the typical romance situation is played out, similar to that of Persephone, in which the female’s complaints are disregarded as trivial and hysterical by the male.

In a later scene, Zee attempts to get Link to wear a good luck charm for her own peace of mind. Link, again, disregards her feelings and tells her he doesn’t believe in that stuff. Despite this typical claim to masculine rationality, Link is relatively quick to believe what Morpheus says about Neo, citing that two other males—her dead brothers, no less—believed Morpheus too. In other words, Link will follow and believe in the superstitions of men but not in those of his own lover. He’s willing to risk his life working on a ship where others have already died for Morpheus’s mission, but he resists wearing a good luck charm on principle, only reluctantly agreeing to take it with him.

Link’s utter disregard for the feelings and concerns of Zee and Trinity are illustrative of the typical male qualities that are praised by the Patriarchy. He’s aggressive, prides himself on his rationality, and is not emotional. Though Lock does show the prized emotion of rage frequently, he clings so tightly to his rationality that he refuses to entertain any talk of Neo’s potential. There is a slight hint that this might be because of a rivalry between Morpheus and Lock regarding Niobe, however, exposing a bit of vulnerability, albeit one regarding female ownership. Trinity explains to Neo that before Morpheus visited the Oracle, he and Niobe were together. Presumably, once Morpheus learned that he must find the One, he sacrificed his own personal love for Niobe for that of a general love for Zion.

There lies the fundamental difference between Neo and every other man in Zion: his personal love for Trinity trumps all. Neo also embodies both traditionally feminine and masculine characteristics, as does Trinity. For example, Neo accepts help from others, is dependent on Trinity, is attractive and sexually available, acts “irrationally,” gets scared, and even cries. However, he also is the best fighter, possessing aggression and brute strength, as well as being a person who exercises agency, which is arguably the most rational act. He is the most complex and complete man in the entire series. Even Morpheus loses his sense of self when Neo tells him that the prophecy isn’t true. Neo is the only one who truly finds himself, and this is directly related to his willingness to connect with Trinity.

Trinity embodies almost all the characteristics Neo does, including the ability to act on her own accord. She is without a doubt the most complex and complete woman in the entire series. She is emotional when someone she cares about is hurt, she is both rational and “irrational” depending on the moment, she can fight and be gentle, and while her love for Neo is

a sort of dependency, she is ultimately an independent woman. Indeed, when she is impaled by machine parts at the end of the third film, a sobbing Neo tells her that she can't die; her response is simply, "Yes, I can." Though she is attractive, she has short, slicked back hair and is hidden behind sunglasses while in the Matrix. While she wears tight PVC bodysuits, she is completely covered, and the way they shine almost works to reflect the intrusive, objectifying gaze instead of inviting it (Gillis 79-80). She does not wear stilettos like Persephone, but rather functional, flat heeled boots. Additionally, both Trinity and Neo save each other's lives directly at least once. Nearly every task that Neo attempts is only successful because of Trinity's help, and they truly seem to work as a team rather than "hero" and "sidekick." It is also worth noting that Neo and Trinity are the only characters in the entire trilogy to say "I love you" to each other despite the numerous other romances.

Another element of Trinity and Neo's relationship that is in sharp contrast to all the others is their love scene. The film alternates between Neo and Trinity having sex by candlelight and the people of Zion dancing sensuously together to a "tribal" beat. The two scenes together can be interpreted as a raw expression of human sexuality. The Merovingian revealed sex in the Matrix as an act of domination, a repressed form of eroticism, and Mouse viewed it similarly. However, sex and sensuality in Zion have the potential to be full of emotion, mutuality, and love. Indeed, it is possible that erotic passion could truly draw people into that "greater and greater communion" that bell hooks described (*The Will to Change* 183). Neo and Trinity are shown to be entwined in a loving embrace at the end of their scene, and the script describes the scene simply: "two become one" (*The Matrix Reloaded* 36). The power of this communion is so strong that Neo expresses his paralyzing fear of losing Trinity, and she reassures him that she won't let go by gripping his hand, a symbolic representation of their bond.

Zee and Link are among the crowd, dancing closely together. The type of sexuality that is expressed in this scene contrasts that of Neo and Trinity. While mutuality is expressed in both scenes, the public nature of the "rave" highlights a difference or even an implied lack in their relationship. While Neo and Trinity opt to have time alone, Zee and Link choose to express their sexual desire for each other openly. The rave scene is not presented as a negative experience, however. The fact remains that Trinity and Neo's scene was designed to signify the completion of their unique bonding process, while Zee and Link participate in a sort of group-bonding experience. Again, there is the distinction made between a general love—in this case connected to sexuality—and a very specific love. Nonetheless, the communion hooks spoke of is present in some sense, and the scene has a liberated feel to it.

It is not long after these scenes that Trinity and Neo meet their end. Trinity delivers a blinded Neo to the heart of the machine city and dies a warrior's death on a sort of battle field. Neo mournfully carries on and reaches a truce with the machines, which ultimately take on the form and voice of a man, sacrificing his life as well. Despite their journey together, continually supporting, saving, and caring for each other nearly equally, the cheers that erupt in Zion after the retreat of the machines are directed towards Neo. The entire series calls to mind a famous quote with unknown origins: "Behind every great man is a great woman." Implicit in this is a

reminder of a tragic truth: amazing women are so often eclipsed by the men in their lives. However, it also implies that a forgotten and underappreciated partnership exists. This is most definitely the case in *The Matrix Trilogy*. The films show Trinity and Neo as both loving partners and autonomous human beings, however, she is seemingly forgotten and unappreciated by the people of Zion. Therefore, while the film series shows that human beings have the potential to break free from the bonds of patriarchy, it also shows just how far they still have to go. The piece of the oppressor is buried deep within, often going unnoticed and deemed “natural” during periods of enlightenment. However, patriarchy leaves everyone unfulfilled and no one can truly be free under its control. *The Matrix Trilogy* proposes the most revolutionary way to fight against this oppressive system: to quite literally love ones’ way to freedom.

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