Research Essay Outline

Thesis: Through his depiction of the Keane scandal, Burton’s “Big Eyes” effectively presents a previously lesser known hoax to the public in a culturally significant manner.

**Paragraph I-**

This paragraph will be used to give a brief, yet important summary of the hoax itself. This will help the reader to have a good foundation and understanding of what Tim Burton was working with.

Background information for the hoax:

* Margaret Ulbrich leaves her husband, Frank, with her daughter Jane in order to find a better life.
* Meets Walter Keane at an art sale
* Walter is supposedly a successful realtor. He eventually asks Margaret to marry him because her former husband filed against her in court to win custody of Jane.
* Keane gallery opens in 1960
* Margaret convinced her daughter that Walter was the true painter
* Margaret did the paintings in an attic to conceal the secret from others
  + Did the movie portray this in a way that was less severe than the actual scenario? (something to further look into, it was mentioned in one of the articles that I read that Burton ‘sugar coated’ some very harsh information about the hoax)
* Margaret finds a box in the back of the studio that are Walter’s paintings, but they have different signatures. She discovers that all of his supposed paintings from Paris have these same signatures underneath his.
* Jane breaks into the art studio to reveal to her mother that she knows about the fraud
* Walter goes insane and attempts to kill Margaret and Jane, they flee the house
* Walter asks Margaret for the rights to all of the paintings in order to get a divorce, as well as 100 more Keanes
* Margaret reveals the truth about this hoax on a radio show in Hawaii
* Margaret and Walter have a ‘paint-off’ in court, Walter claims injury and Margaret wins the case

**Paragraph II-**

Topic Sentence: In Burton’s film he utilizes Walter Keane’s dominant characteristics to depict the importance of this in manipulating Margaret, leading to the continuation of this hoax for twenty years.

**Evidence:**

In an article written published in KCET, Tyler Stallings examines the idea that during the 1950s, a woman was typically presented with very limited options if they chose to leave a marriage.

**Analysis:** Within the movie ‘Big Eyes’, the marriage between Walter and Margaret seems quite rushed, something Margaret’s friend, DeeAnn, comments on. However, the reason that Walter and Margaret so abruptly decide to marry is due to the fact that Margaret’s former husband has threatened to take her to court in order to win custody over their daughter. As a woman in the 1950s, Margaret would be able to maintain custody over her daughter if she was able to find the support of another man, representing the true discrimination during this time. However, this was also one of the first instances where Walter Keane was able to use this discrimination to convince Margaret Keane to trust in him.

"It all happened so fast that there didn't seem any way out. The more successful the paintings were, the worse it became. At one time I thought that if I could only teach Walter how to paint the big–eyed children, that might be the answer, but he couldn't do it. I began to feel that I was completely walled–up and in a way I was. Walter was terribly controlling and terrified of anyone finding out the truth." – Margaret Keane

**Analysis:** This quote from Margaret Keane depicts the truth behind how controlling Walter is portrayed as within the film. Burton put extra emphasis on this in order to show the public how Margaret was able to be stuck under his control for such a long period of time before fighting against him.

“The shadow existence that Margaret lived as the result of Walter's bullying is depicted in the film through shots of Adams painting alone in a stuffy, smoke-filled room, afraid to open the door even for her daughter, Jane.” (ProQuest article)

"I had to lie to my daughter every day," she says, sitting in her living room, surrounded by her paintings. "It went against everything I knew was right. It was just terrible."

- Margaret Keane

**Analysis:** Through the medium of film, Tim Burton was able to represent how truly repressed Margaret Keane was by her own husband. He forced her to stay trapped in an attic all day and lie to her own daughter, going against one of her core moral values. In the movie itself, the agony of lying to her daughter can be seen on Margaret’s face as Walter attempts to convince Jane that he was the true artist, despite what the young girl had supposedly remembered from her early years.

"He was brilliant at promotion. He could charm anyone.” – Margaret Keane (The Telegraph)

**Analysis:** This quote not only helps shine light on Walter’s very overbearing characteristics, but it also helps lead into the next paragraph. Walter charmed Margaret into marriage, as well as a twenty-year hoax, yet he also used this charm in order to convince her that the discrimination against woman artists was a very apparent issue, which would hinder the success of her paintings.

**Paragraph III-**

**Topic Sentence:** ‘Big Eyes’ brought light to the underlying issue of Margaret Keane’s apparent fear of discrimination against woman artists, causing her to believe that her paintings would be less successful when represented by a woman.

**Evidence:**

“And you've got to remember that back in the Fifties there was a lot of prejudice against women artists. There weren't that many of them, and on the whole their work didn't sell. So it's quite possible that my paintings wouldn't have got the exposure they did without him. That's one of the strangest things of all about this." – Margaret Keane (The Telegraph)

Analysis: Even looking back on the whole situation 50 years ago, Margaret still ponders whether her paintings would have been as successful had she stood by them through it all. In Burton’s film, there can be seen a significant rise in interest between when Margaret was the artist, selling her paintings for a mere few dollars, compared to when Walter took over, reeling in a fortune. This ultimately allows the audience to visualize how much of a difference the gender of the artist had on the success of the paintings.

As early as the 1870s, men began to attempt to resist women’s attempts at expanding their presence within the art industry. Some men attempted to establish art schools for only “professional” men. During the 1890s, women found it begin to become increasingly difficult to gain membership to these elite schools, while also struggling to get their work exhibited. (Yale dissertation)

**Analysis:** Going into the 20th century, women had already begun to feel increased repression when attempting to become successful artists. Burton surely kept this in mind when including the scene where Walter goes to an art exhibit with the hopes of getting some of his, and Margaret’s, paintings out. However, when revealing that the paintings are produced by his wife, the owner of the gallery coincidentally denies them, even marking them as tacky and slightly terrifying. However, once Walter takes over at a different venue, the paintings seem to have no trouble selling.

“I grew up in that time and people find it hard to believe that in that era most of the women that I knew, in suburbia anyways, they didn’t work. There was a pressure; there was more of a cocoon, a categorization of things. Obviously there were famous woman artists”… “But still, at the time, and certainly in America, it was a very much more male dominated, in that sense. “ – Tim Burton (Video)

**Analysis:** Tim Burton reveals that he was very aware of the social expectations for a woman’s role in society during an interview with Channel 4 news of London. This can be connected to his decision to represent an early form of classic discrimination against women. Whether Margaret would truthfully have been less successful on her own or not, the evident beliefs surrounding her helped to yield her decision to allow Walter to take credit for her hard work.

**Paragraph IV:**

Topic Sentence: \*Note: I am unsure of a topic sentence for this paragraph, as I am still attempting to find more evidence/ a way to connect these pieces together. It also may be in my best interest to remove this paragraph and move the evidence elsewhere.

**Evidence:**

"I was in total shock," she says. "It was so real and very emotional. Christoph looks and acts exactly like Walter. Amy portrayed exactly what I was thinking and feeling. They made it so alive." – Margaret Keane (ProQuest 2)

**Analysis:** I find this quote to be extremely beneficial in exemplifying how accurate Burton was in portraying this hoax. It also explains the significance behind hiring certain actors, such as Christoph Waltz and Amy Adams. Not only did were they both similar in looks to the young couple, Waltz also was able to efficiently represent the manipulative persona of Walter Keane.

“She’s one of the most quiet, under-the-radar feminists you’ve ever met. She doesn’t have a big voice. She’s not out there on the streets, saying, you know, “Vote for women’s rights!” She did it in her own private, personal way, which I found amazing given the type of person she is.” – Tim Burton (Huffington Post)

**Analysis:** Tim Burton is known for being quiet, often keeping to himself. I find that this may have impacted his decision in putting this hoax out to the public in ways that it had not been before. Margaret was very soft-spoken, essentially standing up for a movement by keeping to herself as opposed to openly shouting her beliefs. However, this is not quite different from Burton, who took the time to allow the world to see the atrocities of Walter Keane and the strength of a quiet feminist such as Margaret in a very similar manner.

**Paragraph V-**

Topic Sentence: It should be addressed that after the reveal of Margaret Keane as the true artist of the popular paintings, their value had a slight increase, potentially going against the argument that discrimination of women in the art industry would have been a significant component in convincing Margaret to comply with the wishes of Walter for such an extended period of time.

\*Note: I thought this paragraph was significant to dispute any evidence that may argue against my claim, as well as providing sufficient evidence to counter the former.

**Evidence:**

Slowly, Keane’s work began to fall back into popular and critical acclaim. She opened a gallery in the early 1990s in San Francisco, and a new generation of fans were able to appreciate her art. These popular images of the past had been adapted as cultural icons in a period that typically lacked this type of art. (KCET)

**Analysis:** Although Margaret’s art may have had a slight increase in popularity after the hoax was announced, it was not until the 1990s that it there was significant increase. However, the reason behind this was due to the rise of a new type of art: pop art. Her Big Eyes paintings fit right under this genre, allowing them to now inspire new artists. In a way, it wasn’t until her paintings were ‘in style’ that people actually took interest in them once again.

With Margaret now as the artist, it was speculated that more people were able to connect with the art at an emotional level, now understanding the true pain that were supposedly in the large eyes of the children. Young artists and collectors became attracted to the art once again due to the pain and the kitsch of these paintings. (KCET)

**Analysis:** Again, artists can be seen now connecting with Margaret’s paintings at a different level, yet this is due to a completely different reason than why they were popular beforehand. In a way, a new face behind the paintings gave them more emotional value, yet they were also attractive now due to the ‘kitsch’ of the paintings, something that they were once criticized for. This new opinion was swayed with the arise of popular art culture.

Margaret’s original pieces now sell for $5,000 to $200,000. (ProQuest Article)

**Analysis:** After such a scandal, it could be guessed that the value of Margaret’s paintings would obviously increase. Not only were they a once popular item, but they also now had quite the story behind them. Yet this increase was truthfully not that significant, especially when compared to artwork within a new category that arose out of inspiration from these paintings. Andy Warhol, who painted in a very similar, unique manner, has typically had his original works sell for close to 20 million dollars. Yet Margaret Keane, the inspiration behind work such as Warhol’s, is only selling her originals for a mere fraction of his price.