PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER IN NORTH AMERICA

Editor | Editor: Lucia Otrísalová
Technický editor | Technical Editor: Lucia Otrísalová
Obálka | Cover: Lucia Otrísalová
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Recenzenti | Reviewers:
Peter Barrer, PhD.
Jason Blake, PhD.
Don Sparling
Pavol Šveda, PhD.

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Editor's Note

Gender permeates almost everything people do. Besides influencing how a person behaves or is expected to behave, it also impacts their placement in the world. According to Joan Scott, gender is “a constitutive element” of social and power relationships (Scott 1067); it informs cultural symbols, normative concepts, social and cultural practices, religious, economic, political, social institutions, and subjective identities. It is therefore an analytical category relevant to studying societies and cultures.

This volume presents papers written primarily by students who deploy gender as the analytical lens through which they examine cultural and literary production in the USA and Canada. While in some papers it is viewed as a classic binary of cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity, in others it is treated as a continuum, with male and female at either end, and in still others its intersections with sexuality, class, and race are investigated.

The aim of this volume is thus not only to present a variety of both traditional and more recent approaches to the study of gender in the North American context, but also to showcase the talents of some of the emerging scholars from different countries of Europe who attended the 4th Biannual Student Conference on the Americas, organized on 18-19 February 2016 by the Department of British and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava.

The volume opens with a contribution by my colleague Ivan Lacko, which offers a survey of the representation of women in nineteenth-century American literature.

Works Cited
OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES WHEN PRESENTING THE WOMAN QUESTION

IVAN LACKO

ABSTRACT • Drawing on the influence of Margaret Fuller and her seminal work Woman in the Nineteenth Century on the writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne, this paper aims to present a view on the evasive ways how Romantic literature addressed “the woman question.” In The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne introduces a heroine whose proto-feminist drive is not only her unique character trait, but also a tool for Hawthorne to explore gender issues and the construction of male and female roles in society. The article explores the complexity of how gender issues were portrayed by nineteenth-century authors and the relevance of this complexity for the development of American literature and its canon.

KEYWORDS • the woman question, nineteenth-century American literature, Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, Romanticism, proto-feminist

As a teacher of nineteenth-century American literature, especially of some of the classical works that have become known as the “canon,” I have often marveled at the sheer complexity and scope of issues covered by authors who lived and worked in entirely different circumstances than twenty-first century readers (e.g. students at university language departments). And yet, many of the issues and the artistic perception and discussion thereof appeal to the modern mindset with a renewed vigor and can engage readers within a much broader context than the original authors may even have envisaged. The so-called woman question is such an issue – a multifaceted matter that trickled through the decades and centuries of American art to burst out in powerful jets in twentieth-century feminist thought.
In this brief text, I endeavor to offer a survey of some relevant, mostly nineteenth-century, works of American literature which tackle the issue of gender and/or social construction of male and female roles in society. Because I do not desire to provide definitive answers to how the gender issue was dealt with in literary works, I will focus on one particular work – Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, which is a good example of how daring and yet ambivalent the attitude to gender issues was in the nineteenth-century society. After all, it took American literature centuries to initiate even very mild changes in the literary canon as far as reflecting women and minorities was concerned (Said 5).

While the Puritan submissiveness of women, made notoriously visible e.g. by the pious poetry of Anne Bradstreet, disguised any female idiosyncrasy in the veil of witchcraft and illegal sin, Romantic literature introduced female characters that were only complementary elements to male heroic or adventurous action, an example being the few women in James Fenimore Cooper’s novels, or the exaggerated caricatures of wives—like Dame van Winkle in Washington Irving’s *Rip van Winkle* whose petticoat government is one of the driving forces for Rip’s reveries and endless hikes away from home. Irving’s stories are populated with women who are two-dimensionally portrayed, in a typical Romantic fashion, as nameless, gossiping small-town women, or as the objects of a man’s desire—Katrina van Tassel in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is a transparent and flat character whose sole function in the story is to be the target of two men’s rivalry.

Similarly, female characters in Edgar Allan Poe’s works, particularly in his poetry, are only passive agencies of fulfilling male desires. Karen Weekes claims that Poe “idealizes the vulnerability of woman,” suggests that “females may have more strength and initiative than the delicate models of his verse,” and emphasizes that a woman’s role is to be “[an] emotional catalyst for her partner” while being “much more significant in her impact on Poe’s narrators than in her own right” (148). Poe’s insistence that a beautiful woman needs to die to conform with a man’s ideal of eternal and ultimate aesthetic pleasure soon found its counter ideology in Margaret Fuller’s important text *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Published in 1843, it presented observations and ideas that laid the foundation for most of the gender-related literary works that followed. In line with the transcendentalist mantra that one needs to examine one’s own existence to understand the intricacy of life better, Fuller
writes: “If there is a misfortune in Woman’s lot, it is in obstacles being interposed by men, which do not mark her state” (27). This sole realization—so difficult to arrive at in the social structure of the early nineteenth century—would later become a catalyst for not just feminist writing, but also more socially aware journalism. As Karolyn L. Karcher posits, Fuller “politicized the Transcendentalist philosophy she had absorbed from Emerson as she applied it first to feminist advocacy and then to journalistic reporting on the condition of the urban poor” (786). But before late nineteenth century female authors such as Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, or Emily Dickinson, most of the literary discourse was defined by men who either perpetuated the patriarchal social setup or aspired to challenge it, with a varying degree of success.

While some American writers of the Romantic tradition tried to liberate themselves from the gender-defined social constraints, others totally neglected the new gender context inspired by transcendentalism. Herman Melville, in his most outstanding creative period, managed to produce fiction entirely without women, be it in his maritime stories like *Billy Budd*, *Benito Cereno*, and *Moby-Dick*, or in his psychological analysis of the dehumanizing force of capitalism in *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Melville’s friend and contemporary Nathaniel Hawthorne first adopted a Romantic attitude very similar to Poe’s functionality of character roles. His stories, a great number of which go back to the social circumstances of Puritan New England, feature female characters who only act as means to highlight a theme the writer wants to dissect and criticize. The character of Faith in “Young Goodman Brown,” for example, is solely a symbolic element in the story, devoid of any psychology. Similarly, Elisabeth in “The Minister’s Black Veil” acts as a piece in the parable with no other human dimension than curiosity and the tendency to be perplexed and misapprehend.

But it is in Hawthorne’s most famous work—*The Scarlet Letter*—where he manages to invent a character who combines the features of a mid-nineteenth-century progressively thinking, transcendentalist woman in the fashion of Margaret Fuller and a Puritan mother for whom self-awareness and self-scrutiny were foreign, possibly even totally unimaginable. That character is, of course, Hester Prynne, the sinner and outcast in seventeenth-century Puritan Boston whose public humiliation and persecution result in her finding a path of strength and independence. Hawthorne endows his heroine with
“combative energy of her character” (*The Scarlet Letter* 55) to allow him to speculate on the “obstacles” introduced by Fuller, though always within the constraints of a Romantic narrative. This results in Hawthorne’s showing the readers how Hester’s will is inhibited by the Calvinist fatalism fostered by the Puritan society when the narrator informs us that “the scarlet letter had not done its office” (*The Scarlet Letter* 108), as well as portraying a world that, along the lines of R. K. Gupta’s argument, insists that “the imagination is by no means a merely beautifying and idealizing faculty” but also a capacity “to burrow into the depth of reality” (316). Gupta’s claim is rooted in Hawthorne’s own definition of romance which both confirms and transcends the features of a Romantic narrative.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne communicates—through his omniscient narrator—Hester’s fate as something that is beyond the grasp and control of her Puritan contemporaries. Most of her exceptionality as a character stems from the fact that she is forced, as a way of punishment, to wear the letter of shame on her chest. The narrator tells us that the letter “had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself” (*The Scarlet Letter* 41), thus indicating her extraordinary position—both because she is ostracized as well as unique. Hester both makes use of and discards the letter to denote her as a person (indeed, as a woman) defined by the community—as Christopher Diffee proposes, “even though the letter undergoes continual reinterpretation in the eyes of the community, the ‘office of the letter’ remains undone because Hester rejects any meanings it might represent” (850). While Hester is aware of the importance of community, the hypocritical and harsh treatment of those around her makes her aware of her individuality, exactly in the transcendentalist sense. At the same time, Hester offers Hawthorne the opportunity to examine “what motherhood might mean for a person who does have, as all human beings do, a sense of independent existence” (Baym 21). In other words, how can a Puritan woman, uncovered as a sinner, relate her experience, state of mind, and identity awareness to “the whole race of womanhood” (*The Scarlet Letter* 108)? Hester perceives this as an impossible task, but contemplates its implications nonetheless:

> As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down and built up anew. Then the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially
modified before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change, in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated. (The Scarlet Letter 108)

The narrator recounts Hester’s thoughts, or perhaps replaces them with his own (or Hawthorne’s) in order to celebrate the heroine’s extraordinary situation and disposition and also challenge her with the complexity of such proto-feminist conjectures. Hawthorne grants Hester “a freedom of speculation” that makes her an independent and potentially dangerous thinker, but simultaneously enlightens the reader that because of Hester’s experience, “some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman” (The Scarlet Letter 107). This betrays Hawthorne’s ambivalence regarding the woman question—he is both keen to put his heroine on the pedestal of feminine strength and independence and unwilling to elevate her to a position of what Hester once imagined herself to assume, namely that of “[a] destined prophetess”—a role the narrator quickly comments on as being “vain” and “impossible” (The Scarlet Letter 166). After all, Hawthorne himself was both interested in the role of women in the society and dismissive of their contribution, e.g. to literature. A few years after the publication of The Scarlet Letter, he expressed his disdain of mid-nineteenth-century women writers, when he wrote of them as of “scribbling women” who “write trash” (The Letters 304).

But the legacy of The Scarlet Letter is strongest in its discussion of how a particular human experience was unique because its protagonist was a woman. For example, Nina Baym’s feminist reading of The Scarlet Letter points out how women (in this case both Hester and her daughter Pearl) are essential for the novel’s drive towards a progressive outcome:

Essentially, too, Pearl is her mother’s child only. Though society and Hester are aware that a man participated in the act, Pearl has no sense of this necessity and hers is the view that the reader is forced to adopt. That is, we know that Hester has had a lover but we never really “know” that Pearl has a father. Through Pearl and because of her, then, Hester takes precedence over Dimmesdale and over the society which tries to put him and his cohorts at the organizing center of the fictional
Ivan Lacko

world. The world of the romance is organized around her. Matriarchy prevails. (23) Baym claims that Hester is fundamentally, and by Hawthorne’s definition, the center of the novel’s universe—and through this very claim, a feminist reader can also see the roles of men, most notably the faltering Dimmesdale, the savage and diabolical Chillingworth, or the hypocritical magistrates and judges. Hester’s role is a complex one—the role of the men is one-sided and one-dimensional, driven by physical force, religious doctrine, or power ambitions only. In other words, men define the social and cultural structure of the community that, in turn, produces what Margaret Fuller refers to as “obstacles” standing in the way of equality and progressive development of women in the nineteenth century. Even from the point of view of modern literary (feminist) criticism, Fuller is still a distinctive and unique voice, not just as “a groundbreaking feminist treatise, but as a bold experiment in creating a new style of rhetorical argument, suited to promoting the change in consciousness it advocates—perhaps even a precursor of the French feminists’ écriture feminine” (Karcher 787). And so, on this note, nineteenth-century literary achievements, in their complexity and contextual wealth, remain a relevant source of cultural, political, and intellectual framework when discussing the issue of gender.
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Ivan Lacko is an assistant professor at the Department of British and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava. He teaches courses in American literature and culture, with particular interest in theatre and performance. His research revolves around social and political issues in literary, dramatic and performative art.

Address: Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Arts, Gondova 2, 814 99 Bratislava. E-mail: ivan.lacko@uniba.sk
This paper focuses on the heroine Katniss Everdeen from the popular American franchise *The Hunger Games*. It uses this strong literary character in order to examine gender androgyny and flexibility of the self to adapt to different social circumstances. Katniss needs to face some extreme situations in which it may seem that her gender features are blurred into an androgynous figure that does not possess a fixed self but that serves as a reflection of the outside world. Katniss’s gender identity displays both masculine and feminine characteristics, and she also undergoes a complete depersonalization of the self when she is turned into a mere symbol of rebellion. By putting Katniss’s real gender identity in question, Suzanne Collins reveals that the contemporary young American generation is defined by the outside social forces of commerce, fashion, and social media.

**Keywords** • androgyne of manners, image, *The Hunger Games*, surface, appearance, form, Katniss, social media, Paglia

**Introduction**
This article examines the character of Katniss Everdeen and her fight against the controlling center of the fictional world of Panem, the Capitol. Katniss is a teenager who takes care of her mother and sister. She illegally hunts in the woods to bring food to the table. She assumes the masculine position of a breadwinner. She lives in coal-mining District 12, which is, together with the other districts, exploited by the rich Capitol. To make sure that there will
not be any rebellion against the people in power, a very special reality show called The Hunger Games takes place every year. Two young people, a girl and a boy, are taken from every district and then forced to fight against each other to death. There can be only one surviving victor, who is then allowed to return home. Before the kids are thrown into the arena, they are attended to by stylists and designers who create a new image for each of them. This article examines Katniss’s path through the games and the fragmentation of her own identity when she is forced to become the beauty, the killer, and the depersonalized symbol of a bird for the purpose of rebellion against the tyranny of the Capitol.

This analysis further deals with the topic of gender, which it shifts to a new and challenging level. It has become common today to distinguish sex from gender. The former is seen as a biological category while the latter stands for a social construction. This article views gender as a fluid entity that is used as a source of control and manipulation. The totalitarian reign of President Snow imposes certain gender identities upon his victims in order to maintain his power. These identities manifest as shallow images constructed by the team of prep designers and come alive through TV projections; they are dehumanized and androgynous.

This paper applies Camille Paglia’s terminology borrowed from her chapter entitled “English Epicene: Wilde’s The Importance of Being Ernest,” which is a part of her book Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson. It focuses on the term “androgyne of manners.” Paglia depicts a sexual persona who is stripped of his or her sexual instincts, does not show clear-cut features of either masculine or feminine gender, and manifests only through social form and image. She uses examples from Oscar Wilde’s decadent world to depict this grotesque sexual persona, a slave to fashion and social acceptance. This figure is viewed through the principles of art. Although Paglia examines this persona in the context of the nineteenth century, there are many features that could be associated with the literary realm of Panem.

This dystopian world where children kill each other for the entertainment of the aristocratic audience may seem completely unrelated to Oscar Wilde’s depiction of Victorian upper-class society and the “androgyne of manners” that Camille Paglia sees inhabiting it. However, it actually offers us a possible key to a deeper understanding of gender complexity and critique of its possible manipulations that are used in order to gain control over the districts.
Suzanne Collins uses Katniss’s inner voice and consciousness to contrast and challenge the decadent androgyny of the Capitol’s society. Although she herself is highly affected by their influence, Katniss manages to maintain her own integrity as a character and does not lose her own identity. By using Katniss as a counter pole to the rich and dehumanized citizens of the Capitol, Collins criticizes the modern American generation that is highly influenced by reality shows and unable to see through the manufactured identities mediated by cameras.

**THE CAPITOL BECOMING THE NEW SALON**

Applying Paglia’s “androgyne of manners” offers Suzanne Collins an opportunity to play with Katniss’s image that can be recreated through media. She may seem to be a girl in love in one shot, but she can also look like a cold-hearted soldier determined to fight to the last breath. Katniss’s personality depends on the team of designers who are in charge of the camera. Reality becomes subjective and can be changed and manipulated by various people in power. Paglia writes about this ability to adapt to different social circumstances: “The androgyne of manners inhabits the world of the drawing room and recreates that world wherever it goes, through manner and speech. The salon is an abstract circle where male and female are equal and interchangeable. Personality becomes a sexually undifferentiated formal mask” (531–532). Paglia highlights the importance of the place where this sexual persona most frequently appears. It is the Victorian play room where guests are invited to be entertained. She argues that sexual differences are overlooked because they are not important in this setting. Men and women are equal because they all follow certain formal codes of proper behavior. They act through “manner and speech.” Many analogies could be found between this salon and the power center of Collins’s dystopian world. When Paglia depicts the salon as an “abstract circle,” she suggests that it can change and accommodate to new social standards. Therefore, it reinvented itself into becoming Suzanne Collins’s the Capitol.

Citizens of the Capitol put a huge emphasis on their appearance and entertainment. They undergo plastic surgeries, dye their hair, and wear extravagant clothes. It is difficult to distinguish between male and female gender since all Capitol residents put on makeup, wear wigs, or apply lipstick. Jennifer Mitchell talks about the blurred boundaries of gender distinction in
her article “Of Queer Necessity: Panem’s Hunger Games and Gender Games”: “The artifice inherent in their treatment and presentation of their bodies is suggestive of an approach to gender that equates bodily reality only with surface appearance” (135). The quotation shows a clear resemblance to Paglia’s claims about the superiority of the form over gender and about the fact that the body takes the form of a surface image. Therefore, male and female bodies could seem interchangeable.

Another aspect of the salon that Paglia writes about is the boredom and passivity of the characters. She uses Oscar Wilde’s quote to introduce the “androgyne of manners” and the environment of the salon: “Wilde admires ‘the great aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing’; he declares ‘cultivated leisure’ to be ‘the aim of man’” (Paglia 531). In the Capitol, people are concerned only with their looks or the games; therefore, it could seem that they are not occupied by any meaningful activity. Katniss expresses her disbelief and contempt at these people’s lifestyles when she says, “What do they do all day, these people in the Capitol, besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to roll in and die for their entertainment?” (Collins, The Hunger 75). In many ways this charade is comparable to the Victorian salon that Paglia describes as the world that the “androgyne of manners” inhabits. There is a great emphasis on form and appearance; everything conforms to social conventions and the dictate of fashion. People go to the salon to be entertained, to escape their ordinary lives. In the Capitol, people spend their lives watching the games. In a way, the Capitol is one big salon.

Camille Paglia further describes the place of the drawing room as “a spectacle of dazzling surfaces” (532). When Katniss describes her prep team, she does not see them as human beings. They are too extravagant and shallow. They are only “surfaces” that circle around her. When she is standing naked in front of them, she does not feel embarrassed because she views them only as exotic birds. Katniss says, “I know I should be embarrassed, but they’re so unlike people that I’m no more self-conscious than if a trio of oddly colored birds were pecking around my feet” (Collins, The Hunger 72). Katniss dehumanizes the people of the Capitol; she defines them only through their appearance. Therefore, they could be compared to Paglia’s “spectacle of dazzling surfaces” since they are presented by Collins as nothing more than these beautiful empty shells that do not care about anything but their appearance.
At the same time, the contestants that appear on this deathly show are also defined only through their “manner and speech.” They are dehumanized by the citizens of Panem as well. Helen Day confirms this in her article “Simulacra, Sacrifice and Survival in The Hunger Games, Battle Royal, and The Running Man,” where she claims that the contestants are not viewed as human beings: “the Capitol audience is so seduced by [their] image that the viewers fail to acknowledge the tributes as real” (175). They score points for their performance. Their life is turned into putting on a good show; they are transformed into being only the “spectacle of dazzling surfaces.” Therefore, a new glossy persona is imposed also upon Katniss. She is also affected by this process of dehumanization. Since the audience fails to perceive her as a real being, the quality of her life is reduced to the importance of appearing on screen. Her identity is changed into an image projected to an audience. Although her inner voice rebels against this simplification of her personality, she needs to play along and conform to the rules of the games.

In order to highlight the role of virtual realities and social media in the lives of American citizens, Wolfgang Funk uses claims by Daniel Boorstin “that American citizens live ‘in a world where fantasy is more real than reality, where the image has more dignity than its original’. American life, he argues, is shaped and inspired to such an extent by media presentations that only those events can attain realness which are staged and performed for media consummation” (38). This claim can be applied to the Capitol. This fictional place could be seen as a reflection and possible critique of American society. It is implied that the fake images and staged events are taken more seriously than real life. In the Capitol, people are completely ignorant of the suffering and poverty in the districts. They see only the images of the tributes that have undergone the process of beautification in the hands of their prep teams. And these manufactured identities are taken at face value by the Capitol spectators. Gretchen Koeing writes about these reinvented images of tributes in her article “Communal Spectacle: Reshaping History and Memory through Violence”: “The children cannot even be worthy tributes until approved Capital technicians reimage them for television consumption by ‘superior’ Capitol residents. The governments fabricated narrative of Panem’s past requires the modification of all the present-day actors to fit the fictionalized versions of their real-life identities” (43). By integrating this concept of image and manipulation with appearance, Collins criticizes the overuse
of reality shows and social media nowadays. As Daniel Boorstin highlights the inability of American tele-viewers to see through the manipulations of the press and media and their eagerness to take the staged stories for real, Collins’s exaggerated caricatures of human beings inhabiting the Capitol may serve as a critique of exactly this form of behavior.

**KATNISS EVERDEEN BATTLES BECOMING THE “ANDROYNE OF MANNERS”**

As Katniss becomes a contestant in The Hunger Games, she enters the realm of Paglia’s salon and falls victim to President Snow’s decadent manipulations. She has to change herself into an image in order to survive. Her appearance becomes seemingly androgynous and ready to adjust to the needs of the audience. However, after Katniss fully understands the principles of the show, she accommodates some of the Capitol’s practices to her own purposes. She pretends to assume some of the qualities of the “androgyne of manners” in order to manipulate her audience into thinking that she is a star-crossed lover.

Katniss first rebels at the thought that she should fake very intimate feelings towards a boy she hardly knows. Yet, her tutor Haymitch sees this strategy as essential to getting her more sponsors. “But we’re not star-crossed lovers!” I say. Haymitch grabs my shoulders and pins me against the wall. ‘Who cares? It’s all a big show. It’s all how you’re perceived. The most I could say about you after your interview was that you were nice enough, although that in itself was a small miracle. Now I can say you’re a heartbreaker’” (Collins, *The Hunger* 158). Haymitch highlights the importance of visual cognition. It is not about the truth; it is about the appearance. Perception is reality here. It is about how her actions will be viewed by the audience. Katniss’s immediate rebellion distances her from the concept of the “androgyne of manners,” and she shows readers that she does not identify with that figure. However, for her audience, she needs to “shape her persona” differently. This is what Camille Paglia examines in her article when she claims that the “ceremony of social form is stronger than gender, shaping personae to its public purpose and turning the internal world into the external” (535). This can be applied to Katniss the minute she decides to assume the role that was assigned to her and becomes “the girl on fire,” a persona that was designed by her stylist Cinna. Katniss reveals her intentions after the ceremonial beginning of The Hunger Games: “All that remains of the design-team’s efforts are the flames
on my nails. I decide to keep them as a reminder of who I am for the audience. Katniss, the girl who was on fire” (Collins, *The Hunger* 162). Katniss is well aware of her duty to the audience. She assumes the feminine gender because it is expected of her by social conventions; she also pretends to fall in love and manifests her feelings for public entertainment. Although she hates it, she reveals some intimate emotions to make her love story more convincing; she is literally “turning [her] internal world into the external.” There is a moment when she admits to herself that she would be really devastated if Peeta died and she does not want to reveal her true emotions in front of the cameras. She says, “I wish I could pull the shutters closed, blocking out this moment from the prying eyes of Panem. Even if it means losing food. Whatever I’m feeling it’s no one’s business but mine” (Collins, *The Hunger* 349). However, after a few days of starving, she decides to make her internal feelings public and therefore assumes some of the qualities that define the “androgyne of manners.”

When Paglia examines the courtship of Jack and Gwendolen in *The Importance of Being Ernest*, she observes that there are no real emotions expressed. Gwendolen makes Jack perform the traditional ritual of proposing to her on his knees. She asks for this because it would appear appealing to potential spectators. “Gwendolen imagines Jack looking at her, while she looks at others looking at them. As a worshipper of form, Gwendolen craves not emotions but display, the theatre of social form” (Paglia 536). Katniss is doing the same when she pretends to be in love with Peeta. She imagines how her actions are perceived by the audience in the Capitol and whether she is putting on a show that is moving enough to get her sponsors. Katniss draws on the social interaction that she observed at home when she was little. She tries to use these memories in order to perform in the “theatre of social form”: “Since I’ve never been in love, this is going to be a real trick. I think of my parents. The way my father never failed to bring her gifts from the woods. The way my mother’s face would light up at the sound of his boots at the door. The way she almost stopped living when he died” (Collins, *The Hunger* 306).

Katniss uses her parents as a role model for her own behavior. She wants her love to look convincing and so she acts out the social patterns that her parents followed during their marriage. This is what Paglia believes is happening in Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Ernest*. The characters only imitate a certain formal code of behavior, and that is what makes them the “androgyne
of manners.” In Paglia’s view, “Wilde’s play is governed by the formalities of social life, which emerge with dancelike ritualism” (535). Katniss adopts these patterns of social actions to convince her audience of her love. She is concerned about whether her appearance for the cameras will look real. Just as “Gwendolen’s thoughts never stray from the world of appearance” (Paglia 536), the inhabitants of the Capitol cannot escape believing in these fake images manufactured by Snow’s employers and they are convinced that what they see is reality. Katniss uses their inability to get out of the “world of appearances” to her advantage and she outwits the Capitol citizens with this love story.

Katniss takes the mask of femininity in front of the cameras. She is forced to take the role of a beauty, to transform herself into an object that is desirable, capable of love, and sexually attractive in the eyes of the opposite gender. However, she never fully identifies with the conventional concept of femininity. Although she is dressed in beautiful gowns and her hair is done, she never considers herself beautiful or attractive. She rather compares herself to such inanimate objects as the sun and an ember from a fireplace. Paglia describes the female characters in The Importance of Being Ernest as creatures without typical feminine qualities: “Never for a moment are Gwendolen and Cecily persuasively ‘female’. They are creatures of indeterminate sex who take up the mask of femininity to play a new and provocative role” (536). The same could be claimed about Katniss. She only pretends to take “the masks of femininity” to attract the attention of the audience. The following quotation demonstrates her feelings when she assumes the role of spectator and observes her own image on TV:

I’m beckoned over to a monitor. They play back the last few minutes of taping and I watch the woman on the screen. Her body seems larger in stature, more imposing than mine. Her face smudged but sexy. Her brows are black and drawn in an angle of defiance. Wisps of smoke – suggesting she has either just been extinguished or is about to burst into flames – rise from her clothes. I do not know who this person is. (Collins, Mockingjay 85)

Here, she completely detaches herself from the glossy persona that she sees on the screen. She can say that she is sexy because she does not admit that she is talking about herself. She uses the third singular person to refer to herself. She cannot recognize the creature hidden behind “the mask of femininity.”
Without the work of her prep team, she could never be considered an object of desire. She never was persuasively feminine in her spirit or in the shapes of body.

After Katniss loses a lot of weight in the games, her body becomes even more asexual. The game makers are planning on surgically enlarging her breasts. But in the end they only change her dress by adding padding to make her look more feminine. Katniss examines this change critically, saying, “I immediately notice the padding over my breasts, adding curves that hunger has stolen from my body. My hands go to my chest and I frown” (Collins, *The Hunger* 414). Katniss rejects anything that could present her as a sexual person. It is visible here that the Capitol is ready to alter not only Katniss’s image but also her body so she could fit into their society more easily. They need to transform her body into something that would be more conventionally feminine so they can still present her as an object of desire.

Camille Paglia also describes the characters from *The Importance of Being Ernest* as very asexual creatures: “They have no sex because they have no real sexual feelings” (534–535). Although Katniss has sexual drives, she has been willingly suppressing them. This is how she describes her first kiss: “It’s the first time I’ve ever kissed a boy, which should make some sort of impression, I guess, but all I can register is how unnaturally hot his lips are from the fever” (Collins, *The Hunger* 305). Although she keeps pretending that she is in love with Peeta and she takes the image of a star-crossed lover, she can never fully accept that role. Katniss says: “if I do have feelings for him, it doesn’t matter because I’ll never be able to afford the kind of love that leads to a family, to children” (Collins, *The Hunger* 435). She reveals that she is willing to give up experiencing any sexual relationship not only with Peeta but with any boy.

After Katniss manages to survive her first Hunger Games, she feels uncertain about what is left of her original self. She tries to convince herself that she can return to being the old Katniss Everdeen: “As I slowly, thoroughly wash the make-up from my face and put my hair in its braid, I begin transforming back into myself. Katniss Everdeen” (Collins, *The Hunger* 432). However strong and convincing this claim may seem, it is immediately negated by this sentence: “I stare into the mirror as I try to remember who I am and who I am not” (Collins, *The Hunger* 433). Katniss defines herself by what she can see, by the style of her hair, by her face not wearing make-up. She is only able to identify with her old self through the mirror image. She cannot stray from
the world of appearances. She uses the mirror to depict who she really is. She has been perceived through cameras the entire time. Now she substitutes them for the mirror where her reflection can reveal her identity. She remains trapped in Paglia’s world of form and surfaces. Even after the games are over, Katniss continues her fight against becoming the “androgyne of manners.”

When Katniss joins the rebels in the war against the Capitol, she wishes to fight and becomes a soldier. Although she willingly chooses this identity, which suits her much better than the “girl in love” scenario she was forced to play during the games, she learns that even this persona has its limitations. The rebels allow her to become a solider but only on a surface level. She will never get into actual combat but only have her image used for propaganda. Katniss says, “As a rebel, I thought I’d get to look more like myself. But it seems a televised rebel has her own standards to live up to” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 71). In her article “Costuming the Resistance: The Female Spectacle of Rebellion,” Amy L. Montz analyzes Katniss’s role in the resistance against the Capitol and highlights that “[t]he followers of the Mockingjay use Katniss’s female body as the visual and public site of resistance through consistent stylized use of spectacle. And the spectacle is almost always rooted in the fashionable” (140).

Katniss could never really leave behind the influence of the Capitol and its decadent androgyny. It affects her even when she ends up among the rebels. They use the same weapons of manipulation as the Capitol does. They use the power of spectacle. Just as “[f]ashion is the deity of the Wildean world of form” (Paglia 538), Katniss’s image needs to follow the codes of fashion. She needs to maintain the appearance that was crafted for her by the stylists in the Capitol.

This is how she describes one of her soldier makeovers: “Cleaning me up is just a preliminary step to determining my new look. With my acid-damaged hair, sunburned skin and ugly scars, the prep team has to make me pretty and then damage, burn and scar me in a more attractive way” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 71). It is visible here again that form and appearance win the battle. Visual cognition is superior to reality, just as in the Wildean world, where, according to Paglia, “matters of form are uppermost, in life and death. Emotion is nothing, the public impression everything” (537). As the war proceeds, the image of Katniss as a symbol of rebellion becomes more and more vital. She is depersonalized and becomes the Mockingjay, a bird that stands for defiance against the Capitol.
Katniss as a person is no longer important. She could die and still fulfil her mission. The rebels no longer care about her life; they only needed her image to provide a spark for the revolution. Paglia’s suggestion that matters of form surpass the matters of living or dying is directly stated in one of Alma Coin’s speeches: “Dead or alive, Katniss Everdeen will remain the face of this rebellion” (Collins, Mockingjay 343). Katniss is completely stripped of any agency, and her face becomes a possession of the rebels. Paglia writes about “Wildean transformation of content into form, soul into surface” (534). Katniss’s own transformation into the “androgyne of manners” may seem complete when she is hit by one of the parachute bombs and turned into a burning torch. In her agony, Katniss believes her transformation into the symbol of the Mockingjay has been accomplished: “I am Cinna’s bird, ignited, flying frantically to escape something inescapable. The feathers of flame that grow from my body. Beating my wings only fans the blaze. I consume myself, but to no end” (Collins, Mockingjay 407). Then her dying body needs to be saved by the Capitol’s technologies. They use new cells to repair her damaged skin and lungs. Her body is finally in the hands of the Capitol, and they can reinvent it. After the process of healing is finished, Katniss refers to herself as the “fire mutt”—a genetically modified creature invented in the Capitol. Tom Henthorne interprets her metaphor as a sign that Katniss “not only cannot maintain the various identities she has been assigned but has lost her sense of herself” (134).

However, the moment she starts regaining her own agency and presenting herself through her own actions, she stops being this mutation and may return to being Katniss. By killing Alma Coin instead of President Snow, Katniss ultimately breaks the script that was written for her. She manages to escape the theatre where she functioned as Paglia’s “androgyne of manners” by reciting learnt dialogs, faking her emotions, and parading in costumes that were designed for her by others. She spoils their show and reveals that there is a free human spirit hidden in her hybrid body.

Conclusion
In The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins draws our attention to the Capitol, whose aristocratic culture includes a certain insistence on perceiving gender as fluid or arbitrary, and gender roles—or sexual personae—as commodities to be constructed for display, without regard to any emotional or moral
reality and solely for the consumption of an audience. In those respects, it bears some resemblances to the Wildean salon culture that Paglia describes in Sexual Personae. These parallels are significant because they show the evolution of the “androgyne of manners,” who started as a hypocritical aristocratic figure in Paglia’s salon and ended up as a cruel tyrant of Collins’s Capitol. While Paglia’s androgynous figures and their self-indulgent lives and empty performances in the salon are viewed as a form of a silly and harmless comedy, they take the role of oppressors in Suzanne Collins’s literary world. The child tributes are dragged into the “salon” against their will; they are dehumanized and turned into spectacles. Collins’s novels show all the negative aspects of becoming the “androgyne of manners,” who is presented as a figure not only without a specific gender but also without empathy and emotions. She uses Katniss to fight these aristocratic and selfish tendencies of a bourgeois society born in the Victorian salon and reveals how cruel and despotic they have become over time.

Katniss’s heroism lies in her ability to maintain her inner voice and her own integrity and morals despite all manipulations. Through the character of Katniss, Collins exposes and critiques the operations of such a culture, giving the audience a contrasting figure that at times falls victim to these decadent manipulations, but at other times accommodates them tactically for her own purposes, turning them against the aristocrats themselves. Her skill at doing this is central to what Collins presents as her heroism and also points to The Hunger Games’s implicit critique of the media-saturated culture of Katniss’s young contemporaries in real life.
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Adéla Branná is a student of the Ph.D. program in Literatures in English at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno. She holds two master’s degrees. The first master’s degree was earned from the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University in 2013, and she also graduated in Teacher Training in English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in 2015. Both of her diploma theses concerned strong female literary characters and their different strategies of coping with patriarchal oppression. As a Ph.D. student, she is focusing on female monstrosity in literature under the supervision of Professor Milada Franková.

Address: Masaryk University in Brno, Faculty of Arts, Department of English and American Studies, Arna Nováka 1 Brno 602 00, Czech Republic. E-mail: BrannaAdela@seznam.cz
Feminist Voices
in Alice Munro’s Selected Short Stories

Sanja Ignjatović

Abstract • The paper examines the various layers of narratives in selected stories from Alice Munro’s short-story collections *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You* and *Dear Life* from the perspective of relevant feminist issues persisting to this day. By analyzing Munro’s narrative technique in the autodiegetic narratives “Material,” “The Eye,” and “Dear Life,” the paper aims to reveal the personal and the authentic female voices intricately woven into the trivial and mundane story worlds—voices otherwise denied public space. The design of these autodiegetic narratives produces the effect of autobiographical fiction, but it is the seemingly commonplace character-narrators whose authentic discourses ultimately blur the line between fiction and fact. Munro purposefully undermines the autobiographical narrative unity by allowing several female narratives to flow into the main narrative and provide a new space for the examination of gender, gender inequality, and limitations extending to the present day.

Keywords • Alice Munro, short story, narrative, discourse, feminism, gender, gender roles

The discourses relating to Munro’s stories are not visibly radical in their protest against those discourses of power that shape the economic, political, social, or other aspects of everyday life. Quite the contrary, Munro’s discourses can unarguably be seen as chunks of that very discourse-version settled into the routine of everyday business, and additionally juxtaposed to it in the form of autodiegetic fiction featuring the extensive use of focalizing subjects who, without the presumption of authority of any kind, present accounts of their own quests for identity.
Overt criticism of patriarchy and the exclusion of women from the domain of the public, and art, have been tackled by feminist theory and by feminist critics, belonging to various traditions, as the problem of the phallogocentric tradition that upholds the concept of feminine passivity against the male active principle, or, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain it in their essay “The Madwoman in the Attic,” “Male sexuality, in other words, is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power” (364). Of course, their argument can be extended and applied not only to the domain of art or creativity, but to a wider context, and the overall active participation and function of women in the public and private domains.

The goal of this paper, however, is not to focus on the binary opposites exposed by the feminist theory as artificially created and enforced by the patriarchal tradition in order to discourage one and privilege another, but rather to examine the fictional narratives of characters whose existence is limited by that very discourse of power and the nature of discourse in which and by which they operate. The paper aims to reveal the techniques Munro uses to expose the awareness of the imposed boundaries—the boundaries that, in the case of her stories, function as tradition, socio-economic circumstance, or simply forces operating on the level of interpersonal relations in a wider context. These techniques go against the very nature of the prevalent discourse and therefore subvert its power to reinforce cultural, social, and political boundaries aimed at women.

Adrienne Rich can be associated with the tradition of feminist criticism that remains unburdened by the legacy of Deconstruction, the relativization of meaning, and the seemingly positivistic and yet extremely polarizing influences of postmodernism that imply compromises within the discourse of power rather than attempt to change it. In her essay “When We DeadAwaken,” incidentally published two years before Alice Munro published the collection of stories Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You, Rich aims to investigate the roots of “the oppressive nature of male/female relations” and whether the model of oppression is located in the economic system or “the domination of males” (381). This is exactly why the relevance of Adrienne Rich’s ‘feminist manifesto,’ if one could call it like that, cannot possibly be underestimated even in the light of recent feminist theoretical directions. Rich and Munro react to the very same historical, economic, social, and political period. Rich approaches the problematic perception of femininity and female gender roles
not as a critic, but as an artist, as well as Munro, for whom “re-vision” is the “act of survival,” and in a similar vein as New Criticism approaches history and literary texts—with emphasis on re-interpretation. The quest for self-unity is then a quest for liberation from language that entraps women into the language of men: “how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live afresh” (Rich 382). Namely, Munro’s narratives do not at first sight question or examine the feminine space within society. That is, until they are read in a sequence (if not their entirety), they do not uncover the systematic conceptions of identity or the limited scope of personal freedom imposed by societal heritage, tradition, and the patriarchal standard. The personal accounts Munro has produced concern the individual stories of the women Adrienne Rich gives her gratitude to: “the women who are not with us here because they are washing the dishes and looking after the children” (Rich 382), and they are by no means exotic or peculiar, other than in the sense that they are pervasively accepted as the norm. On the contrary, in accordance with the conventions of the literary genre Munro skillfully exploits, the narratives of these women become bleak and disturbing, oppressed by the weight of their own ordinariness. It is exactly this feature that destroys the myths of the patriarchal tradition for it unmask the destructive core which influences all individuals, regardless of gender. Much like Rich, Munro also creates portraits of living, flesh and blood, women—fictional, and yet this-worldly in the sense that they are recognizable. Commenting on the binary opposition presumed between the sexes—female passivity and male activity—Rich notes that “a certain freedom of mind is needed” (385) in order for creative work to be possible. Women are not allowed the luxury of personal space in which their “attention will not be suddenly snatched away” (Rich 385)—by children, by their husbands, by chores, or by impending daily tasks resulting in a trivial existence in which there is no space for any imaginative transformation of reality. For Rich, “writing is re-naming” (385), and yet, there is no freedom for women to explore this space in an active manner.

Munro’s narrative elements in the stories “Material,” “The Eye,” and “Dear Life” will be discussed through the prism of Adrienne Rich’s essay “When We Dead Awaken,” a personal proclamation transcending the categorization of either an artistic or a feminist manifesto, drawing upon such feminist traditions as that of Helene Cixous or Luce Irigaray, and yet claiming no roots in or
requiring any extensive theoretical background. In addition to that, Munro’s narratives will be commented on with a view to the genre conventions, the rhetorical motivation of the author, and with the aim of emphasizing the role of minor characters in the stories as the direct comment of the author.

Genre-wise, the three stories examined in this paper can be categorized as autobiographies or pseudo-autobiographies, and not only because of the specific narrative techniques Munro uses, but rather because autobiographies also resonate with the apparent desire to consolidate personal historical continuity in the three narratives. In fact, the very narrative technique and the purposefulness of its use are, in a way, coextensive. Helga Schwalm in her essay “Autobiography” defines “autobiography as a literary genre [that] signifies a retrospective narrative that undertakes to tell the author’s own life, or a substantial part of it, seeking (at least in its classic version) to reconstruct his/her personal development within a given historical, social and cultural framework.” Given the feminist perspective, this paper focuses on the social dimension because, unarguably, personal narratives such as autobiographies, oral histories, memoirs, etc. all serve to better understand the relationship between individuals and their societies for such narratives are never only individual. In addition to that, being an autodiegetic narrative, autobiography inevitably involves a dualism of sorts—the narrator that focalizes the hero (the self) and produces two typical instances in the course of the narrative: the narrating self and the narrated self (Genette). The discourse produced is both at its end and in the present moment because of the two temporal points recognized in the process of narration, embodied in the subject and object of focalization, as Mieke Bal defines it in her revision of Gerard Genette’s narrative model presented in Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method. Focalization in an autodiegetic narrative may variably shift from the usually ‘younger’ instance of the narrator, the protagonist or main character, to the ‘older’ counterpart—the narrator. Dan P. McAdams in his article “Identity and the Life Story” proposes that the autobiographical form provides an explanation for the self of the present. In addition to that, the causal explanation of the ‘present self’ is also a condition for a ‘unified’ sense of self. “It is an individual’s story which has the power to tie together past, present, and future in his life. It is a story which is able to provide unity and purpose in his or her life” (McAdams, Power, Intimacy 17).
Munro’s fiction is to a large extent self-reflective. Focalization, therefore, occurs not only deliberately, but almost compulsively, which brings into play the numerous minor characters, among others the mother (“Dear Life”) and Sadie (“The Eye”), who in the course of narrated events shed light not only on the narrator, or Munro as the author, but on the social context where women, enclosed in their designated space, suffer a tragic fate either by submitting to the external forces which entrap them in their private domains or, in Rich’s words, render them paralyzed; or the opposite, by transgressing against the norm and bringing upon themselves a metaphorical or literal death, respectively.

The telling of autobiographical stories is a tool that can be used in order to establish, negotiate, and redefine identities. This means that identities are found rather in the way narratives are organized and performed in relation to the ongoing interaction than ‘inside’ the narrative. (Hydén 47)

“Material” is transmitted as a subjective, autodiegetic narrative, and it begins in what is the ‘present’ moment, but goes back some seventeen years into the past to explore the reasons of a failed marriage, but also, perhaps, the stumped personal and professional growth of the main character-narrator, now a middle-aged teacher, married to an engineer, Gabriel, and mother of the seventeen-year-old Clea.

“Material” is at the same time the most direct criticism of conservatism and gender inequality transmitted through an uninterrupted female voice coming from a personal, albeit fictional, experience, but also a skillful narrative representation of a collective voice that exposes the climate in which professional and personal advancement and development are contingent upon the basis of gender. The unnamed main character reads her former husband’s collection of stories, stumbles upon a story she herself provided the “material” for, and feels the urge to express her emotions in a letter to him. The plot revolves around her inability to put into words what she desires to say, so she instead, out of what eventually can be understood not as a practice but rather compulsion, resorts to examining the role of Hugo, her former husband, and the power that he, to an extent, still has over her. In this discourse, Hugo is the symbol of a man whose needs are put over everyone else’s, and therefore he stands for a type. In this sense, some aspects of the story can also be understood as political, as they deal with the position of a woman in a society.
that limits her to a traditional role. More precisely, the hypocrisy the narrative tackles is practiced by the academic community that endorses inequity. The incident which triggers the desire to reflect on her life and the personal failures otherwise ignored happens in the bookshop where Gabriel encourages her to buy Hugo’s latest collection of stories for Clea. Her reading the story that is particularly personal is an introduction into a series of episodes from her life on which she reflects from two perspectives typical of the autobiographical convention. Finally, the confession where she admits her anger at not being allowed to have a career as a writer ensues, and it is there that emotions such as anger and envy reveal the painful personal disappointment.

The narration in “Material” is not entirely reliable. The discourse is uncensored and flows spontaneously from the perspective of an older self. Unarguably, it is one-sided, and yet, it does not aim to mask this feature. The emphasis is not on disguising the focalizing subject’s intentions, but on revealing them, gradually, in a process of self-examination—a process where, basically, the narrated self and the narrating self are commenting on the past experiences and, in the process of writing, reliving them. Therefore, in this process of self-revelation, related in the syntax of frustration, pain, and envy, Munro’s narrator examines the “vain, quarrelsome men . . . cosseted by the academic life, the literary life, by women” (“Material” 28) by examining her own role in the perpetuation of gender inequality, and the naiveté of the younger self that enabled it. The very juxtaposition of “swimming or drinking or going for a walk” (Munro, “Material” 28) with listening to a panel discussion at the University where her former husband Hugo is to discuss a relevant literary issue sets the tone of the entire confession-monologue. The unnamed narrator is the collective voice, rising against the hypocrisy of the normative that exploits the culturally perpetuated, politically upheld, and ideologically fortified inequalities.

The power that these men have is the power women are refused for reasons that can be inferred. If women are “hoping” to ask “intelligent questions” and “not be ridiculous,” then what is insinuated is that women are not as intelligent as men on the “platform.”

People, I say, but I mean women, middle-aged women like me, alert and trembling, hoping to ask intelligent questions and not be ridiculous; soft-haired young girls awash in adoration, hoping to lock eyes with
one of the men on the platform. Girls, women too, fall in love with such men, they imagine there is power in them. (Munro, “Material” 29)

The obvious spatial metaphor is quite adequate to illustrate the inequality in society that women of the “Material” world face in professional terms—women down, men up. In addition to that, by implying that those “bloated” men are “cosseted” (Munro, “Material” 28) by women, retrospectively, the narrator intimates that she was both one of the enablers and victims. It is important to note that these conclusions are made by the older self while the narrated self, the young woman, has no awareness, but rather only suffers, feels anger and powerlessness when faced with the uncontrollable ego of her husband at the time. Later on in the narrative, Dotty, their neighbor at the time, is invoked to illustrate the effect: “Dotty apologized every time, she was scared of Hugo and respectful of his work and his intelligence” (Munro, “Material” 41).

Dotty, a young promiscuous woman, possibly even a prostitute, is intimidated by the writer-husband of the narrator, even though she is quite clueless as to why. She, in fact, is intimidated by the very strength of Hugo’s unrestrained overall appearance and behavior. His need for solitude, the special atmosphere to ‘create,’ dramatic and aggressive outbursts all conspire to induce in her some kind of unknowledgeable fear but also respect. Dotty is a witness to Hugo’s own sense of self-importance and aggressiveness that is glimpsed later on in the narrative. “I [Hugo] arranged so that I could have this afternoon free. That did not just happen. I arranged it. I am at a crucial point, I am at the point where this play lives or dies. If I go down there I’m afraid I might strangle her” (Munro, “Material” 41).

What the unnamed narrator extracts from her memories, the numerous episodes of her married life to Hugo, is what Adrienne Rich calls the “devouring ego.” In her essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” Rich describes the traditional paradigm in which the prerogative of creation is granted to men and expected to be upheld by women without questioning it:

Now, to be maternally with small children all day in the old way, to be with a man in the old way of marriage, requires a holding-back, a putting aside of that imaginative activity, and demands instead a kind of conservatism. I want to make clear that I am not saying that in order to write well, or think well, it is necessary to become unavailable to
others, or to become a devouring ego. This has been the myth of the
masculine artist and thinker. (385)

What Rich calls “the old way of marriage,” the protagonist in “Material”
compares to “permissively reared children.” The behavior of such “imaginative
activity” (Rich 385) that is the prerogative of men remains unquestioned
and their excesses accepted as collateral damage— the burden of the females
they exploit in the process. Munro’s collective voice terms these men “outra-
geous writers” for they suffer from “excess of approval” (“Material” 34), but
the argument extends beyond the realm of art. “He used to smile crookedly
for photographs to hide the right top incisor, dead since somebody at high
school pushed him into a drinking fountain. Now he doesn’t care, he laughs,
he bares those rotting stumps” (Munro, “Material” 33). Hugo is basically pre-
ferred as a caricature of a man—baring “those stumps,” and, of course, this
description comes at a moment when he is already exposed for his numerous
love affairs, divorces, and the neglect of his daughter Clea, for example. The
narrative unarguably guides us to see the story from a particular position.
Even when the narrator admits her emotion-inspired portraiture of Hugo, she
ironically comments that she does not have “the imagination or good will to
proceed differently” implying that she is describing “life”, while “fiction” is
“Hugo’s business” (Munro, “Material” 34). Munro’s narrator is openly amused
at how effortless such a description of Hugo may be achieved, and this is yet
another instance where the technique itself stands as the mirror of truth to
the discourse of power—truth stripped off any ideological boundaries, but
personal.

Her “life” is unimaginative—it is the private domain limited by house-
work and the needs of others, whereas her own aspirations fall short of frui-
tion. This is also ironically illustrated in the very act of her writing Hugo
a letter that is delayed until all the family business has subsided, at which
point inspiration too subsides and turns into bitter and inartistic frustration.
It is also here that Munro’s character-narrator and Rich align. Rich says, “I
felt that I had either to consider myself a failed woman and a failed poet, or
to try to find some synthesis by which to understand what was happening
to me” (385). The social and even peer pressure allows for gender-inspired
stereotypes to be the armature of female identity causing what Rich calls
“discontinuity of female life” (385).
The practice of re-naming reality is in Munro’s “Material” depicted in the episode where both the narrator and her husband engage in a game of creating original “phrases in common” (“Material”37) to describe their world. Hugo, however, elevates this practice to art, in which those same phrases become the building blocks of his stories. The younger self of the narrator never clearly voices her failed ambitions—they somehow must remain untold, as if naming them would destroy the foundations of the acquired reality. The character of the mother in “Dear Life” similarly keeps golf clubs in plain sight even though they are never used, nor was there ever any opportunity for the kind of life that included them to draw the family out of the farm life she clearly despises and rejects.

The personal narrative is craftily shaped from fragments of memory that need not be artistically reworked for the purpose of a letter, but it is exactly the style and the effort that lead to the conclusion that Munro’s collective voice here echoes Rich’s seeking and demanding “a certain freedom of mind” (385), or even before that, Virginia Woolf’s demand for “a room of one’s own” (561). Women, disciplined to assume their passive roles and forced into holding back their individuality and potential subversive creativity that could re-shape primarily their own perception and then re-shape and re-name reality as such, are given the choice either to conform, or to renounce their femininity in the discourse that is supposedly universal only in its masculine form, or rather maternity and motherhood for it is not equally shared. “Don’t be offended. Ironical objections are a habit with me. I am half-ashamed of them” (Munro, “Material”51).

What for Hugo turns out to be “a paying investment”—their broken marriage, the struggles over the years—for the narrator “now” is “useless baggage” for she is neither a writer, nor has she gained any recognition for the experience and labor of the married years. The impossibility of writing a coherent letter to Hugo is emphasized by her frantic irony and at the same time by an artistic, metaphorical, paralysis. The inability to write to her own satisfaction lies also in the inadequacy of words that she could use—she describes rather than writes. However, Luce Irigaray in her essay “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine” claims that “to play with mimesis” is a way by which women re-assume their position within the discourse in the sense that they do not become absorbed by it, but rather unmask those features of it that remain invisible to the masculine eye. She goes on to
say, “It also means ‘to unveil’ the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply absorbed by this function. They also remain elsewhere...” (378).

Ironically, the “devouring ego” of Hugo is perceived as similar to that of Gabriel—a gentler and more understanding husband who is nowhere near as exotic in terms of social recognition or his profession. “In their limited and precarious ways they both have authority. They are not at the mercy. Or think they are not. I can’t blame them...” (Munro, “Material”51–52). What the narrator suggests is that women do not have the authority to create the atmosphere that writing requires—the personal space. The two entirely different men, a university professor and an engineer, both have the power to enforce their ego simply on the basis of gender and without it being questioned. What the narrator specifically finds blasphemous in her second husband is his unforced and spontaneous ability to be “happy,” therefore revealing the tragic irony of her two extreme choices resulting in the same loss—that of freedom. The sudden awareness of her apparent powerlessness results in an affective outburst: “I do blame them. I envy and despise” (Munro, “Material”52).

The character of the mother appears in the last four stories of the Dear Life collection termed by Munro herself “autobiographical in feeling” (255), but the character type is not restricted to this collection. Rather, the narrator of “Material” and the character of the mother share the same paralysis, but suffer different consequences in their inability to change their individual fates. “The Eye” and “Dear Life” do not, at first glance, revolve around the narrator-author’s mother. On the contrary, the very convention of the genre gives primacy to the narrator-author, who recalls episodes from her past and comments on them from different perspectives. On the other hand, the inevitable inflow of the unexpected biography of the mother creates a bridge between different worlds—the different stages of the narrator-levels—and reveals a significant, yet not as striking, shift in lifestyle, values, and understanding of what may appear a distant cultural artifact, but in reality stands for an enduring tradition and a contemporary issue.

The story begins with the narrator’s mother being presented as an “ominous presence”—the unquestionable authority on all matters, but not authority “feared.” The mother-figure is soon contrasted to Sadie, an episodic character, who introduces a change not only in the household, but, in a broader context, also in the perception of what is acceptable behavior for women. Sadie is a
rebellious teenager whose language greatly differs from the norm the narrator’s mother approves of. Moreover, she is a young farm girl who behaves in a way that necessarily invites the attention of local women. Ironically, of course, the stereotypes that apply to Sadie’s being discriminated against by the narrator’s mother are aligned and based on the same premise the mother herself is discriminated against—individuality. Playing the guitar, singing on the popular local radio station, and frequenting dance clubs are Sadie’s ‘sins.’ Being a woman implies uniformity pertaining to behavior, appearance, values, and tenacity in upholding tradition. The extent and power of Munro’s irony cannot be fully grasped or enjoyed on individual occasions or in the individual comments. It is rather the bigger picture that, on the one hand, provides criticism against the hypocrisy appropriated by women and exerted on each other; and on the other, the tragedy of the lack of awareness of the seemingly innocent or moral daily practices. This attitude of compliance and aggressiveness, an everyday concoction of small-town morality, insincerity, and double standards enacted by and upon fellow-women, is illustrated in the opening lines of “The Eye”:

And in my interpretation of the picture that hung at the foot of my bed, showing Jesus suffering the little children to come unto him. Suffering meant something different in those days, but that was not what we concentrated on. My mother pointed out the little girl hiding round a corner because she wanted to come to Jesus but was too shy. That was me, my mother said, and I supposed it was though I wouldn’t have figured it out without her telling me and I rather wished it wasn’t so.

(258)

The child-narrator in “The Eye” recognizes the problematic notion of “suffering,” and Munro skillfully adds to its irony by relating it to yet more illustrations of how actual suffering is neither properly named nor properly attended. Interestingly, the ironic, playful, and occasionally sarcastic narrator, Munro, focalizes the first-person narrative through different characters rendering the temporal distance almost irrelevant. The child’s first steps into religion are at the same time, in a broader context, the first steps into the realization that personal identity may be understood differently by her mother. This means that the authority, or “the ominous presence,” demands something different to be understood as natural, or later on, moral—the norm—the mold against which identity is shaped. Sadie is particularly important in the relationship
between the mother and the narrator as a child because she presents a possible outcome of what her mother would consider bad parenting. Sadie’s ‘celebrity’ status, initially ignored by the mother, becomes an excuse for the demonization of what the young woman epitomizes and what seems to be too liberal at that moment. The mother uses her behavior as a negative example and her death as a deterrent. However, Sadie’s influence on the child is also cleverly used by the mother as a pretext for yet another attempt to convince her husband that moving to the local town would have a beneficial effect on their daughter’s education and overall behavior for, ironically, it would be too liberal of her to admit to having ambitions and preferences of her own. The idea or ambition, however, remains unrealized.

Sadie’s account of her dance club adventures is related through the child’s eyes and remains only partially understood. The young girl at the time cannot understand what it means to “jab” the young men when they transgress the limits, nor does she understand the notion of having to “bolt home” or not being “caught.” “She wasn’t like some, she said. She didn’t mean to get caught” (Munro, “The Eye”262). When Sadie is run over one night coming home from the dance club, the women in the community are not outraged or disconsolate by the tragedy, but by the shame of her not being in the company of a man her age as her protector: “‘A girl without a boyfriend going to dances on foot,’ said the woman who was still being friends with my mother. She spoke quite softly and my mother murmured something regretful” (Munro, “The Eye”266–267).

The child is taken to the funeral by her mother against her will in order to see the consequences of such behavior. The death of Sadie, similarly to the exile of the local prostitute mentioned in one of the other stories, is considered a punishment for the sin of immorality—the disregard of the norm. Ironically, the very event—the funeral—triggers another memory in the narrator and that is the discussion between her parents about the mother taking the car and taking the child to the funeral. For the father such an act is completely unnecessary—a woman driving a car, alone and with a child—is in itself an act of rebellion, or simply an unnecessary whim on the part of the woman: “My mother wanted something very badly. Was it nice friends? Women who played bridge and had husbands who went to work in suits with vests? Not quite, and no hope of that anyway” (Munro, “Dear Life”263). At this point, the narrator is commenting from the perspective of the older self, having the distance and the knowledge to understand both what was attempted by the
mother, but also what was not clearly named. What is recurring is the image of the mother whose hands are full—at the time with another baby, the laundry washed manually, or the dishes, or work around the farm—all preventing her from having the autonomy to deal with her own aspirations. Even in the context of this story alone, albeit the mastery of narrative and focalizing ‘tricks,’ Munro employs to create the effect the genre requires, it is impossible to simplify the mother’s attitude towards Sadie as merely being reflective of high moral standards. On the other hand, the complete portrait of this former school-teacher and mother of three, who could never fit in or be to the liking of her own or her husband’s family, becomes revealed in “Dear Life.”

Structure-wise, “Dear Life” features a series of analepses presented by the narrator from the period of time ranging from the character’s mid-teens to, probably, early twenties when she marries and leaves for Vancouver. Moreover, a significant, effect-creating ‘event’ is embedded. It is important to note that it is only at this point in “Dear Life,” as the last in the series, that it is revealed that the narrator is focalizing from the vantage point of an older woman whose mother is long gone. The typical single-effect event, or epiphany, is not provided as the main story, but as a commentary by the narrating self. The embedded narrative is a seemingly unrelated story of which the narrator’s mother and a certain neighbor are participants. The incident described there is in fact the very beginning of a series, and it involves a mentally deranged elderly woman, the neighbor, who intrudes on the narrator’s mother inside the family house—an incident misconstrued, for the unfortunate woman is the former inhabitant of the house, looking for her own child in frenzy. The very idea that the story of that family house begins and ends with madness is disturbing. Both women implicated by pure circumstance in the incident would remain stuck and paralyzed in the space of the house—their limited space. Metaphorically, the narrator herself was paralyzed, too: being overwhelmed by the daily routine and dissatisfied with her own creative flow—“so busy with my own young family and my own invariably unsatisfactory writing” (Munro, “Dear Life”318).

Moreover, “Dear Life,” although it goes back in time to re-examine events belonging to the past, yet again resonates with the same collective voice related in “Material” because the standpoint of the narrator is not that of the past, but rather of the older self, who, in the process of narrative creation, the storytelling process, sifts through memories and reconsiders her position.
In fact, the three exemplary stories examined in this paper, among a series of other stories from different collections, uncover the tenacity with which tradition and traditional roles persist over a period of at least six decades of the twentieth century, but extend to the twenty-first as well. The contrast between the setting in “Material” and the stories from Dear Life, granted, is only found in the setting. Whereas the setting of the latter is a small-town farm, the setting of the former is an urban area with a much developed academic community. It is not difficult to notice the connectedness of the character of the mother and the narrator of the “Material.” They are both teachers, both stunted in their professional growth and both paralyzed by marriage and the sense of inadequacy that continuously triggers the impulse to digress and return to the crossroads point where things could have gone a different way. Both women are controlled by the men in their lives. The compliance that permits their ambitions to be influenced and ultimately renounced, or denied, is addressed tentatively in “Material,” while the mother’s narrative excludes even the possibility or notion of rebellion. She approaches her husband as the ultimate authority on all questions pertaining to her own life and the life of the family, although no resentment is ever openly mentioned. The resentment which, on the other hand, oozes from the space between the lines of “Material” is indicative of the transformation in the awareness of one’s own self-worth. Both in “Material” and “Dear Life,” men are contented with their lifestyle and the distribution of power, regardless of the economic status or any other aspect of life.

The epiphanic moment closes “Dear Life” and the narrative of the mother, but extends to the narrator whose quest for unity and identity results in a kind of acceptance of failure and the circumstances: “We say of some things that they can’t be forgiven, or that we will never forgive ourselves. But we do—we do it all the time” (Munro, “Dear Life” 319). Essentially, Munro’s narrators discover the problematic necessity to resist culture and tradition, but also the coextensive renunciation and isolation followed by this necessity. The complex matter of personal choice in a society that breeds and fully accepts only conformity figures as the underlying challenge of the daily life of Munro’s narrator-characters (and characters). In this sense, these women’s struggles unveil the systematically imposed negative conceptions of identity, as well as their never-ending compulsion to re-evaluate them by re-evaluating their own life narratives. This re-evaluation takes the form of storytelling.
that serves the purpose of not justifying the personal sense of failure per se, but rather uncovering the roots of the madness that the accrued failures seem to present to them. Namely, Lars-Christer Hydén, one of the authors in *Beyond Narrative Coherence*, claims that dementias “generally imply either a disruption or a gradual change of identities” (40) and that the effort put into telling and re-telling of memories, turning them into narratives, is a process by which the disruption is overcome at least momentarily.

Sometimes narratives become part of the illness process. This is especially true when a person’s ability to tell and use stories is affected by the disease, and the telling of stories at the same time becomes a central part of the life with the disease. (Hydén 40)

The practice of telling and re-telling stories does not only imply the person with the illness expressing themselves using language or even body language, but also hearing their stories through other people’s voices—giving them a sense of credibility and reliability.

In “Dear Life” it is the narrator, decades later, that goes back to “interpreting” her mother’s narrative as a way of re-interpreting her own. Storytelling is used as a tool that directs the impulse to reassess the discourse by properly understanding the present and by ensuring the existence not only of continuity but, more importantly, of the historical sense, much in the vein of Adrienne Rich. It also grants a creative release to the urge to reassess the nature of relation to the dominant discourse in the vein of Irigaray, encircling the three stories of women, of different generations and perspectives, from the viewpoint of a child without a developed sense of what womanhood entails in a society hierarchically positioning one gender over the other in “The Eye”; through the eyes of a woman desperately seeking a way to advance in a society where her role is limited to sustaining the equilibrium between survival and traditional role in “Dear Life”; and a woman who, although well aware of the double standard and the hypocrisy of equality, ultimately only discovers herself to be incapable of a creative endeavor and rants in frustration (see Munro, “Material”).

The compliance, or rather the absorption into the traditional role, is best exemplified by the manner in which the narrator in “Dear Life” recognizes the roots of her own, perhaps under the circumstance, justified ‘passivity.’ The very cultural conditioning places women in the position to choose, inexcusably, between the extremes of being considered perfect mothers, wives,
daughters, all assuming certain patterns of behavior artificially placed to restrict movement—social, political, and other.

The character of the mother is the most poignant because the reader is presented with the unfortunate resolution of her personal drama. In her forties, the age the narrator in “Dear Life” has long outlived, and the age that the narrator of “Material” is currently most likely in, she is diagnosed with Parkinson’s—a disease that, on the physical, literal, level, renders her paralyzed and, on the metaphorical level, parallels the collective condition of arrested identities, women submerged in the dishwater, indiscernible from the objects surrounding them in their limited private spaces. Battling the illness, the mother speaks of “her struggle to get to high school,” and, among other things, “the friends she had at a normal school” (Munro, “Dear Life”315)—relating in chunks of memories the personal struggles essential to her personal development, however failed.

Hydén suggests in his essay “Identity, Self, Narrative” that one of the possible ways in which a narrative can be interpreted is not as a “finished” but an “ongoing” product of the social circumstances that produce it:

In this way telling an autobiographical story is a move in an ongoing interaction with other participants, a move that aims at redefining the relationships between the participants. (Hydén 47)

The mother’s storytelling practice is directed primarily at her daughter in an attempt to find the common grounds for better understanding, but also a warning against the imminent threat of being frozen in time, digressing and re-living one and the same fulfilling experience as contrasted to decades of struggle and failure. In the abovementioned essay, Hydén indicates that it is not only important what the story tells, but also “the way stories are told, received and negotiated” (47)—to regard stories as accounts of social “performance and action,” and “to challenge the traditional literary idea about narratives, and regard narratives as storytelling” (47.). In this sense, it is not unexpected that the character’s mother holds on to one story she feels is defining—personally and socially.

In one of the episodes in “Dear Life,” Munro contemplates on the “very new looking golf bag, with the golf clubs and balls inside” (303), in a corner of the dining room, never once used but simply collecting dust there as a reminder of what her mother might have dreamed of for her husband and herself. The younger-self’s comment that people who played golf “were not
people who wore overalls” (Munro, “Dear Life” 303) suggests a discrepancy in the reality the mother desired and lived. Even for the child, the idea of her mother playing golf is unimaginable, and this testifies to an awareness both of conditioning and social boundaries. The aspirations elicited by the deceitful concept of vertical mobility are not only frustrated and overturned into a form of drudgery and ultimately madness for this particular woman, or the collective voice of the period, but they are also indicative of the methodical indoctrination that disallows individuals of any gender to break free from uniformity unharmed. The perpetuation of the system belongs to the family from this viewpoint. It is in the very family that this conditioning takes place and it is also where the discourse of power exerts its strongest influence, and Munro illustrates the impotence of women by presenting the debris of her mother’s shattered dreams in the form of objects collecting dust in the dark corners of the living room, and subtly creating a parallel to the immovable and useless body of the mother herself—ultimately an object without a practical purpose:

She must have thought differently at one time. She must have thought that she and my father were going to transform themselves into a different sort of people, people who enjoyed a degree of leisure. Golf. Dinner parties. Perhaps she had convinced herself that certain boundaries were not there. (Munro, “Dear Life” 304)

In an almost anecdotal tone, the narrator in “Dear Life” gives an account of the “misgivings” she remembers or believes could have been the reason for a certain animosity not only in the wider family circle, for her relatives could not approve or understand the way she spoke (304), but by extension the neighborhood as well. Her mother’s cooking is scrutinized with the view of the standard set for her by her female predecessors, her appearance is contrasted to that of the local women. The fact that she diverges from the standard of her own social status, but also from the norms pertaining to it, albeit the compromises and sacrifices accepted in their name, suggests the extent to which renunciation of personal freedom and individual expression are not only desired, but considered obligatory.

In the final lines of the mother’s portrait, Munro intrudes into the narrative by providing a striking, and ambiguous, comment that could be interpreted both literally and figuratively. Namely, the reduction of this woman to a housewife, and the limitation of her space to the interior of the house—the
isolation—correlates, ironically, with the nature of her illness and the gradual, yet long, decline of her capacities and physical power. Her mother’s “afternoon dress, even if she was only washing things at the sink” is commented on by the relatives, along with the “misgivings about [her] cooking,” as a “fault” for not looking like “what she was” (Munro, “Dear Life” 312). The mother’s being brought up on a farm implied a comportment that would not resist remaining on one—not changing into an afternoon dress, nor talking in a way that would imply a certain degree of sophistication, and these restrictions, among others, are imposed by the wider family circle and society.

Munro’s comment on the endurance of her mother’s body to sustain the illness, that “she held on to some strength in herself for a surprisingly long time” (“Dear Life” 308), correlates, perhaps, to her endurance in the struggle for personal liberation and emancipation. Ulrica Skagert in *Possibility-Space and Its Imaginative Variations in Alice Munro’s Short Stories* indicates that the power of Munro’s fiction is in her ability to “transform” reality into art by revealing the “shocking business of real life” located under the surface. By relating her mother’s illness, and the inner struggle to prolong life and her mental capacities, strategically to her great efforts to advance socially and exert her authentic individuality, Munro emphasizes the importance of a unified existence—much in the manner of Rich. Any division or compromise reducing an individual to a mere gender role, metaphorically, leads to madness. In “Material” it is envy and resentment that paralyze and prevent authentic, creative, life-affirming action, whereas in “Dear Life” compliance leads to paralysis—not only mental, but literal, physical, passivity.

Skagert’s description of Munro’s work as revealing the “shocking business of real life” can also be extended to include and complement, for the purposes of conclusion, Virginia Woolf’s comment on gender in her essay “A Room of One’s Own,” where she says,

> At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial – and any question about sex is that – one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can give one’s audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is to contain more truth than fact. (561)

What is essentially subversive in Alice Munro’s narratives is, on the one hand, the technique she employs to induce interpellation in the reader—the
technique which is direct, devoid of excessive embellishment or ornament; but personal and “mimicking,” in Irigaray’s sense, the discourse of power that penetrates individuals through culture and tradition. However, this technique of “mimicking,” enhanced by the authenticity of subject and character, does not relate truth directly itself, but rather, as Woolf suggested six and more decades earlier, serves to encourage an interpretation of one’s own on the basis not of factual veracity, but of the credibility and veracity of the presented. The feminist in Munro is evident not in her choice of characters, although they are surely women whose unfortunate or disturbing life narratives are related so as to center attention to a more collective theme and issue. The feminist aspect of Munro’s work is made manifest by the subtle method of uncovering the way in which the patriarchal society conceals and disguises its own brutality on the basis of economic, class, gender, and other differences in its hierarchical configuration; and uncovering by showing how what Rich calls “fragments and scraps” of “common consciousness and a common theme” (386) becomes thwarted from fully developing into an awareness of self by forces, both external and internal, which conceptually, functionally, and morally define women’s identity.
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Sanja Ignjatović is a Ph.D. student at the Philology Department and a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš for the Canadian Studies and British Studies courses, but also Contemporary English 1, 2 and 5. Her main fields of interest include the short story as a genre, its contemporary forms, as well as theory of literature and cognitive poetics.

Address: University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of English Language, Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18000 Niš, Serbia. E-mail: sania.ignjatovic@gmail.com
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN ELMER RICE’S STREET SCENE AND BETH HENLEY’S CRIMES OF THE HEART

SANJA MATKOVIĆ

ABSTRACT • Applying sociopsychological research, this paper deals with the causes and effects of domestic violence in two American plays written fifty years apart: Elmer Rice’s Street Scene (1929) and Beth Henley’s Crimes of the Heart (1979). In both plays, the main causes of male domestic violence are alienation, caused by urbanization of the modern times, and patriarchal values. However, while the female reaction to male domestic violence in Street Scene is submission, Crimes of the Heart shows that certain social changes have taken place in the meantime; namely, the battered wife responds with female domestic violence, which displays different characteristics than male violence. In addition, it is claimed that there are double standards in the assessment of male and female domestic violence in these plays: male violence suggests an effort to establish control while female violence signifies that the perpetrator is crazy and losing control.

KEYWORDS • Street Scene, Crimes of the Heart, domestic violence, male violence, female violence, patriarchal values

INTRODUCTION

“To designate a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell’s flames. Still, it seems a good in itself to acknowledge, to have enlarged, one’s sense of how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world we share with others.” (Sontag 114)
Domestic violence has been a serious problem throughout human history because even laws have allowed, if not encouraged, domestic violence against women. To illustrate, husbands had the right to beat or kill their wives for offenses ranging from insults to adultery, whereas such punishment was not imposed on men. Such cases are to be found, for example, in the Code of Hammurabi, in the laws of Ancient Rome as well as in the Anglo-American common law. However, it was only in the 1970s that serious attempts to recognize and stop domestic violence appeared. Statistics on domestic violence differ, but according to Roberts, every nine seconds an intimate partner assaults or abuses a woman in the USA, woman battering/intimate partner violence is prevalent in the lifetime of 25 percent of American couples, and about eight million women annually are abused by their intimate partners (61), which proves that domestic violence is still a serious problem.

Since plays reflect and criticize the values of a society as well as human nature, they naturally also deal with the topic of domestic violence through the interpretation of the playwrights influenced by the beliefs of their own time period. Two American plays with similar topics, one from the first and the other from the second half of the twentieth century, have been chosen for the analysis of the causes and effects of male versus female domestic violence. The first one is *Street Scene*, a play from 1929, written by Elmer Rice, which addresses violence against a woman in the first half of the twentieth century. In spite of the quality and importance of Rice’s work, he became forgotten during time, and there are unfortunately only a few books about his opus.1 The second play analyzed in this paper is *Crimes of the Heart*, a black comedy from 1979 written by Beth Henley, which deals with an attempted murder of an abusive husband. These two plays were chosen on the basis of their quality; both of them won the Pulitzer Prize, they ran for more than five hundred performances, and both of them were adapted for the screen. In these plays, written in the interval of fifty years, the causes of male domestic violence remain similar, while female reaction to it changes from submission to female domestic violence, which reflects the social changes that happened in the meantime.

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1 In 1965 Robert Hogan reports on the lack of articles on Rice and on the absence of his texts in anthologies and textbooks (142-4). Until today, more than fifty years later, Rice’s status has not changed. Hogan explains that Rice has been neglected due to the deficiency of intelligent criticism (9) and due to the fact that theatre is considered to be news instead of art in the USA, which means that people are more interested in new dramas than in old pieces (5).
In *Street Scene*, Rice’s main intention was to faithfully depict daily life in a New York tenement during the 1920s. Its theme—the tragic destiny of a married couple—corresponds to that of a great tragedy and tragicomedy because it affirms human values and deeply moves its audiences (Hogan 52). In order to analyze domestic violence in *Street Scene*, the marriage and the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Maurrant, who are involved in domestic violence, will be explained first.

Mr. Maurrant is described as having “a rugged, grim face” (14), an appearance corresponding to his nature as a bad-tempered and authoritarian person. As such, he is suspicious of people using their personal freedom and expressing their emotions (Adler 42), especially when it comes to his wife and children. On one occasion he tells his wife: “A woman’s got a right to stay in her own home, lookin’ after her husband an’ children.” (Rice 82), which is a statement that best describes his attitude toward his family. Throughout the novel, he blames and scolds his wife because their children, including their grown-up and employed daughter, are not home, making statements such as: “It is a mother’s place to know what her daughter’s doin’” (15). From his words and behavior, it is obvious that he supports patriarchal values, believing that he, as paterfamilias, has a right to rule over his family and that marriage gives him even the power of life and death (cf. Rice 126), as it becomes apparent in the end.

Mrs. Maurrant’s personality is the exact opposite of her husband’s. Namely, she is a very kind and sympathetic woman, who wants to enjoy life. She longs for love, peace, and togetherness, the values she misses in her married life, contemplating the importance of them on several occasions throughout the play. Her need for love and a kind word from her husband is best reflected in her following statement: “They [people] don’t realize that everybody wants a kind word, now and then. After all, we’re all human, and we can’t just go along by ourselves, all the time, without ever getting a kind word” (Rice 16). Mrs. Maurrant’s feeling of deep loneliness in marriage, as well as awareness that her husband does not love her, are a source of her profound unhappiness. She explains to her daughter Rose that she has always tried to be a good wife, but that it has never seemed to make any difference to her husband (Rice 87–88). Since Mr. Maurrant unjustifiably believes that he has always been a good husband, Rose explains to him, “It’s somebody to be sort of nice
to her that she wants—sort of nice and gentle, the way she is to you” (Rice 83). Because of the intense feeling of loneliness, Mrs. Maurrant involves in an affair with a man called Sankey, which becomes a public secret. In spite of the immorality of their relationship, Mrs. Maurrant’s loneliness is so dramatized that she is unlikely to be judged harshly by the audience (Adler 43) but rather sympathized with. When Rose tells her mother that Sankey should not come so often because she is afraid what her father will do if he starts drinking, her mother replies that she understands, after which she invites Sankey to talk to him. Since this invitation takes place right after Mrs. Maurrant’s conversation with her daughter, it is very probable that Mrs. Maurrant invites Sankey to tell him that they cannot see each other anymore. Nevertheless, Mr. Maurrant unexpectedly comes home drunk and shoots his wife and her lover, as their neighbors have been predicting throughout the story.

According to research, women are almost ten times more likely to be victims of domestic violence (Ajduković et al. 57), and male violence is more damaging than female violence (Tracy 573). In fact, men are twenty times more often perpetrators of homicides or serious bodily injuries (Ajduković 38). These statistical data make the murder of Mrs. Maurrant, a victim of domestic violence with a fatal outcome perpetrated by her husband, a textbook example. Furthermore, unlike female violence, which will be discussed later, male violence is said to be committed in order to establish control (Tracy 574). Similarly, Tracy reports that “threats to their [abusive men’s] control of the relationship must be dealt by force if necessary” (583). It can thus be deduced that by murdering his wife and her lover, Mr. Maurrant tries to establish power over his wife and her adulterous behavior, which represents a threat to his control of the marriage.

According to feminists, the main cause of domestic violence against women is patriarchy, a system that implies male superiority over men’s wives and children, who are considered to be their property. Since Mr. Maurrant acts in accordance with patriarchal values and rules over his family as if he owns it, disregarding the possibility of him not being a good husband and father, there is no doubt that patriarchy is one of the causes of his crime. However, is it the only one? Discussing the relationship between patriarchy and domestic violence, Steven R. Tracy raises a question: “If patriarchy is the ultimate cause of all violence against women, then why is it that on an annual basis 90% of all North American men do not abuse women?” (578).
He rightfully claims that domestic violence is multifactorial, and that there are also biological (brain structure, functioning, and hormones), intrapsychic (personality and attachment disorders), and social factors (childhood experiences of violence) involved (Tracy 579). Some of the factors other than patriarchy will be discussed below.

Domestic violence can appear in all socioeconomic groups (Ventura and Miller 639). However, it is prevalent in lower-class families and communities (Ventura and Miller 639), an example of which is the family presented in Street Scene. The Maurrants belong to the lower class since they dwell in a poor and “mean quarter of New York” (Rice 5), surrounded by other families that also live in modest conditions. Besides the economic situation, another risk factor both for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence is lack of education, which is defined by some scholars as less than a high school diploma and by others as less than a college degree (McMullan 268). This factor also exists in Street Scene since Mr. Maurrant is described by one of the neighbors as “an illiterate rough neck” (72), while Mrs. Maurrant is a housewife from the beginning of the twentieth century, which indicates a probability that she is not educated.

Furthermore, the risk of dying from domestic violence increases if there are events triggering jealousy, and the perpetrator believes his partner is leaving him for somebody else (Campbell, Sharps, and Glass 398). This motif is also present in Street Scene since Mrs. Maurrant’s affair is a trigger for jealousy and violence.

Another factor connected to lethal domestic violence is alcohol. Stalans reports that approximately 40 percent of men convicted of murdering their female partners were intoxicated when they committed the crime (696). Mr. Maurrant admits that he was drunk at the time of the murder, but he says that he was out of his mind, and regrets having murdered his wife. However, according to Stalans, “[a]lcohol does not cause biochemical changes that increase aggression; instead, people’s expectations about the effects of alcohol determine the relationship between alcohol and IPV [intimate partner violence]” (697). This means that alcohol is only Mr. Maurrant’s excuse for planned violence (cf. Stalans 698), since he most probably knew about his wife’s infidelity, hinting to it throughout the play and coming home unexpectedly shortly after he had left for work.
Since in *Street Scene* Rice provides a realistic representation of daily life, it can be deduced that he considers domestic violence a realistic part of life in poor immigrant urban neighborhoods in the USA in the 1920s. The topics he writes about are timeless, but he still depicts a certain time that is, among other things, represented in Mr. Maurrant’s patriarchal attitudes and behavior toward his wife and children. Although unhappy, Mrs. Maurrant does not stand up for herself or her children; instead, her rebellion consists in her unlucky choice to cheat on her abusive husband with a married man. Apart from depicting the problems of a patriarchal society, Rice criticizes the influence of urban society on lower classes. It is evident that Rice blames urbanization for his characters’ alienation, resulting in violence in the Maurrants’ case, since Rose, the most reasonable and virtuous character, suggests moving to the suburbs as a solution to her family’s problems. At the end of the play, a Jewish neighbor Kaplan comments on the tragic event in the following way: “How ken ve call ourselves civilized, ven ve see thet sax jealousy hes de power to avaken in us de primitive pessions of de sevege? [sic]” (Rice 125), thus implying that domestic violence is primitive behavior, which does not belong to the civilized world.² Despite Hogan’s claim that *Street Scene* proves that “people inevitably destroy themselves, that they carry in themselves the seeds of their brutality” so they “cannot avoid hurting each other” (51), people are nevertheless reasonable beings able to control their urges and passions. Evidence that *Street Scene* actually proves that people can decide to make good decisions and refuse appealing, but immoral temptations is the Maurrants’ daughter Rose. The play ends when Rose refuses her mother’s way and rejects her boss’s tempting but immoral offer (Nikčević 200). She also rejects the boy with whom she shares a mutual liking since she does not want him to give up his education because of her, but tells him that their parting does not have to be forever. She proves that, unlike her mom, young girls of that time are no longer soft and helpless but know how to take care of themselves (Rice 84). Being such a strong young woman, after the destruction of her family, she decides to get out of New York with her brother, because she believes that life would be better in the suburbs. Rose represents a new generation of women—women who decide to take their destinies in their own hands because she knows that happiness depends on people themselves.

² Since Kaplan is “an atheist Jew,” like Rice, Kaplan’s comments on the world very likely embody Rice’s message, reflecting his attitude on certain issues.
CRIMES OF THE HEART (1979)

Fifty years later, some things changed regarding women’s roles in society and family, but domestic violence is still largely present both in real life and in drama. One such example is found in Crimes of the Heart, a play from the 1970s, in which quite a similar situation to the one from Street Scene is described, but with a different outcome, which makes this play and domestic violence in it more complex.3

One of the main characters in Crimes of the Heart is Babe, a young woman married to a lawyer Zackery, the richest and the most powerful man in Hazelhurst. However, Babe has been continually physically and mentally abused by him, but she keeps it a secret. To her sister’s question why Zackery has been violent against her, as if he had to have a good reason, she admits that she does not know, that he started hating her because she could not laugh at his jokes. It seems that Babe’s grandfather urged her to marry Zackery in order to “skyrocket right to the heights of Hazelhurst society,” observing that “Zackery was just the right man for her whether she knew it or not” (Henley 16). Old Granddaddy’s comments reveal that Babe most probably did not marry Zackery out of love, which is a theory supported by Plunka, who claims that “there is no evidence that they ever loved each other” (81). Babe, often alone at home, feels incredibly lonely and alienated. Zackery’s emotional distance from Babe, creating a void in her life, is emphasized by his absence from the stage (Bigsby 335; Plunka 81). Throughout the play, he remains offstage: he is only talked about, and he talks to Babe on the telephone. Because of Babe’s intense feeling of loneliness, she engages in an affair with a fifteen-year-old black boy Willie Jay. It is evident that so far the situation resembles to a great extent the one from Street Scene. One day, she and Willie Jay are playing with a dog when Zackery comes home although he was supposed to be at office. He punches Willie Jay and pushes him down the porch steps, threatening him not to come to his house anymore, after which Willie Jay escapes. Provoked by that, Babe takes a gun, and her first thought is to commit suicide, but she then thinks of her mother, who killed herself after her husband had left her. She realizes that both she and her mother in fact wanted to kill their husbands, so she shoots Zackery, wounding him.

3 According to Eagleton, tragedy does not die in the twentieth century, but it mutates into modernism (206), a literary period to which Crimes of the Heart belongs.
Suicidal thoughts, according to Ulsperger, may be triggered by mental and physical abuse by a partner (319). This factor is present in Babe’s case, and the last straw in her abusive marriage is represented by her husband’s physical assault on Willie Jay. Furthermore, Ulsperger identifies other factors relevant for the occurrence of suicidal thoughts, i.e. genetics and mental disorders such as anxiety and depression (319). If Ulsperger’s theory is applied to *Crimes of the Heart*, it is apparent that Babe may have a genetic predisposition for suicidality due to a case of suicide in her family history, which occupies Babe’s thoughts throughout the play. Besides the suicidal thoughts after the incident with Willie Jay and Zackery, Babe unsuccessfully attempts to take her life later in the play, first by hanging herself, and then by sticking her head in an oven. Depression, the second factor identified by Ulsperger, may be present in Babe’s case, too. Considering that Ulsperger suggests ongoing abuse as a possible cause of depression (319), this mental disorder might have developed in Babe due to continual domestic abuse. In brief, domestic violence, which may have led to depression, and a family history of suicide, are possible reasons for Babe’s suicide attempts.

Unlike male violence, which is committed in order to establish control, according to Ajduković, female violence is usually used in self-defense and to stop violence (38). Ogle reports that women rarely kill, but in the cases they do, they mostly kill their abusers in order to survive. They kill in their home and without co-conspirators. Women killers are usually provoked by their victims, and they do not plan the murder in advance, but kill in sudden aggression. They tend to be more traditional in their sex roles, and at the time of the homicide they were mostly suffering from depression (87–88). It is apparent that the majority of these factors play a role in Babe’s murder attempt, which could have ended as a murder if her hands were not shaking while she was aiming at Zackery. She tries to kill her abusive husband by herself in their home, not planning it before, but is provoked by Zackery’s assault on Willie Jay. When Babe decides to kill Zackery, she aims for his heart, intending to kill him, but she misses and wounds him in the stomach. According to Auflitsch, aiming at Zackery’s heart is not accidental; she observes that just as Zackery wounded Babe’s heart in a metaphorical way, she wants to take his life by wounding his heart (277), which demonstrates Babe’s rage toward her husband, accumulated during the months or even years of submissive suffering. Owing to the fact that Babe stays at home while her husband works and
earns, and that she silently endures Zackery’s abuse, her role of a wife can be described as fairly traditional. As discussed above, it is very probable that Babe was also suffering from depression, which represents another aspect of female violence named by Ogle. There is only one factor that is not true for Babe: she, namely, does not attempt to murder her husband in self-defense. While she was experiencing Zackery’s physical and psychological maltreatment, her rage has been absent (Shepard 99), and she “has denied the significance of her own fractures and bruises” (Shepard 103). However, only on the occasion of her husband’s attack on Willie Jay, Babe finally opposes Zackery’s bullying, using violence not in self-defense, but to defend her black lover (cf. Haedicke 85). She thereafter also keeps protecting Willy Jay in another way by refusing to admit why she shot her husband; she instead repeats that she just did not like his looks. Babe says that jail will be a relief to her because then she will not have to live with Zachery any longer, and his snoopy sister will not come over all the time and bully her (Henley 22). Choosing jail over life with her husband is a proof that Babe’s marriage with Zackery must have been an absolute horror for her.

According to Sally Good, female aggression has never been socially acceptable (87). Namely, male aggression indicates taking control, while aggression committed by a woman represents the exact opposite: losing control of herself and of the situation (Good 88). In addition, Good’s research shows that female violent characters are found mostly in humorous texts (88), which also applies to Crimes of the Heart, a black comedy that deals with serious issues such as wife battering in a humorous way. Good observes that “[a] violent or aggressive woman is seen by society as either a bitch, mentally disturbed, or unfeminine” (88), and Babe is seen as mentally disturbed by at least three characters in the play: her sister Lenny, her cousin Chick, and her husband. Firstly, Lenny believes that Babe is “in-her-head-ill” (Henley 13) because of her claim that she shot Zackery for she “just did not like his stinking looks” (Henley 19), thereby supporting the stereotype of a crazy violent woman, as opposed to a violent man, who is considered to be in control of himself and the situation. Secondly, Chick, who repeatedly attacks the Magrath sisters for what she perceives to be disobedience of a code of womanhood that emphasizes courtesy and submission (Shepard 104), predicts that Babe will end up either in prison or in a mental hospital. Finally, Zackery threatens Babe with committing her to an asylum because of his belief in her insanity, thereby
suggesting that women who rebel against male violence should be declared insane and treated in psychiatric hospitals, so that they do not attempt to stop domestic violence anymore, but submit themselves to male authority, no matter how irrational or aggressive that authority may be. Nevertheless, as Shepard points out, “Henley insists we not dismiss him [Zackery] as an aberrant loner, but see him as an integral member of a community that permits, even expects, men to abuse women, and that expects women to cope with it by clinging to the theorem of female martyrdom” (104). As demonstrated, Lenny and Chick, although women, consciously or unconsciously decide to belong to this community. To put it differently, male violence is “justified, typically male” (Good 90), and expected, while women are thought to be crazy when they resort to violence, which leads to a conclusion that there are double standards for male and female violence. In *Crimes of the Heart* two crimes are committed: wife battering, representing male violence, which is followed by female violence, an attempted murder. In other words, unable to deal with her problems, Babe turns from a victim to a victimizer.

**Comparison of Domestic Violence in Street Scene and Crimes of the Heart**

Given the fact that drama usually portrays real life, it presents the issue of domestic violence as well. There are significant differences in the origins and effects of male and female domestic violence. Various factors are responsible for male domestic violence: patriarchy, socioeconomic background, the presence of events triggering jealousy, and alcoholism. Male violence is often said to be committed in order to establish control, and it is justified as typically male behavior. In contrast, female violence is committed mostly in defense, and aggressive women are considered to be crazy and losing control, while their acts of violence have historically been unacceptable for society. Since men’s and women’s violence are seen as the exact opposites by society, double standards are applied in the perception of their aggressive behavior.

Although Rice and Henley wrote their plays in different periods, they approach the topic of domestic violence similarly. Their characters are alienated from other people, especially their spouses, which is mainly the consequence of modern, urban life in both plays. Although statistics show that domestic violence is prevalent in lower-class communities, it seems that in the analyzed plays social background does not play such a role since Rice’s
characters come from a poor background while Babe and her husband belong to an upper class. Furthermore, both Rice and Henley put their characters in an extremely patriarchal environment where women are expected not to disobey men but to be submissive regardless of their husbands’ cruel treatment of them. Mrs. Maurrant’s and Babe’s husbands are distanced and violent, making their wives feel lonely and miserable, which is the reason why they resort to having an affair in order to feel happy and accepted. This leads to the jealousy of their husbands, which becomes the trigger of domestic violence depicted in the plays.

However, there is one major difference between Street Scene and Crimes of the Heart: Babe’s decision to kill Zackery as a reaction to his continuous abuse of her and assault on Willie Jay. Unlike Mrs. Maurrant, who stays submissive until the very end of her life, Babe decides to stop Zachery’s maltreatment and take revenge. It is very unlikely that such a reaction could have been depicted in a 1920s play because of the prevailing patriarchal values of that period. However, during the 1970s, this crime in the context as it is in the play is somewhat acceptable to the audience because it shows a woman fighting for herself in still quite a patriarchal environment. She, nevertheless, does not kill her husband because her hands were shaking, so she later regrets not having killed him, by which Henley portrays Babe as incapable of going through with violence, making the story a black comedy. In contrast, although drunk, Mr. Maurrant is capable of killing not only his wife but also her lover. After spending a short time in jail, Babe is released on bail. As the story unfolds, it seems most likely that her lawyer and Zackery are going to settle, and that Babe is not going to end up in prison. Accordingly, Henley portrays the attempted murder of a violent husband as not such a serious crime, but a struggle for Babe’s rights as a human being in a modern alienated patriarchal world, even though Babe turns from a victim into a victimizer. In contrast, Rice strongly disapproves of domestic violence against Mrs. Maurrant, whose affair he represents in a sympathetic way, and lets the readers know that Mr. Maurrant will be condemned to death. In short, the murders by Mr. Maurrant are presented as a horrible deed of a typical man trying to control his wife, while Babe’s crime is on the one hand acceptable due to the fact that it shows a woman fighting for herself, but on the other hand, the aggressive woman is considered to be crazy because she is losing control over herself. In other
words, there are double standards in assessing male and female domestic violence both in real life and in drama.

In both plays, domestic violence is represented as a way out used by people suffering from alienation and dissatisfaction with themselves, their marriages, and the modern society. However, it is also depicted as a wrong way out, emphasizing the importance of morally correct life choices. If the logic from Street Scene is applied, it seems that the society even fifty years later, in Crimes of the Heart, is still not civilized and that domestic violence is still an issue to be dealt with. One of the rare shining examples in these plays is Rose Maurrant, the unfortunate couple’s daughter, who proves that people can choose to make good decisions and refuse appealing, but immoral temptations, thereby avoiding domestic violence and deciding on their own and other people’s happiness.
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Sanja Matković received her master’s degree cum laude in English and German language and literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, Croatia. Because of her great interest in literature, she is currently studying for a Ph.D. in Literature and Cultural Identity at the same faculty, and her area of interest is English and American literature. She is a teaching assistant in English language at the Faculty of Teacher Education, Osijek.

*Address*: Josip Juraj University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lorenza Jägera 9, 31 000 Osijek, Croatia. E-mail: smatkovic87@gmail.com
Dead or Alive?

The American Gentleman in Advertisements:

A Case Study

Julia Rensing

Abstract • The ‘masculinity crisis’ and the new position of women in society seem to create a longing in American men for an ancient and traditional male role model: the gentleman. At least this is what contemporary advertising suggests. The originally English construct is a popular feature in media. A reason for this can be found in the changes in Western societies: men feel uncertain about their masculinity as traditional understandings of gender roles have been challenged. This paper investigates the current function, position, and reputation of the gentleman in this environment.

In order to do so, the gentleman’s formula will be examined, as well as conceptions of American masculinity. A case study of three advertising spots featuring the gentleman shows that portrayals of the traditional concept vary from a celebration of the modern gentleman, though a nostalgic remembrance, to a display that only focuses on his specific codes of behavior. This suggests that men in the twenty-first-century ‘masculinity crisis’ still admire the gentleman’s function as an idol. However, in a society striving for gender equality, this symbol of patriarchy cannot—or should not—prevail.

Keywords • masculinity crisis, gender studies, masculinity studies, feminism, gentleman, male role model

Introduction

After the patriarch, the chauvinist, the oppressor and the sexist, another male role model has now been declared as feminism’s opponent: The gentleman. It is a male concept known all around the globe. The word itself is an integral part of everyday speech but stands for a construct that came into existence long before our time. Common associations with the gentleman imply
specific codes of behavior, certain manners and performances, a particular appearance, as well as a prestigious reputation and rank. It appears as if this status has now been challenged. In order to generate an understanding of the gentleman’s current position in the twenty-first century, this paper will examine depictions of this traditional male role model in TV commercials.

Prior to this, a basic knowledge of the history of the gentleman is essential. For this, the genesis and the further development of his formula over the centuries need to be approached. Due to historical, economic, and social events, Western societies have undergone immense changes ever since the gentleman’s birth. The transformation of this male ideal runs parallel to an altered understanding of masculinity. For this reason, it is also vital to assess the development of masculinity. The media claim that in recent decades the so-called ‘masculinity crisis’ has emerged because feminism (amongst other movements) has challenged men’s role in society. This debate needs to be examined in order to reflect on the persistent understanding of gender roles. Already the mere fact that the gentleman is still used for promoting brands seems to be a sign that he is an immortal concept that will remain an integral icon of Western culture. These evaluations will help to assess the gentleman’s status today and the prevalent tensions that surround him.

Subsequent to these theoretical discussions, a case study of contemporary commercials and the application of the discussed theories will follow. Dolce & Gabbana, Chivas, and Givenchy serve as examples of brands that feature the gentleman. The interpretation of these commercials will reveal why this traditional role model still seems to be regarded as a useful tool for the advertisement of whiskey or perfume. Finally, this analysis is vital for an understanding of the current status of the gentleman, and it allows to draw conclusions on sentiments and the existing gender roles in Western societies.

THE HISTORY OF THE GENTLEMAN

The gentleman is originally a British phenomenon. After the term’s first emergence in the fifteenth century, it advanced from a label describing men with a coat of arms to a concept open to everybody (Fraser 7; Berberich 8–9). In this century “good manners, humility, piety and modesty were wanted” and were thus also desired qualities for the gentlefolk (Fraser 17). As time went on, being a gentleman then fulfilled a specific function: it became a label (Mason 16). The term enabled these English men to “raise themselves
above the vulgar” and to “close gentle ranks” against the lower classes (Fraser 9; Mason 16). Thus, at the time of the gentlefolk’s birth, access to this particular group was granted to everyone who could adhere to specific manners and characteristics. However, soon senses of superiority and class became attached to the concept, and it turned into an exclusive role model.

From the sixteenth century onwards, the gentlefolk expanded further, and additional meaning was attached to the concept; being a gentleman required certain attitudes, manners, style, and standards of conduct, which again served to differentiate this group of men “from the mob” (Fraser 9; Mason 12). The reputation and increasing popularity brought the gentleman to America. For example, on plantations, men “tried to create in an alien land the life of an English squire,” seeking to portray qualities such as courage and courtesy according to the English model (Mason 214). Together with its geographical extension, the term’s significance became more elusive. Mason indicates that there was no longer a “clear-cut distinction” about what the term really signified:

by the nineteenth century the term ‘gentleman’ had become extraordinarily elastic; it meant very different things to different people. To some it meant ‘anyone as good as I am or better’. To others it meant some association with the ownership of land. But to everyone it also meant a standard of conduct, a standard to which the best born did not always rise and which even the humblest might sometimes display. (12)

At the same time, the construct has also become subject to further changes, the gentleman “was adapted and modified to fit contemporary needs” (Berberich 21). For example, the construct was affected by the new facets of manliness in which stoicism, hardiness, and endurance were seen as desirable male qualities (Berberich 22). The formula that emerged in this time serves as a type of “forerunner” that still contributes to our modern understanding of the gentleman as a “medieval knight, with his code of moral conduct, courteous behavior to women and fair play to defeated foes in battle” (Berberich 15). Especially towards the other sex, this role model provided clear codes of conduct, such as courtesy, responsibility, and even idealization of women (Mason 12).

Since such codes were “managed more easily” than Christianity, being a gentleman even became like a religion in the second half of the nineteenth century (Mason 16, 232). However, with the succeeding two World Wars in the
following years, the gentleman died—but only as a social force (Mason 14). In
the “battles for power,” the urge of being a gentleman became less dominant,
and he was only used as a symbol for past and better times (Berberich 23). He
stepped into the background, even though his existence still seems to be taken
for granted, and his codes of behavior are deemed as common knowledge.
More recently, also oppositions have come into existence, and a new rather
critical perspective on the traditional ideal arose. Philip Mason and Christine
Berberich point out that today the term is no longer appreciated: “Gentleman
is not a fashionable word today. Indeed, it can hardly be used without apol-
ogy and is sometimes used with a sneer” (Mason 12; Berberich 5). Hence,
the gentleman has turned from an overall admired ideal to a controversial,
disliked phenomenon.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MASCULINITY

The extensive change in the gentleman’s reputation bears a significant
resemblance to the state of masculinity, as the masculine gender role has also
altered extensively over the centuries. For example, nowadays the alleged
male crisis is featured heavily in the media, and in this context there are com-
monly several sources mentioned. This paper will focus on two factors: the
loss of legitimacy of male supremacy in Western society and the influences of
the changing working environment on American masculinity.

The Industrial Revolution, along with urbanization and the separation
of home and the place of work, enhanced the rise of patriarchy, which was
“based on men’s economic superiority” (Beynon 18, 59; Buchbinder 5). These
developments contributed greatly to the classification of distinct male and
female spheres. Men’s status was defined by their work and achievements,
and gender roles such as those of the “passive nurturer and active breadwin-
der” emerged (Bloch 247). “Male” qualities like ambition, rivalry, and an urge
for dominance were admired (Rotundo 3). As years went by, the focus also
shifted to the male body as strength and appearance gained in importance
(Rotundo 6, 11). Emotions were to be channeled effectively by men and with
the two World Wars this need for “emotional reticence” grew (Rotundo 3, 7;
Beynon 14). Man’s new combat role demanded toughness, endurance, and
courage (Beynon 14). But during this time, women needed to earn money
to uphold the household, taking on the role of the breadwinner and with
this “one of the great markers of traditional, patriarchal masculinity” (Beynon
This “feminization of employment” restructured the organization of the family and had a great effect on the understandings of masculinity (Beynon 88).

Later in the twentieth century, men turned into consumers, and goods, services, and leisure took on greater significance for the masculine self (Rotundo 283, 287; Beynon 94). However, the urge to be identified as the source of knowledge and authority and the provider for the family was omnipresent (Mayer Hacker 227). As a result, men feel exhausted to embody what is traditionally expected from them and to adapt to the changes of the twenty-first century (Mayer Hacker 227; Lemon 62–63). Voices proclaiming a male crisis spread. Masculinity was increasingly questioned and criticized, which became obvious from the portrayal of masculinity in the media (Genz and Brabon 132; Beynon 83, 95). Men are in this crisis, because they are uncertain what actually defines their masculinity today. A decisive role in this development can be assigned to feminism, as women’s struggles contributed to men’s “major loss of legitimacy for patriarchy” (Pilcher and Whelehan 202). It affects men’s world, in which the gentleman had—or has—to hold his ground.

**Feminism**

“Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” – is this quote by bell hooks actually still applicable to the twenty-first century (xii)? Is feminism still needed or maybe rather a struggle of the past? These ambiguous questions are also reflected in the current debate on postfeminism. While, for example, the media often suggest that twenty-first-century Western societies are in a postfeminist era, in which feminism can be taken for granted and women finally can have it all, other voices rather proclaim that postfeminism is a backlash on feminist achievements (Faludi 2; Genz and Brabon 3, 12; Coppock, Haydon, and Richter 3; McRobbie 6, 8, 11). It creates the illusion that feminism has become obsolete just “to ensure that a new women’s movement will not re-emerge” (McRobbie 1). These opposing understandings of feminism today reflect the dominant uncertainty about gender roles in Western societies: Men and women are facing the lack of accepted, clearly defined patterns of behavior expected of them. As a response to these changes and crises, the campaigns by Dolce & Gabbana, Givenchy, and Chivas seem to have something to offer in their resurrection of the gentleman.
CASE STUDY

All three commercials that serve as analysis material for this case study promote European brands that are known almost worldwide and also have a large market share in the United States. Their framework conditions are similar to the gentleman’s. Dolce & Gabbana, Givenchy, and to an extent Chivas all resort to adaptations of the classic English ideal in order to attach a European standard or quality to their product (Mason 12; Kettemann 47). However, the strategies they use to pursue this goal are quite different.

The role of the gentleman in Dolce & Gabbana’s promotion of their perfume “The One” is embodied by the famous American actor Matthew McConaughey—an obvious move to increase the bandwidth of audience. We observe McConaughey strolling through a luxurious room with fancy decoration and elegant people. Already in the first seconds, the spot establishes a nostalgic mood, since the whole commercial is shot in black and white. Besides that, the decoration as well as the clothing of the people suggest that it is set sometime at the beginning of the twentieth century. The arrangement of the furniture, the setting of the table, and the fact that there are only a few people left in this big room indicate that what we see is the end of an upper-class party where a gentleman is one of the last attendees. But he remains remote from the other guests and even seems to outclass them. He simply walks past with his self-confident smile firm in place. He then passes a sleeping lady on a sofa and covers her with a coat, proving that he is courteous and caring, while she is passive and in need of his help—which is quite a controversial depiction of a woman. The actions as well as features in the commercial affirm traditional, pre-crisis, as well as pre-feminist gender roles.

At the same time, the commercial also proves that this traditional role model is still desirable in the twenty-first century, as they celebrate his popular qualities. The company suggests that the gentleman is still alive, this can also be attributed to the fact that the scene does not end on the gentleman as a nostalgic remembrance: after the gentleman leaves the sleeping lady on the sofa, the movie clip gradually gains a touch of coloring. This might signify the beginning of the day after the long party, or a transfer of this nostalgic remembering into the present. Evidence for this interpretation can be found in the following scenes: In the next shot he looks fresh and energetic, he suddenly wears a bow tie and adjusts his clothing by pulling on his sleeves. This
proves that being a gentleman does not only require a certain attitude, but a proper appearance, no matter how rough the party was.

Dolce & Gabbana then provides some of the means it takes to be this gentleman—it equates the product and attainment of the social role. A clear hint to this is given with the portrayal of the advertised product. It suggests that through its consumption men will be able to raise themselves “above the vulgar” just like the label ‘gentleman’ once allowed, before the World Wars, the transformation of women’s and men’s places in society, and the ‘masculinity crisis’ (Fraser 9). These pictures of the Dolce & Gabbana perfume are accompanied by a voice-over claiming, “If you know who you are, there’s nothing to prove. The One Gentleman. The new fragrance by Dolce and Gabbana” (Parfum de Luxe).

In the next scene, McConaughey leaves the setting and the exclusive upper-class community in the luxury salon and steps out to the seaside. The camera captures him from the front, the gentleman passes it, reassuring that his confident smile is still firm in place and walks further to the sea, looking at the wideness of the ocean. The man casually puts one hand into his pocket; all these gestures show no sign of uncertainty. He presents himself as a thinker, an intellectual; the Dolce & Gabbana gentleman appears to be a symbol of self-assurance. This is further confirmed by the final statement of the voice-over: “In the end it’s better to be the One” (Parfum de Luxe). So he is the ONE gentleman, superior to the rest. This depiction once again highlights the specific class belonging of gentlemen: Dolce and Gabbana suggest that the product will grant their consumers access to the higher classes—they will even ‘outclass’ the rest, just like McConaughey. The other figures in the commercial spot merely serve to let him stand out, he never has any contact with them, and also the lady is irrelevant to him. Only his good manners, compulsory for a proper gentleman, are the reason for his compassionate gesture towards her (Berberich 17). Consequently, he is the perfect incorporation of the gentleman, defined by Mason as living “consistently and intelligibly, with self-respect, performing his dues; who must show respect and consideration for women; must be independent and upright, of unblemished reputation” (20). Besides, this portrayal highlights that even today it is possible and desirable to be a gentleman. In fact, the distinguishing moment between the nostalgic, tinted past and the colored present is only the purchase of the perfume.
The commercial reflects current tensions that are relevant on a global scale. As Beynon indicates, the twenty-first century is marked by specific concerns: “It would appear that we live at a time when gender identity has less to do with biology than with economic and cultural circumstances. But . . . for many there remains a strong nostalgia for a time when gender differentiation was less ambiguous” (6). In this case, the gentleman stands for a symbol of this kind of longing. The commercial indicates that the product can ease this nostalgia, turn it into reality and recapture men’s lost agency that they handed over to women during the masculinity crisis.

Another quite distinct method of featuring the British male role model is visible in the commercial of the perfume “The One Gentleman” by Givenchy. The French brand is quite straightforward in its portrayal of a traditional but contemporary gentleman. Their advertising campaign also counts on the success of this commercial due to its high star cast that enables its world-wide appeal. Simon Baker, the famous Australian actor, is the global brand ambassador and is shown together with the American fashion model Cameron Russell.

One parallel to the Dolce & Gabbana gentleman is that Givenchy also presents the gentleman in a purely positive light. The Givenchy gentleman is introduced with cheerful music, walking down a crowded street in pouring rain. The high angle shot at 0:06 gives an overview of the location: The buildings and stores, as well as the clothing of the passers-by and the gentleman, suggest that this is a residential area of the middle or upper class. This short 30-second commercial revolves solely around the Givenchy gentleman who wanders happily and with a smile on his face through the street, making his way past the other people. He does not seem annoyed by the masses crossing his way, but is amused and enjoys the challenge of avoiding to be pushed by them or their umbrellas. Thus, he sticks out from the crowd; he is different. This is also underlined by the fact that other than the people hurrying through the rain, the gentleman is not even in need of any kind of rain protection, instead he plays with his umbrella, seemingly unaffected by the weather. This is also suggested by a fast shot of the back of his head, his hair and his suit seem perfectly styled, just as expected from a proper gentleman.

Only because of a sudden encounter with a beautiful woman does he come in need of his umbrella. The lady is wearing a red costume and stands out from the dull and rather grey surroundings. She is looking for a taxi, standing
at the side of the street, exposed to the rain, when the unexpected guardian steps in from behind and provides her with shelter. These images and gestures aim directly at modern men who might feel “confronted with contradictory and conflicting images of themselves” (Lemon 63). The Givenchy gentleman proves to men in crisis that they still need to take care of women and give priority to their protection and at the same time men should be self-sufficient with their own needs (Mason 19). The gentleman embodies what modern men can be like once they adhere to these codes of behavior: The Givenchy gentleman seems self-confident, integral, courteous, prestigious, and satisfied with himself and this gentleman is not a nostalgic remembrance of the past. Instead he is the modern twenty-first century version of the traditional role model, which indicates that the gentleman is still alive, still needed, and still worth imitating.

In comparison to the Dolce & Gabbana gentleman, the Givenchy male figure is not disinterested in interacting with others. He is searching for a direct social contact, trying to impress and gain the attention of the beautiful woman. His manners and attitudes appear to pay off. When he hands his umbrella to the lady, she is speechless and seems stunned by his courtesy. He then steps out into the rain and finally seems to be affected by it, his suit is getting wet, but his smile remains firm in place when he walks backwards away from the lady.

These scenes are commented on by a voice-over with the words “gentlemen only, the new fragrance for men by Givenchy” (Alla Perfume). This quote is in English to secure international appeal, while the brand’s name is pronounced with a distinct French sound, underlining the origin of the brand, presumably to attach a certain French standard or reputation to the product (Birch and McPhail 91–92). Together with these words, the perfume appears on the screen to visualize the source of the man’s satisfaction and confidence. Hence, it is the traditional gentleman that is promoted here: he is a European product that is courteous to women, presents good manners whilst being a self-confident optimist. Givenchy’s feature of him suggests to the audience that this male role model is still desirable for every man, and the brand emphasizes that the traditional gentleman can and should survive in the twenty-first century. The advertising does not reflect the gentleman’s challenges or current criticism but rather presents him as untouchable. This idealization, however, can also be interpreted as a desperate attempt to appeal
to men to hold on to this role model and restore the traditional hierarchal order.

Furthermore, the modern gentleman that is depicted here can be seen as the incarnation of highest superiority—he does not even need to conquer the lady, instead he just leaves her, satisfied with the awareness of his effect on people. Givenchy proves with its advertising that, given the assumption that we are encountering a postfeminist era, a certain longing for the gentleman and for men’s superiority still exists. Besides this, it indicates that women also still fall for this male ideal, are prone to and in need of his guard. This commercial proves that nothing has changed: the twenty-first century is still inhabited by the patriarchal gentleman, and feminism has resisted to struggle further and has accepted its defeat. Another possible interpretation might be that the advertisement proves that feminist revolts against the patriarchal order of society still continue—or have to continue. The commercial can be read as a sign that the gentleman still has relevance for an international audience and that feminist struggles have not yet managed to destroy this controversial concept.

What is more, also in this depiction, the gentleman is a representative of America’s high class society. These assumptions can be drawn from his style, appearance, and the setting of the spot. So just like Dolce & Gabbana, this prestigious brand also seeks to attract its consumers by offering insight and access to the class of the wealthy and successful.

Besides this, both of these perfume commercials present an ideal that serves modern men as a compensation for their uncertainty. The last example in this case study uses an even more direct approach to teach their costumers how to transform into this ideal. The whiskey brand Chivas offers explicit codes of behavior to their male costumers. The ideal implied in this commercial is never directly addressed—the label ‘gentleman’ is avoided here. Instead of portraying single ‘alpha’ gentlemen, the men in this spot are all shown in groups and in specifically male domains. This importance of brotherhood is underlined right at the beginning by a voice-over, questioning “Millions of people, everyone out for themselves. Can this really be the only way? – No” (Wolfang Digital). What follows is a sequence of scenarios that represent exemplary ‘manly’ behavior based on the model of the gentleman, as the
commercial is an accumulation of different sceneries that underline a particular ‘manly’ behavior as admirable for men.

For example, in one scene the viewer observes how a soccer player from the opposing team helps up a fallen player, underlining the importance of fair-play, loyalty, and courtesy. The same values and characteristics are emphasized in a different situation where a group of men support one of their friends by pushing his car together to make it run again, which indicates that together and in a team, men can do anything. This is due to manly strength which has long been another attribute considered as a mandatory masculine characteristic (Schrock and Schwalbe 283; Buchbinder 89). The meaning of these images is further intensified by the words “Here’s to honor and to gallantry. Long may it live. Here’s to doing the right thing, to giving a damn. Here’s to the straight talkers, who give their word and keep it” (youtube). With this last sentence, a group of elderly men is shown in order to underline that these attributes are not only admirable in a particular generation of men, instead all men should live upright and sincere lives.

Furthermore, the commercial shows that these desirable codes of behavior do not solely refer to social interaction but also to a particular way of living: The men portrayed are skydiving and enjoying their lives, which is further suggested by the words “here’s to freedom, wherever you find it. And to knowing the true meaning of wealth. Here’s to the brave amongst us” (WolFang Digital). This is also a direct appeal to masculine attributes such as bravery and courage (Buchbinder 89; Beynon 14). These impressions are followed by additional images, such as a group of men riding on horses at the beach or of valiant firefighters congratulating each other on their successful work. The next scene proves that this courteous and chivalrous behavior comes alongside pleasure, achievement, and success. Another group of men celebrate with a trophy in their hands, proving that their actions and manners are rewarded and showing the joy that comes along with it. The specific patterns of behavior incorporated by these men differentiate them from the rest: “Here’s to a code of behavior that sets certain men apart from all others” (WolFang Digital). Their lifestyle is an exclusive and desirable one, and a certain sense of superiority is ascribed to them. However, until now this superiority has seemed to be detached from the men’s class belonging. Chivas suggests that it is simply their behavior that is a source of their special reputation in society. All the qualities upheld here are implicit references to
the traditional gentleman who has commonly been associated with values such as integrity and self-sufficiency (Mason 19).

Besides these, also more modern characteristics that men are supposed to possess are highlighted: men need to be strong and successful, and achievement defines their happiness (Buchbinder 283; Rotundo 3). If these codes of behavior and manly qualities are combined, the ideal of manhood as it is presented here can be accomplished, which leads to total satisfaction. This message can also be interpreted with regards to the imagery shown in the following scene in which carefree men are swimming in water which suggests that through chivalry and gentlemanly behavior, men can endure and survive through all elements: The men diving in the sky, riding on the ground, going through fire, or enjoying themselves in the water are unbeatable and indestructible. Again, these pictures create the illusion that all men (or all consumers) can become gentlemen; thus, it remains a concept accessible to everyone, just as it was at the gentlefolks’ birth (Fraser 7; Berberich 8–9) Additionally, these scenes allude to specifically male actions, portraying men in former combat roles such as the knightly horseman or the air force soldier and the marine on the water and in traditionally male businesses such as soccer and fire brigade.

In the last scene, another sphere of life in which this specific behavior is relevant is presented: the chivalrous man also stands out in public, in exclusive soiree. Here again it is shown that the lifestyle of a gentleman comes along with a specific outward appearance. A well-dressed group of men is presented at an elegant and sophisticated party, drinking a glass of Chivas. And with this reference to the promoted product, the commercial ends with the concluding appeal “Here’s to us. Live with Chivalry” in order to cheer and celebrate such men that succeed in living this specific way of life (WolFang Digital). In this scene, the commercial differs from the one by Dolce & Gabbana, suggesting that the Chivas gentleman is part of a certain (mandatorily exclusive) society and interacts with it. Women are set in relation to him, functioning as a side effect to highlight men’s well-respected status in their community, and the women’s appreciation and laughter affirm this reputation. These men’s lives are full of joy and approval, instead of uncertainty and criticism. The last line of the voice-over serves as a direct link to the product. The quote can be seen as a toast, a speech that celebrates modern gentlemen and salutes them with a glass of alcohol. These scenes finally reaffirm that also the Chivas gentleman
is a member of the higher society, he is drinking expensive alcohol while socializing with other well-dressed and wealthy men from the upper class.

The drink itself is presented in the final picture. The product appears on the screen against a black background with the statement ‘Live with Chivalry’ as a subtitle to the brand’s name ‘Chivas.’ It can be seen as the concluding connection to these promoted codes of behavior and the company. Chivas tells its costumers what manly behavior should look like and connects these ideas directly to their product: Drinking this particular whiskey opens the door to this band of brothers, this special chivalrous community. It is a compulsory element defining modern manliness. While the commercial seems to be specifically addressed to modern gentlemen it does not name their figures or recipients as such. This strategy can be interpreted as intentional: Chivas avoids the controversial label of ‘gentleman.’ This is due to the fact that, as previous theories have shown, during the time of release of this advertisement, his position is no longer uncontested. Thus, this commercial spot seeks to redefine masculinity and proves that some traditional values of the gentleman are still relevant and worth continuing. Besides those characteristics, the company upholds traditional manly attributes such as strength and bravery.

In doing so, Chivas also draws attention to the advantages of this lifestyle: the men presented in this commercial seem to have a certain status, they are self-confident, enjoy their “in-group loyalty,” have a good time amongst their male friends and could reclaim their authority that—as the theory suggested—was lost in the masculinity crisis (Schrock and Schwalbe 283). Thus, their (exclusive and upper-class) group of men is a significant element in building their identity since divorces increase, the nuclear family loses its stability, and modern men are encountering a loss of community (Rotundo 284). In these uncertain times, their brotherhood is their safe harbor and the source of their confidence; their membership in this privileged group of men can be the new characteristic of masculinity.

This implies that Chivas seeks to appeal to men by creating an illusion of isolating them from the impact of feminism and changing gender roles. In conclusion, the Chivas men do not even need to hold their ground next to women. Instead, the brand suggests that what really matters is that men regain their self-confidence, uphold good manners, and stick together with their brothers. They can achieve this freedom by drinking a glass of whiskey, which is a perfect solution to their crisis.
Considering the strategies, contents, and messages of the three portrayals of the gentleman, it becomes obvious that Dolce & Gabbana, Chivas, and Givenchy all evolve around men’s uncertainty about their masculinity. “In short, the crisis of masculinity theory suggests that men today, more than ever, are confused about what it means to be a man, and are attempting to push beyond the rigid role prescriptions of traditional concepts of masculinity” (Lemon 62). Due to this, men no longer have a specific code of conduct. The given commercials aim to fill this void and remind their consumer of a once prestigious role model with a long history of success. They suggest that being a gentleman is a way out of the crisis, and the product promoted is the gadget needed to turn into this ideal. Thus, the brands want to awaken desires for a past construct that stands for better times. The gentleman is used as a symbol for an intact world, a clear cut order without anxieties, challenges, or identity confusions. He is someone to look up to; his relation to women appears as unproblematic. He displays respectful and courteous behavior towards them—while they are never more than stage properties. This portrayal mirrors the tradition of the gentlefolk, which is “rooted in inequality,” which implies not only a clear hierarchal order between gender roles, but also differences in class affiliations (Mason 226; Mead 91). The three examples have shown that the modern gentleman as a member of the white upper class—this exclusivity is already strongly connected to the promoted products. All brands are affordable solely to wealthy gentlemen. However, a more in-depth analysis of the modern gentleman’s ethnic and class belonging cannot be discussed in further detail here, as it would exceed the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the associations of exclusivity and inequality mentioned here continue to lie at the heart of the traditional concept that is still remembered today. This might be a source for the arising criticisms and the contested status of the gentleman in the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSION
The gentleman must die. This ruthless deduction seems to be the only logical fate for the gentleman. History has shown that the traditional concept of the gentleman represents a hallmark of hierarchized structures that classify men as superior. The theoretical approach to the development of gender roles and the gentleman’s formula has revealed that the present situation in which the controversial male ideal is located remains vague and ambiguous.
The patriarchal order of society has been challenged by feminism; however, inequality prevails. Thus, if a deconstruction of this condition is to succeed, the gentleman’s death seems compulsory, since this construct is incompatible with modern understandings of gender roles.

In this respect, the commercials of Dolce & Gabbana, Chivas, and Givenchy served to understand the gentleman’s status in twenty-first-century Western societies. What links these luxury brands is their assumption that the gentleman still carries a specific relevance nowadays. Whether a nostalgic remembrance, a celebration of the codes of behavior associated with the label, or a modern incarnation—in each case, the gentleman is presented as an admired ideal. Still, interpretations can be ambiguous: these different features of the gentleman can be read as a remembered death, an upcoming downfall, or a celebration of a living ideal. Thus, the importance and the perceptions of him differ from individual to individual.

Nevertheless, the various representations of the gentleman show that this construct has been subject to change. Its formula is indeed flexible to a certain extent and has gone through several historical developments. The changes of the gentleman and those of manhood in general underline feminism’s influences on traditional ideas about gender. Also the interpretation of these three commercials has demonstrated that a modification of gender roles has taken place. At the same time it has revealed that a particular need for specific ideals, such as that of the gentleman, is still existent. Even though it is a contested term nowadays, the gentleman still incorporates desired qualities that might be worth retaining. Those probably also account for the positive image that many proponents of the gentleman still postulate. In order to celebrate this side of him without attracting criticism, Chivas simply avoids the (by now) negatively connoted label ‘gentleman.’ This term still implicitly represents an ideal that carries sexist traits. The gentleman descends from an order of society that traditionally favored men above women, and besides this, it refers to an exclusively male upper or middle-class community. Even though it might entail positive characteristics as well, some are degrading and attached with a sense of superiority that has been consolidated throughout its history. A simple disregard of the negatively connoted term cannot withdraw these implications.

If the gentleman’s code of behavior is supposed to prevail, as demanded by his proponents, it is not sufficient to simply drop the label ‘gentleman.’ It
needs to be renewed and revised in order to encompass variety and plurality. This paper has shown that a certain desire for the survival of the concept persists, as it provides guidance to individuals who feel uncertain about their identity and are in need of a role model. If this wish is adhered to, at least the biased term must die in order to make room for new concepts that include all genders and embrace diversity. The gentleman’s admired manners, well-reputed qualities, and specific code of style should apply not only to every man but also to every woman. This way, the gentleman’s death will enable the rise of the ‘gentle person.’
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Since 2015 Julia Rensing has been studying for a master’s degree in British and North American Cultural Studies at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg. In 2014 she earned a bachelor’s degree in Media Science in Marburg and in 2015 she finished her second bachelor’s degree in Anglophone Studies. From December 2014 to May 2015 she was a student assistant in the editorial office of MEDIENwissenschaft: Rezensionen | Review. Since 2012 she has worked as a freelancer for the local radio station of Paderborn and for the youth radio station "deinfm-owl" Gütersloh, where she still works today.

Address: Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg; English Seminar; Department of British and North American Cultural Studies, Rempartstraße 15, 79085 Freiburg, Germany.
**INTERWEAVING THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE:**
**HOMOSEXUALITY AND QUÉBÉCOIS THEATER**

**EVA ŠOLTÉSOVÁ**

**ABSTRACT** • This paper considers the question of Québécois nationalism from the point of view of the intersection of the public sphere of politics and the private sphere of an individual citizen, particularly in relation to homosexuality. The subject of the following analysis is two theatre plays from the second half of the 1980s, *Being at home with Claude* by René-Daniel Dubois and *Le Polygraphe* (Polygraph) by Robert Lepage, which are connected by the theme of homosexual characters struggling against the state apparatus. Both plays have also been adapted as films and the paper analyzes these as well. Since the Quiet Revolution, homosexuality and transvestism have served in Quebec as a trope for the colonized character of its national identity. This metonymy suggests that there are more complex issues at stake in the conflict between the main characters of these plays and the police.

**KEYWORDS** • Quebec, homosexuality, nationalism, Quiet Revolution, René-Daniel Dubois, Robert Lepage, national identity, French Canadians, theatre, cinematography

For theoreticians interested in the problem of ambiguous national identity, Quebec offers a very good case study: its population consists of a Francophone majority, an Anglophone minority, eleven aboriginal nations, and Quebecers from a variety of other backgrounds. Quebec is therefore, according to Jocelyn Maclure, “multinational, multicultural, and hybrid” (3).

The 1960s were marked in Quebec by what is today called the “Quiet Revolution”. It was a period of profound social and economic changes, and one of its consequences was a decrease in the power of the Catholic Church, which had previously been the pillar of French Canadian nationalism. Under the banner of nationalism, the government enacted changes which resulted
in an increased economic power of the French Canadian population, and it undertook a radical modernization of the country in every sphere. Suddenly, in contrast to the previous form of nationalism founded on cultural and religious conservatisim, it seemed that nationalism could indeed go hand in hand with modernization. At this point, Quebec starts to demand recognition of its “special status” (Stevenson 267) with respect to the other Canadian provinces, and this recognition should consist in a so-called “sovereignty-association” (Stevenson 271) relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada.

Since psychoanalysis was the dominant ideology of the time, the Freudian trope of arrested development was pervasive in the nationalist discourse of the Quiet Revolution. From this point of view, French Canadians were prevented from developing into their “normal” condition by the arrival of the English colonizer in the eighteenth century. Because Quebec was considered to be abnormal enough due to its colonized status, tolerance of other types of deviances, including sexual ones, was significantly limited and efforts to eliminate them very intense. Owing to this perception of Québécois history as a quest for normality, homosexuality became associated with Quebec’s arrested development, and if the nation was to reach its maturity, it was naturally expected to discard such backward tendencies.

In every nationalist ideology, the public sphere necessarily intersects with the private one. Most nationalisms which have emerged since the nineteenth century have been modelled on the masculine ideal of patriarchal family. Hence the subjection of a colonized nation was often accounted for by the inherently feminine character of this nation with respect to its masculine colonizer. Consequently, in order for the colonized nation to attain the same independent status as the colonizer, it needed to repress all its feminine tendencies and show its masculine potential. Such identification with masculine values and patriarchal structures basically implies the state of obligatory heterosexuality in the colonized society. According to Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, since the seventeenth century, there has been a continuous effort to force sexuality out of the private sphere and transform it into a form of public discourse, which would serve as a political instrument of the social elite. The situation was not different in Quebec during the Quiet Revolution, and homosexuality was perceived as hostile to the project of decolonization.

To quote an example, during the October crisis of 1970, which is an overarching name for a series of events that took place in Quebec following the
kidnapping of a British diplomat, James Cross, and the Minister of Labor, Pierre Laporte, by the Quebec Liberation Front (FLQ) and which involved Pierre Trudeau, Canada’s Prime Minister at the time, invoking the War Measures Act, the FLQ issued a manifesto in which Trudeau is disparagingly called “a fairy” (la tapette). Here, the FLQ refers to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1968–69, in which the federal government legalized homosexual relations between consenting adults and which was accompanied by Trudeau’s famous proclamation in which he defended the private space of an individual against the encroachment of public institutions: “The state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation” (Corriveau 123). Picturing the main representative of the oppressive federal government as a homosexual testifies to the fact that homosexuality was strongly politicized in Quebec in this period and thus became a truly public issue. Furthermore, the term fédérate, an amalgam of the French words fédéraliste (federalist) and pédérate (pederast), came into usage in the 1960s to label the intellectual elite of the previous era, which was perceived as passive and seductive in its relations with the clergy and with the English Canadian capital, while, at the same time, it contributed to the colonization of its own nation.

Countries whose economic and social structures are based on the traditional family unit are, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “brutally homophobic; and the homophobia . . . is not arbitrary or gratuitous, but tightly knit into the texture of family, gender, age, class, and race relations.” These societies cannot “cease to be homophobic and have its political and economic structures remain unchanged” (4). This explains the problem of colonized societies, whose main goal is to overthrow these traditional economic and social structures in the country. Their situation is therefore very complex and there arises the question of how to reconcile moral conservatism with the effort to subvert political establishment.

There emerged voices according to which the transformation of Quebec’s social and political status and its subsequent liberation had to be conditioned on the level of personal identity by the refusal of dominant patriarchal structures and normalizing social tendencies. One of such voices was that of Michel Tremblay, Quebec’s most successful playwright of the second half of the twentieth century. Tremblay populated his plays with homosexuals, transvestites and other individuals proscribed by society. Such marginalized characters became for him appropriate symbols of the peripheral society
that he considered Quebec to be and, according to Renate Usmiani, his plays are “a plea for marginality, for freedom of the individual from the pressures of society, as well as for the freedom of marginal societies” (qtd. in Pigeon 30). Nevertheless, in Pigeon’s words, “the figuration of a national identity as homosexual as a means of authenticating its identity virtually excludes it from ‘the extended family of modern nations’” (35). The playwrights that I will focus on in this article are considered to be Tremblay’s followers with respect to their unorthodox modelling of national identity on homosexual characters.

**Being at Home with Claude**

The whole plot of *Being at home with Claude*, presented for the first time in Montreal in 1985, consists of a police interrogation, which has stretched over thirty-five hours. An inspector interrogates the main character, Yves, a young gay prostitute, who murdered his lover, Claude, following which he called the police, confessed his crime and locked himself in the office of one of the judges in the Palace of Justice in Montreal. The police cannot forcibly remove him because Yves has notified the press and threatened to reveal certain discrediting facts about the judge.

This interrogation is totally fruitless because the inspector and Yves are not able to communicate. While the inspector asks Yves logical questions as to his actions before and after the murder, Yves is not able to remember the events in a coherent chronological order. His memory of the murder and of the events surrounding it presents a thick haze where logic and time do not exist. Indeed, Yves’s account sometimes clearly contradicts logic and common sense, as for example in this exchange:

L’INSPECTEUR : Mais pourquoi qu’tu l’as appelé ? Tu l’savais qu’y était mort, c’est toi qui l’as tué.
LUI : Mais je l’savais pas.
L’INSPECTEUR : Comment ça, tu l’savais pas ?
LUI : J’pensais qu’c’était un rêve. (DuBois 27)

**INSPECTOR:** Why did you call him? You knew that he was dead, it was you who had killed him.
**HIM:** But I didn’t know that.
**INSPECTOR:** How come you didn’t know?
In *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault claims that the most pervasive means of access to an individual’s private discourse of sexuality has been the practice of confession. Confession supposedly allows the individual to be liberated from the weight of sin or mental illness, which have been the two most frequent categories subsuming unorthodox sexual phenomena. In his *Madness and Civilization*, on the other hand, Foucault warns that the liberation promised by the ritual of confession is illusory because confession takes the form of verbal discourse. In order for madness to be liberated, it would need to be communicated in a language appropriate to it and such a language is necessarily incommensurate with the language of reason. The language of reason is the language that the subject acquires upon entering the Symbolic Order, after, in the Cartesian spirit, it has identified her or himself as a reasonable subject against the unreasonable Other. The unreasonable Other cannot form a unitary coherent subjectivity because it does not possess reason to define itself as such and the lack of such subjectivity excludes it from the Symbolic Order and its language. From this point of view, the attempt of the inspector to elicit a satisfactory confession from Yves, who occupies here the position of the mad person, is thwarted by the incommensurability of the language of madness and that of reason.

Moreover, Yves himself points out the impossibility of expressing himself properly in the language he is supposed to use:


How come words do this? They aren’t supposed to. . . . They’re supposed to say what we think. That’s what they’ve taught us at school, haven’t they? One word for each thing and each thing has its word? . . . You only need to say it and everyone will understand. . . . Everything that needs to be said, it’s simple: say it. Then how come I
can’t do that? Yet, it’s simple: I know what I want to say. How come you don’t understand it? How come it doesn’t fit?

Yves challenges here the power of the Symbolic to represent reality and his view of reality in particular. Indeed, after entering the Symbolic Order, after having learnt the language of reason, an individual’s mind is not able to perceive reality otherwise than through the prism of Symbolic concepts. In reaction to this Symbolic ordering of reality, Yves, in Maximilien Laroche’s words, “se noie dans son langage, dans son réel imaginaire, dans cet abîme béant qui sépare le signifiant du signifié” (“immerses himself in his language, in his imaginary reality, in this gaping abyss which separates the signifier from the signified”; 206).

As an act of rebellion against the word of the father, Yves refuses to reveal to the inspector his own as well as Claude’s name, because he refuses to have their complex identities pinned down by two meaningless words. Judging by the fact that Claude never physically appears on the stage and Yves even refuses to name him, Claude becomes a representative par excellence of the Imaginary Order, a pure signified without a signifier or a referent.

However, the film adaptation of the play by Jean Beaudin from 1992 adds a new dimension to the interpretation of the play. It is due to the fact that the film does not only show Claude’s physical body, but, in a very vivid way, it explicitly points to that aspect of Claude’s character which cannot be contained in his name. In the film, Beaudin adds a prologue to the conversation between Yves and the inspector, where he shows Yves and Claude’s lovemaking and Claude’s subsequent murder. In contrast to the present action of the movie, the interrogation itself, which is shot in color, the prologue and other flashbacks into the past are shot in black and white.

Nevertheless, at the moment when Yves and Claude reach their orgasms, Yves slits Claude’s throat and the red color of Claude’s gushing blood splashes over this black and white picture. André Loiselle explains that the blood appears in color because it is the only element of the scene which escapes Yves’s memory and his subsequent narrative. According to Loiselle, Yves’s understanding of the situation is not able to encompass Claude’s pouring blood, the ultimate index of his physical death. In fact, the absence of the actual act of slitting Claude’s throat is conspicuous in the play itself. Yves says, “pis j’nous voyais pus jamais r’sortir de chez eux. Jamais nous r’lever. Pis en même temps, j’sentais son sexe, comme un arb’, qui explosait. Pis déjà,
"y'avait pus d'dcouteau dans ma main" ("and then I saw us never leaving the place. Never getting up. And at the same time, I felt his penis, like a tree which exploded. And, suddenly, there was no knife in my hand anymore"; my emphasis; Dubois 109). Claude’s blood represents a trauma for Yves, with which he is unable to reconcile and which he is therefore unable to remember.

Claude’s blood evades rational, verbal representation, it is the Lacanian Real, the Impossible, which resists incorporation into the Symbolic Order. It seems that Claude takes part in the Symbolic Order as well as in the Real. He occupies an impossible space where the Real gives birth to the Symbolic and where the Symbolic conditions the existence of the Real. According to Penelope Ingram’s theory elucidated in The Signifying Body, a material body has multiple meanings and is able to signify beyond its Symbolic representation. It signifies to the existence of the Real, which, however, cannot exist without the Symbolic, because otherwise the body’s signification would not be understandable at all. Nevertheless, a body nestled comfortably in the Symbolic Order might still contain an element which cannot be represented in the Symbolic and which points to another space where an alternative memory, an alternative history suspected by Foucault, runs parallel to the dominant reasonable and positivist one, which is based on the suppression of the material body.

From his position outside the Symbolic Order, Yves presents what Foucault calls the “ruptures of evidence” (Huffer 52), an alternative narrative of the murder to the one that will eventually reach the public and the one which is not based on the rational model composed of a clear motive, crime, and its inevitable consequences. For this reason, the inspector’s fire of questions as to the details of the night of the murder gets on his nerves: “Pourquoi vous voulez absolument mett’ tou’es morceaux ensemble ? Y’a quelqu’un qui est mort. Ça doit vous prend’ un coupab’ ? Vous l’avez. Qu’est-cé qu’y vous faut d’pluss ?” (“Why do you necessarily need to put all the pieces together? There is someone who is dead. Does there need to be a culprit? You have him. What more do you need?”; Dubois 72). Such an alternative history implies an alternative view of ethics and justice, according to which Yves and Claude’s relationship belongs to the private sphere and should not be an object of public investigation.

At the end of the play, Yves is not charged with murder, as many would expect, but he is given space to present his own story of the love relationship.
with Claude. The inspector listens to this monologue without interruption, which testifies to an increasing compassion on his part. In this way he gets close to Foucault’s ideal of a compassionate listener, who is prepared to be changed by the narrative he is listening to. As Lynne Huffer explains, “In ethical terms, it is not a silencing of reason so that unreason might speak . . . It is, rather, the opening of a passage, within reason, less for speaking than for an archival listening: the creation of a pathway for a different hearing” (227). The inspector lets go of his publicly assigned identity of the protector of good moral standards thanks to “an erotic, ethical listening that undoes the subject in his will to knowledge, producing vibrations, physical sensations, and feelings . . . that, paradoxically, cannot be known or named” (251). This unraveling of public identity and undoing of the subject refers to Foucault’s ideal of desubjectivation, that is to say, to a situation where the concept of a Symbolic subject is abandoned completely. Such abandon makes what becomes the new subject (for the lack of a better term) experience vibrations, sensations, and feelings which are not representable in the Symbolic Order and which therefore belong to the sphere of the Real and of the material body.

**Polygraph**

I used the film adaptation of *Being at home with Claude* in my previous analysis because, as a cinematographic product, it offers an interesting interpretation of the play, one which would be difficult, if not impossible, to realize on the stage. Lepage’s *Polygraph* was also adapted for the screen by the author himself, but the play itself uses multiple cinematic references and thus provides a sort of meta-cinematic commentary.

The main character of *Polygraph*, which premiered in 1987, is Francois, who is gay and an adherent of masochistic practices. He is accused of the murder of his female friend, Marie-Claude. Following the accusation, he is subjected to a lie-detector (polygraph) test, the results of which are allegedly “inconclusive” (Lepage 39). We enter the action a few years after these events took place. At this point we meet Lucie, Francois’s friend and neighbor, who plays the main role in the film based on the real event of Marie-Claude’s murder. Lucie starts a romantic relationship with David, an inspector who escaped to Canada from East Berlin and who also administered Francois’s polygraph test. This test deeply traumatized Francois, who feels betrayed by
his own body, does not know if he is or is not Marie-Claude’s murderer and therefore is haunted by a paralyzing feeling of guilt.

The play provides an insightful commentary on the nature and production of films. Lucie, who is also a theatre actress with no previous film experience (the movie about the murder of Marie-Claude is her first), describes how differently each medium treats the actor: “When you perform [in the theatre], the audience is watching the whole you... But today [during the shooting], I felt that they were taking me apart” (Lepage 23). Here she evokes the ability of the camera to focus on separate parts of the actor’s body and in this way as if to cut it into pieces: “Close-up of one eye, medium shot of the knife in the back, my right hand scratching at the floor...” (Lepage 23).

In Lucie’s description, the cinematographic camera assumes the role of a mirror which does not reflect a body in its wholeness and unity, but which offers a heterotopic image of the subject. It cuts Lucie’s body into pieces and recomposes them, which results in the deformation of her image. Such splitting into parts and subsequent recomposition on the visual level again evokes Foucault’s theory of desubjectivation. Although the idea of unravelling one’s subjectivity is inevitably scary because it challenges our very existence in the Symbolic world, such desubjectivation and questioning of our Egos, as the example of the inspector in Dubois’s play shows, might also offer a possibility for a new appreciation of the Other’s experience.

By employing various cinematic devices on the stage, Lepage indeed attempts to evoke the experience of watching a film. The play begins by the projection of opening credits, each scene is introduced by its projected title, and projections of photographs and pictures, as well as audio recordings, are used abundantly. The actors even imitate typical cinematographic shots: in one scene, while Lucie leans against the wall, David and Francois, who stand from each side of her, put one foot on the wall and slightly incline in the horizontal direction. The image obtained in this way is reminiscent of a shot from above, as if the two men were standing above the corpse, which reminds the audience of a shot in a movie thriller.

The film adaptation of Polygraph, as well as the film adaptation of Being at home with Claude, enacts a significant shift in the interpretation of the play. However, here the change takes place on the level of content. In the movie, Francois is recast as a heterosexual and Marie-Claire (the film version of Marie-Claude in the play) becomes his girlfriend. Francois of the play,
portrayed as a gay masochist, is, according to Peter Dickinson, “the subject of a police investigation in part because of his perceived ‘criminal’ sexuality” (141). Furthermore, at the end of the film, the real murderer of Marie-Claire is revealed. She was killed by her sister Claude out of jealousy, because Claude had previously had an affair with Francois. Heterosexual orientation thus allows Francois to be liberated from police persecution, as well as from the weight of his conscience. However, at the end of the play, Francois, who testifies to the same confusion between reality and illusion as Yves in Dubois’s play, is unable to resolve this dilemma and throws himself under an underground train. From a rational point of view, the memory of both theatre characters is significantly flawed.

The interdependence of personal and collective histories is explicitly staged by Lepage in the opening scene. Here David performs an autopsy on Marie-Claude and, at the same time, Francois lectures on the construction of the Berlin Wall. By alternating the segments of each of the two monologues, the geography of Berlin becomes intertwined with the anatomy of Marie-Claude’s body, a human body thus becomes a metonymy of a political situation. In this wonderful theatrical feat, the cutting of the city into two parts by the wall is compared to the slicing wound inflicted on Marie-Claude’s heart by the murderer’s knife, the flow of Berliners fleeing East Germany in the western direction to the victim’s bleeding, and the functioning of Marie-Claude’s heart is compared to the system of alternating gates which allowed the passage from West to East Berlin, but at the same time prevented the passage in the opposite direction.

The autopsy scene dramatizes the situation where an individual’s body, her or his private space, loses its private character and becomes part of the political world of collective rights and obligations. As part of a nation or any other community, an individual is given rights, but in turn is obliged to contribute to preserving the unity of this community. Francois, as a student of political studies, feels that his body, which does not conform to the accepted moral standards, has not fulfilled its function in the life of the community. As Jocelyn Maclure explains, “[s]ince their purpose is to preserve and promote specific linguistic and cultural traits, collective rights impede the establishment of a purely civic nation in which the state only entertains ties with citizens in isolation” (96). Both Yves and Francois intensely feel the disparity between their identity and the demands their state makes on them. Their
personal identity is in conflict with the ideal public identity imposed on them by the nation.

In order to resolve the question of ambiguous identity, the analysis of Lepage’s play with lights and shadows becomes useful. The actor’s shadow is often projected on the screen located behind her or him. In this way the real actor present on the stage is transformed into an absent two-dimensional image on the screen. The shadow suggests the existence of a different life of the character, of an alternative history, which is absent and present at the same time. Nevertheless, the presence of the shadow is conditioned by the presence of the real actor on the stage and it is therefore only by a direct juxtaposition of the Symbolic and of the Real that the history of the mad and of the material body (the Freudian eros) can be portrayed. As Lynne Huffer explains, “we cannot access eros directly, except as the shadow cast by something as it is leaving” (249). As basically a shadow play not anchored in the material world, cinema, as we have seen on the example of Being at home with Claude, allows such access. The stage as manipulated by Lepage thus becomes this impossible space occupied by Claude in Dubois’s play, where the Symbolic and the Real continually transform from one into the other.

**Conclusion**

As the cinematic adaptations of the two plays show, the reflections of the plays’ characters offered by the mirror of the cinema screen are not identical. While Claude is immaterial in the play, a pure absent signified, in the film he becomes a pure materiality. Francois’s heterosexual alter ego in the film version of Polygraph manages to model a new coherent identity for himself thanks to the possession of “normal” sexuality. Jean Larose claims that “[t]he greatest pitfall for the ‘Quebec’ identity is to fall under the spell of its own reflection in the mirror of the identical” (qtd. in Maclure 54). This means that Quebec society would like to observe its own identity in the mirror as whole, coherent, and unspoiled. However, such perception of identity conditions its existence on the presence of the colonizer, an external entity, against whom Quebec could define itself in such a clear-cut way. But according to Ingram, the true ethical relation towards the Other is based on “the ontological becoming not only of the Self but of the Other. Such a relation is ethical because it does not force the Other into the position of ground for subject’s becoming. Instead, the Other experiences its own becoming in relation” (44).
The ethical encounter between the subject and the Other would involve not only the language of the Symbolic, but it would take place on the non-representative, material level as well. It might result in the realization that neither the theatre’s nor the cinematic interpretation of the story is the correct one, but that they condition and complement each other, as well as the realization on the part of the Québécois society, that, as Maclure claims, “[t]here is simply nothing abnormal or aberrant about federated peoples” (72) as there is nothing abnormal or aberrant about plural national and sexual identities.
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Eva Šoltésová obtained a master’s degree in English philology, French philology, and English language translation at Masaryk University in Brno. She is primarily interested in Irish and Canadian studies and literature. The subjects of her master’s theses were Irish postcolonial trauma as depicted in the novels by James Joyce and Flann O’Brien and the overlap between the issues of homosexuality and nationalism in Québécois theatre in the 1980s. She works as a freelance translator.

Address: Masaryk University in Brno, Faculty of Arts, Department of British and American Studies, Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic. E-mail: soltesova.e@gmail.com.
Power, Gender, and Ideology in Ken Kesey’s One Flew over The Cuckoo’s Nest

Gergely Vörös

Abstract • At first sight the world presented in Ken Kesey’s novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest seems to be dominated by women—in particular Nurse Ratched. Yet the story is not only told through the voice of patriarchy, but it attempts (and succeeds) in legitimizing those male created categories that define women in relation to men. This paper provides an insight into how the narrative makes sense of the male experience and entangles the image of the illegitimately powerful woman with the oppressive nature of disciplinary power. It is argued that as soon as the rationality that is imposed upon the patients starts to seem morally reprehensible, the women who do not stay in their prescribed roles are held responsible for the inadequacies of the system. As a result, women again, as in many narratives before, are held to be the root of all evil in the world. Consequently, the resistance of the inmates gains a metaphysical level: removing the head nurse means more than simply breaking free from the constraints of oppressive power: it is an attempt to reinstate the order of an idealized past, as it were, to reinstate Phallus where Logos was.

Keywords • power, gender, ideology, Ken Kesey, One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest

Although the second part of the twentieth century saw a profound change regarding the position of women in American society, the idea of full equality has not been achieved yet. However, for many men, the increasing enfranchisement of women, the reduction of male privilege, and the social climate promoting equality may have felt hostile and alienating. Ken Kesey’s One Flew over The Cuckoo’s Nest testifies to this sentiment. The argument that is conveyed by the novel speaks to a great wish to reinstate the phallocentric order of an ideal past and reorganize the symbolic around the male. In order to justify the moral supremacy of men, it portrays a microcosm in which
males are dominated by powerful women—in particular by Nurse Ratched, who, by depriving them of their free will, emasculates them as well. Hence, if the inmates of the mental institution are to liberate themselves, they need to reclaim their masculinity first by eliminating the head nurse.

To begin with, it has to be noted that the majority of the patients are labelled insane due to their inability to adjust to the position society and the collective in which they live designates to masculine identity. Throughout the novel it is frequently echoed that the primary reason the patients are in the institution is "[their] proven inability to adjust to society" (Kesey 94). As Harding, one of the characters, puts it, "we are not in here because we are rabbits—we’d be rabbits wherever we were—we’re all in here because we can’t adjust to our rabbithood" (Kesey 62). The "rabbithood," to which they cannot conform, is nothing more than their expected social position, which is in contradiction with their ideas about masculinity. As sons, husbands, or in fact inmates, they are submitted to a set of expectations, to which they struggle to adapt. In addition, the instances when they are not able to fit into their prescribed roles are taken to be the evidence of their madness. Hence, madness seems to be a moral category that can be attributed to those who fail to integrate into society. Reading Foucault, Gutting observes that in our times the mentally ill are taken to be "moral offenders." They transgress certain social norms; hence, they are expected to feel guilty and attempt to reform their abnormal attitudes and behavior (73). Confirming this claim, McMurphy is considered a psychopath because of his inability to control his animalistic urges and his unwillingness to submit himself to the external order. As he puts it, "he [his previous doctor] told me that 'psychopath' means I fight and fuh—pardon me, ladies—means I am he put it overzealous in my sexual relations" (Kesey 29). Consequently, the ideas at the heart of masculine identity seem to be at odds with the moral dictum of society.

By morally conditioning the patients, the psychiatric institution represses their masculinity. Set up to produce socially acceptable subjects, the institution is supposed to create well-behaved citizens from moral offenders. As, however, this assumes the repression of their sexuality, the ward, in fact, suppresses their masculine identity, which is, to an extent, determined by biological sex. As their conduct breaches the moral dictum of the institution, under the watch of Mrs. Ratched, those who attempt to live up to the ideals of masculinity are monitored, disciplined, and punished. Hence, the institution,
by imposing its discourse on the inmates, slowly rewrites their self-identity and constructs a new identity for them, in line with the requirements of the institution, from without. As Butler argues, “power that at first appears as external pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity” (3). Thus, who they are, what they think, and how they view the world as the patients of the institution is determined by those moral requirements that transform them into emasculated subjects.

By becoming the subjects of the mental asylum, the inmates are castrated in another sense as well: the institution slowly erodes their free will. As Daniel J. Vitkus observes, the power of the head nurse derives from her “ability to infantalize and humiliate men – to render them sexless” (77). By becoming the subjects of the institution, the inmates essentially give up their agency and are transformed into “functioning, adjusted component[s]” of the combine, who can be controlled by the head nurse, who presses the “button for things to start” (22). The first to verbalize this is McMurphy, who tries to open up the eyes of his fellows: “she is a ball-cutter. I've seen a thousand of 'em, old and young... who try to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to... by gettin’ you where it hurts the worst” (Kesey 36). Given that the ability to act freely is inherent in the construction of the masculinity that is perpetuated by the novel, by losing their agency, they get stripped of their masculinity as well. As later on Harding admits to McMurphy, “there’s not a man here ...that isn’t afraid he is losing or has already lost his whambam. We comical little creatures can’t even achieve masculinity...” (Kesey 40). Hence, the narrative suggests that if they are to deprive the head nurse of her power and liberate themselves, they need to reclaim their masculinity first.

Nonetheless, as “the ward is [just] a factory for the Combine” (Kesey 25), its oppressive order is not limited to the institution but is inherent in everyday reality as well. The outside world, with its sterile uniformity, is just as hostile to the men as the hospital. As suggested, women collaborate with power in order to emasculate men. For example, Bromden’s father, a Native American chief, who is portrayed as a traditional father figure, fights the Combine for years before his wife can make him too weak to oppose the government and gives in.
The Combine. It worked on him for years. He was big enough to fight it for a while. It wanted us to live in inspected houses. It wanted to take the falls. It was even in the tribe, and they worked on him. In the town they beat him up in the alleys and cut his hair short once. Oh, the Combine’s big—big. He fought it a long time till my mother made him too little to fight any more and he gave up. (Kesey 123)

The government seeks to dominate the Chief to further its plans about building a hydroelectric dam on the lands of the tribe. He opposes not only to uphold his “right to be Indian” (Kesey 178), but also in order to preserve the integrity of his masculine self that is endangered by the feminising oppression. Hence, the novel juxtaposes “the ‘natural’ maleness” and “a domineering, emasculating representation of the feminine” (Vitkus 66). Furthermore, Bromden’s mother not only helped the defeat of her husband but made life harder for her son as well. By helping the dissolution of the tribe, she aided the decline of the only community in which Bromden did not feel alienated, and forced him to live according to the rules of the Combine, which as it appears are hostile to men. Moreover, the social order not only rids itself of the Chief, but by denying the son the name of the father, it cuts Bromden off his paternal heritage as well. He carries the traces of his emasculation in his name, as in the hope of a better future he adopts the maiden name of his white and educated mother. Thus, the narrative implies that under the dictum of the feminine power, the masculine “identity can only exist in a decayed and rotting state” (Meloy 8).

Bromden’s fate, however, is not an exception but rather a norm. In fact, most of the patients believe women are to be blamed for the fact that they have ended up in the institution. One of the most haunting manifestations of misogyny are Ruckly’s vicious utterances. He murmurs, says, or yells “Fffffffuck da wife! Fffffffuck da wife!” as a reaction to every impulse he is exposed to (Kesey 14). Although he is not able to explain his feelings, they seem to confirm the assertion that in the novel it is usually the women who get the blame for the failures of men. Furthermore, even if he is able to rationalize and express them in a more sophisticated manner, Harding cherishes similar sentiments towards his wife, with whom he lives in a sham marriage to preserve his social status. As she knows about Harding’s homosexual orientation, she takes every opportunity to remind him of his supposed inadequacy and keeps suggesting in the eyes of the public that “he may give her
reason to seek further sexual attention” (Kesey 28). Due to the humiliation he feels, Harding becomes a neurotic and ends up in hospital. Billy Bibbit, whose life is maimed by his overly attached mother, suffers from his inability to enter sexual adulthood. Controlling his life, his mother deprives Harding of every chance to get a girlfriend, or in fact do anything that might weaken his dependency on her. Hence, she makes it impossible for him to develop his masculine self. What is more, even after, by losing his virginity with one of the prostitutes on the ward, he is initiated into manhood, the head nurse is able to reassert the matriarchal control over him by taking over the position of his mother (Vitkus 80).

“What worries me, Billy,” she said—I could hear the change in her voice—"is how your poor mother is going to take this.”
She got the response she was after. Billy flinched and put his hand to his cheek like he’d been burned with acid.
“Mrs. Bibbit’s always been so proud of your discretion. I know she has. This is going to disturb her terribly. You know how she is when she gets disturbed, Billy; you know how ill the poor woman can become. She’s very sensitive. Especially concerning her son. She always spoke so proudly of you. She al—”
“Nuh! Nuh!” His mouth was working. He shook his head, begging her.
“You d-don’t n-n-need!”
“Billy Billy Billy,” she said. “Your mother and I are old friends.”
“No!” he cried. His voice scraped the white, bare walls of the Seclusion Room. He lifted his chin so he was shouting at the moon of light in the ceiling. “N-n-no!” (Kesey 173)
The possibility that his mother may learn about his affair, right after this scene, drives Billy Bibbit into suicide, who, as he is not ready to face up to the matriarchal oppression yet, chooses to cut his own throat. Thus, the novel confirms the assertion that dominant women are not only hostile but also willing to destroy those who attempt to recover their masculine self.

By creating the microcosm of the mental hospital, Kesey blames women for the inherently oppressive aspects of social existence. Whilst most of the women are portrayed as either oppressors or collaborators with the regime, the inmates are presented as “victims of a matriarchy” (Kesey 38), who are not only deprived of their self-identity but are emasculated as well. Consequently, as Vitkus argues, if the rationality around which society is organized is unjust,
“the voice of madness becomes the voice of sanity” (65). Hence, the novel succeeds in its attempt to legitimize the moral supremacy of the masculine voice, and for the inner logic of the narrative every effort made to subvert the matriarchal dominance is welcome as an attempt to liberate the oppressed.

The myth Kesey creates not only treats women as scapegoats, but also succeeds in disguising the effects of masculine ideology on subjective consciousness. As Robert P. Wexler phrases it, "Kesey refuses to deny the binary mode of Western thinking about gender, and in fact he sets up an ideological fiction (Big Nurse) that allows him to blame women and to avoid any analysis of patriarchy” (235). Indeed, the inmates suffer just as much from the normative ideas of manhood to which they cannot live up to as from the exaggerated vision of the matriarchal oppression. The key to understand why are they so keen on asserting the narrative of their oppression lies in the fact that it is convenient for them. Thus, reading the novel through the prism of Žižek’s thoughts, the inmates project the contradictions and dissatisfactions of their experience onto the picture of the other—onto women (252). That is to say, they designate the head nurse, and dominating women in general, as the obstacle that has to be removed if they are to live up to the ideas of masculinity and overcome the sense of alienation, which is apparently inherent to the human condition. Even if their narrative, in spite of its superficial appeal, may be morally questionable, as it will be shown, it is incredibly effective in mobilizing the inmates in their struggle against the head nurse.

McMurphy’s appearance on the ward not only shows the inmates that it is possible to exist unconstrained by power, but also promises the restoration of their masculinity. In their eyes, McMurphy appears as the embodiment of the masculine ideal, the macho man. He is strong, free, and openly defies the power of the head nurse. Hence, the inmates seek his help to reassert their masculinity in the face of the feminizing oppression. “Tell me, Mr. McMurphy, how does one go about showing a woman who’s boss...How does he show her who’s king of the mountain? A man like you should be able to tell us that” (Kesey 42). According to McMurphy, “man has but one truly effective weapon against the juggernaut of modern matriarchy... One weapon, and with every passing year in this hip, motivationally researched society, more and more people are discovering how to render that weapon useless and conquer those who have hitherto been the conquerors—” (Kesey 42). Having realized that dominating women castrate males so that they can exert their power over
them, McMurphy believes that men can only dominate women by the use of their sexuality, which figures as the source of the assumed masculine superiority. Being chosen by the inmates, McMurphy, as it were, becomes their ideological leader, and his ideas fuel the masculine narrative, by the help of which they embark on the journey to liberate themselves.

As he sees sexual domination as the only effective weapon against the feminizing order of the institution in his struggle against the head nurse, sexuality occupies a central position. Ever since his arrival on the ward, McMurphy keeps reminding the head nurse about her sexual vulnerability and about the supposed superiority of his biological gender. He asks about and compliments on the size of her breasts, tells stories about the women he or his friends dominated sexually or otherwise, and tries to be seen by her naked as many times as possible. Moreover, McMurphy believes that if he was able to seduce the head nurse, it would ensure his triumph over her:

“Why, if you mean do I think I could get a bone up over that old buzzard, no, I don’t believe I could. . . .”

“She’s not all that homely, McMurphy. Her face is quite handsome and well preserved. And in spite of all her attempts to conceal them, in that sexless get-up, you can still make out the evidence of some rather extraordinary breasts. She must have been a rather beautiful young woman. Still—for the sake of argument, could you get it up over her even if she wasn’t old, even if she was young and had the beauty of Helen?”

“I don’t know Helen, but I see what you’re drivin’ at. And you’re by God right. I couldn’t get it up over old frozen face in there even if she had the beauty of Marilyn Monroe.”

“There you are. She’s won.” (Kesey 42)

The above cited dialogue between Harding and McMurphy confirms the claim that only sexually impregnable women are able to dominate the men. In order to render useless McMurphy’s attempts that are aimed at subverting her power, the head nurse tries to conceal the marks of her femininity. Besides her behavior and speech, she also tries to modify the way she looks. By concealing her “womanly breasts” (Kesey 8), she attempts the disguise the marks that could make her vulnerable in the face of masculine sexuality. As Bromden puts it, “she chose to ignore the way nature had tagged her with those outsized badges of femininity, just like she was above him, and sex, and
everything else that’s weak and of the flesh” (Kesey 90). Thus, the narrative suggests that she is able to repress the masculine self of the inmates as long as she remains impenetrable for the masculine narrative.

However, not all women are considered to be threatening to masculinity. Those who submit themselves to the categories that are imposed on them through the perspective of men are celebrated by the novel. The prostitutes, for instance, let themselves be objectified happily and as they sexually subordinate themselves to the males, they help them to reassert their masculine self. Similarly, the “little Jap nurse” from the disturbed, by being kind, understanding and serving the needs of men, helps the inmates to regain control over the social space. As Bromden says, “the Big Nurse was over in Medical for a week, so for a while we had the little Jap nurse from Disturbed running the ward; that gave the guys a chance to change a lot of the ward policy” (Kesey 175). Their example shows that those women who accept the masculine narrative and define themselves in relation to men are perceived as allies. Nevertheless, the fact that they can only serve as auxiliaries furthering the masculine dominance implies that in a male dominated universe the relations are just as asymmetric as in the Combine, with the difference that in that case the feminine self is put in the position of the oppressed.

By helping them to reclaim their masculine self, McMurphy leads the inmates on the way towards their liberation. After many small achievements, like setting up a casino in a tub room or putting together a basketball team, which helps the inmates to rebuild their self-confidence, McMurphy organizes a fishing trip that marks a pivotal moment in the process of reclaiming their agency. Besides alluding to many heroic narratives about masculinity like *The Old Man and The Sea* or *The Ulysses*, it makes it possible for the inmates to carry out their heroic deeds. They not only catch an enormous fish, but for the first time are not afraid to face up to the reality of the external world from which in fact they seek refuge in the institution. From the sea they return to the pier ready to reclaim their manhood. As the narrative suggests, even those who have previously bullied them recognize this: “these weren’t the same bunch of weak-knees from a nuthouse that they’d watched take their insults on the dock this morning” (Kesey 142). Having regained their masculinity, a week after the trip they smuggle into the hospital two prostitutes, one of whom they have taken on the fishing trip, and violate the symbolic order of the ward. “Drunk and running and laughing and carrying on with women
square in the center of the Combine’s most powerful stronghold... Maybe the Combine wasn’t all-powerful” (Kesey 168). As the inmates recover their masculine self, and consequently their agency, the Head Nurse is deprived of her power that feeds on castrated males. Thus, by cutting off the source of her power, the inmates take the first step towards liberating themselves.

This, however, is not enough to completely eliminate Nurse Ratched, and as she tries to restore her power, she drives Billy Bibbit into suicide. Enraged by the loss of his friend, McMurphy attempts to rape the Head Nurse and thus uncovers her vulnerability. “He grabbed for her and ripped her uniform all the way down the front, screaming again when the two nipples circles started from her chest and swelled out and out, bigger than anybody had ever even imagined, warm and pink in the light” (Kesey 175). Even if the act in itself is reprehensible, for the inner logic of the narrative it is nothing more than “a hard duty that finally just had to be done, like it or not” (Kesey 175). That she could only be removed through the execution of a violent act not only confirms the suggestion that men can assert their dominance by the exertion of their sexuality, but also attempts to justify sexual aggression towards women as a tool of exercising their power. Indeed, after the symbolic violation of her body, the head nurse loses her power completely, and gradually the patients start to leave the institution. “She couldn’t rule with her old power any more...She was losing her patients one after the other” (176). Consequently, the narrative confirms its assertion that, by the help of sexual dominance, it is possible to subvert the power of matriarchy and create an order in which the masculine self has a privileged position.

Nevertheless, as the novel does not account for what happens after their departure, it remains questionable whether the inmates are able to free themselves in a yet more important sense—from their intellectual imprisonment. Although it fuels their liberation, the alternative to the matriarchal dominance, proposed by the masculinist ideology, from the other side of the binary, is just as oppressive and alienating as the vision of the Combine. It is not a coincidence that the final sentence of the novel “I been away a long time” (Kesey 178) is said by Bromden, who, having sacrificed his friend, learnt the price to be paid on the altar of ideologies. Even if the depiction of his escape is an ultimate manifestation of masculinity, unlike the other inmates, Bromden is not trying his luck in society again, but following the tracks of a stray dog, he is fleeing from the ‘civilized’ world back to his ‘indigenous’ past;
and by doing so, he is able to transcend the ideological limitations in which Kesey as well as his fellows remain captive.
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Gergely Vörös is a BA student in English and Philosophy at Comenius University. His interests are centered around the topics that arise at the intersection of literature and philosophy. At the moment, he focuses on the problem of the self, ideology, and power in the context of modern and contemporary literature.

Address: Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Arts, Department of British and American Studies, Gondova 2, 814 99 Bratislava. Slovak Republic. E-mail: gergely.geroka.voros3@gmail.com
COLORING TRUE WOMANHOOD:
FRANCES E. W. HARPER AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMINIST INTERSECTIONALITY

ELISSA WITTKE

ABSTRACT • In her political writings, Frances E. W. Harper exhibits a surprisingly modern and intersectional approach to racism and gender inequality, whereby she precedes African-American feminist critique of the exclusiveness of second-wave feminism by about a century. This paper examines how Harper uncovers and condemns the intersecting oppressions African-American women experience: gender inequality and racism. In her political speeches Harper demonstrates an intricate knowledge of the socio-political context of Reconstruction and the late nineteenth century more generally. It is necessary to (re-)evaluate how Harper both embraces and transforms nineteenth-century female stereotypes, namely those postulated by the “cult of true womanhood.” Claiming women’s moral superiority to men, Harper re-envisions the “true woman” as a self-reliant, critically thinking female who goes public for the benefit of all humankind, rather than pursuing individual domestic happiness. Harper moreover demands that women from all races and nations join moral forces to publicly fight for a better, more just society—anticipating the most central demand of third-wave feminism. She thus deserves a more prominent position in the history of nineteenth-century U.S. literature in general, and in the feminist canon in particular.

KEYWORDS • Frances E. W. Harper, intersectionality, racism, gender inequality, cult of true womanhood

Born free in the slave state of Maryland in 1825, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper is today widely recognized for her artistic achievements as a writer and social activist against racial oppression. She published her first volume of poetry at the age of twenty in 1845 and gave her first abolitionist lecture in 1854.

1 This paper has been peer-reviewed in a class taught by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Hochbruck at the University of Freiburg, Germany. I would like to thank Prof. Hochbruck and my classmates for their helpful criticism and kind support.
After the Civil War she also became involved in the woman’s suffrage movement. However, if Harper is included in literary histories of the nineteenth century these days, she is usually featured as an abolitionist writer of novels and poetry who prioritized race over gender. Her suffragist activism, as my re-assessment of her work through the lens of intersectionality will show, is lamentably undervalued. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to show Harper’s importance for U.S. feminism historically, as well as to emphasize her relevance as a resource for contemporary feminist thinking.

As scholarly research on Frances Harper usually focuses on her literary work, I chose to concentrate on four of her speeches, given in front of abolitionist and suffragist audiences between 1857 and 1893. The first section of my paper is dedicated to an evaluation of the stance Harper takes towards her era’s conception of “woman,” as defined by the “cult of true womanhood.” The emphasis here is on Harper’s exposure of the “true woman” as a culturally constructed ideal. The second section comprises a re-assessment of Harper as an African-American feminist intellectual using Patricia Hill Collins’s “matrix of domination” for a more in-depth analysis of Harper’s speeches. This section offers insights into the ways in which Harper uncovered the complex system of oppressions African-Americans in general and African-American women in particular suffered from during her era. To conclude, I am going to underscore Harper’s importance for contemporary feminist thinking.

I first encountered Harper in the context of the “cult of true womanhood,” and my first impression was that she was supporting the ideals of this movement—which from today’s perspective was rather anti-feminist. According to Barbara Welter, the “true woman” is defined by four virtues: “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (372). A few quotes may serve to exemplify to which degree Harper appears to have embraced the ideal of the “true woman.” For example, she states that “the world has need of all the spiritual aid that woman can give” and goes on to claim that women have “the opportunity . . . of filling this old world with fairer and higher aims” (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”). She repeatedly urges “the development of a national conscience, and the upbuilding of national character” and claims that the responsibility falls to the “true woman” as morally superior to man (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”).
Yet it is important to consider two things when assessing Harper in the context of “true womanhood.” First, according to Sarah E. Bennison, the ideal of the “true woman” rigorously “defined what it meant to be a ‘woman’ in nineteenth-century America”—it is therefore questionable whether Harper can be reproached for her seeming inability to think outside of such a powerful ideology (208). And secondly and more importantly, I argue that she used the vocabulary of the “cult of true womanhood” to claim authority in front of suffragist audiences. Melba J. Boyd quotes a contemporary’s comment on a speech by Harper: “parts of the lecturer’s discourse ... grated a little on a white Southern ear, but it was lost and forgiven” (qtd. in Boyd 122). Within the framework of the “cult of true womanhood,” Harper’s critique of sexist and racist tendencies in nineteenth-century America became acceptable even to white male listeners.

I want to take a closer look at those parts that “grated a little on a white Southern ear” (qtd. in Boyd 122). Drawing on the belief in female moral superiority, which was crucial to the “cult of true womanhood,” Harper demanded that women become politically, that is, publicly, active for the betterment of society. She is convinced that “[t]he world can not move without woman’s sharing in the movement, and to help give a right impetus to that movement is woman’s highest privilege” (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”). Harper thus collapses the conservative dichotomy of the private and the public sphere. She contradicts the virtues of domesticity and female passivity, advocating, as Valerie Palmer-Mehta observes, “a life in which the personal and the public [are] merged in an effort to realize the moral, social and economic development of society” (195). While Harper demands that women become publicly active, she also appeals to men to get more involved in the domestic sphere, emphasizing “the need of good homes, of good fathers, and good mothers” (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”). She stresses that “[t]he ballot in the hands of woman means power added to influence,” making clear that she will not be satisfied with influencing politics from the safety of the home (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”). The result of full emancipation “will be not to make home less happy, but society more holy” (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”).

Harper went even further than merely demanding public “true women.” From her special standpoint as an African-American activist, she questions such essentialist categories as “woman.” Neither only African American, nor
merely a woman, but an African American woman, Harper describes her life experience with the following words: “I, as a colored woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if ... my hand [was] against every man, and every man’s hand against me” (“We Are All Bound Up Together”). Harper closely knits together two powerful systems of oppression that dominate African American women’s life: race and gender. From the contradiction that Harper experiences between the ideal of the “true woman” and her reality in nineteenth-century America, she concludes that her era’s conception of “woman” is foremost a cultural construct. She states, “I am not sure that women are naturally so much better than men” and voices her conviction that “it is not through sex but through character that the best influence of women upon the life of the nation must be exerted,” taking an anti-essentialist position towards the concept of “woman” (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”).

Harper’s personal experience of the intersection of oppressions in the African-American female identity moreover leads her to a skeptical stance towards the early feminist movement. She observes that “[w]hen it was a question of race, I let the lesser question of sex go. But the white women all go for sex, letting race occupy a minor position” (qtd. in Boyd 128). Whereas this quotation is often made use of to position Harper as foremost a race activist, she actually criticizes a binary distinction between race and gender (cf. Boyd 128). She calls attention to the problem that a binary conception of race and gender poses to women of color. It suggests that there is a choice to make—but if she wishes to stay true to her experience she cannot let either occupy a minor position (cf. McDaneld 396–397). Harper thus goes on and voices her skepticism about white suffragists’ understanding of “woman,” wondering “if it was broad enough to take colored women” too (qtd. in Boyd 128). She points to the biggest deficit of first-wave feminism: white suffragists’ “failure to address women’s interlocking experiences of oppression and the varying needs of women across race, class, and [gender]” (Palmer-Mehta 202–203). With that, Harper exhibits a quite modern, intersectional approach to the feminist cause.

Harper uncovers the complex system of oppressions that affects African-Americans in general, and African-American women in particular. After the Civil War she visited the South during her lecturing tours and made
firsthand experiences of the prevailing racialized inequalities. To underscore the intersectional character of Harper’s observations before, during and after Reconstruction, I would like to use Patricia Hill Collins’s “matrix of domination.” Collins’s model features four domains of power. First, the structural domain of power, comprising law, polity, religion, and economy. Second, the disciplinary domain, which “control[s] and organize[s] human behavior through routinization, rationalization, and surveillance” (“Patricia Hill Collins: Intersecting Oppressions”). It manages oppression through more or less veiled social institutions such as racism or sexism. Third, Collins identifies the hegemonic domain of power, where ideology and individual consciousness combine—authority only functions because people believe in it. Finally, there is the interpersonal domain of power, where Collins stresses that the oppressed easily becomes an oppressor herself (“Patricia Hill Collins: Intersecting Oppressions”). It is crucial to keep in mind that these domains of power are not clearly separated, but overlap in the multidimensionality of oppression.

Harper’s account of the structural domain of power comprises three major observations. First, she criticizes the economic exploitation of African-Americans, emphasizing that both Southern and Northern states profit from slavery and indentured labor: “one of [America’s] chief staples has been the sons and daughters [it] send[s] to the human market” (Harper, “Liberty”). Second, she laments the institutionalized poverty and illiteracy of African-Americans. She reproaches white America for having made African-Americans work without pay for the past two hundred years (cf. Harper 1891). She moreover states that “[i]f the negro is ignorant, he has lived under the shadow of an institution which, at least in part of the country, made it a crime to teach him to read” (Harper 1891). Harper exposes the hypocrisy of making the African-American population personally responsible for their oppressed situation: “It comes with ill grace from a man who has put out my eyes to make a parade of my blindness” (Harper 1891). Finally, she criticizes governmental tolerance of lynching and Klan violence. She demands that the “government ... should have power to defend [African-American] life in the hour of peril” (Harper 1891). She is convinced that “there are red-handed men in our republic, who walk unwhipped of justice” (Harper 1891).

The structural domain of power is closely linked to the disciplinary mechanisms that perpetuate oppression; Harper here focuses on racism and
sexism. She repeatedly cites the injustices and atrocities against the African-American population. She asserts that she “know[s] of no other civilized country ... where men are still lynched, murdered, and even burned for real or supposed crimes” (Harper 1891). Harper moreover criticizes public sentiment in a more general way when she observes that African-Americans are perceived as being “good enough for soldiers, but not good enough for citizens” (Harper, “We Are All”). While Harper concentrates on issues of African-American life in general, she also draws attention to the fact that “woman is [especially] unequal before the law,” repeatedly exposing the sexism prevalent during her time (Harper, “We Are All”).

The observations Harper makes in the hegemonic domain of power demonstrate how she successfully unmasks racism as culturally constructed. She states, for example, “I know of no other country in which the enslaved and the enslavers were so physically different that the complexion of the one was a symbol of power and superiority, and that of the other an emblem of poverty, ignorance, and social abasement” (qtd. in Boyd 199). Harper here uses quite modern vocabulary—symbol, emblem—and exhibits her understanding of how racism assigns value and manages oppression. In a speech that she gave before the Civil War, she explained that the institution of slavery “should send a thrill of horror through the nerves of civilization,” but that it does not, because of the “fearful alchemy by which this blood can be transformed into gold. Instead of listening to the cry of agony, [Americans] listen to the ring of dollars” (Harper, “Liberty”). After the Civil War she articulated this idea of the “fearful alchemy” again, stating that “[u]nderlying this racial question . . . is one controlling idea,” which assigns to African-Americans “the position of an alien race among a people impatient of a rival” (Harper 1891). Harper moreover insists that a white person’s consciousness is characterized by “an inheritance of privileges . . . ages of education, dominion, civilization”—suggesting that this may partly account for the widespread opposition to race equality (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”). Yet Harper also stays moored to gender inequality in her observations of the hegemonic domain of power. She states, for example, “This grand and glorious revolution . . . will fail . . . until throughout the length and brea[d]th of the American Republic, the nation shall be so color-blind, as to know no man by the color of his skin or the curl of his hair” (Harper, “We Are All”). She continues with a positive vision of the United States as “one great privileged nation, whose privilege
will be to produce the loftiest manhood and womanhood that humanity can attain” (Harper, “We Are All”). This is the central point of Harper’s intersectionality: While demanding that race inequality be addressed and remedied, she also establishes gender equality as a core element of an enlightened and prosperous nation.

In her observations of the interpersonal domain of power, finally, Harper exhibits a modern feminist approach to race and gender inequality. As stated earlier, she laments that she, as an African-American woman, has had to fight all her life: “I don’t want to have to fight all the time. Today I am puzzled where to make my home ... Have women nothing to do with this?” (Harper, “We Are All”). Part of a later speech ties in with this demand that white suffragists recognize their part in the perpetuation of African-American oppression. Drawing on the imagery of the “cult of true womanhood,” Harper states that “[t]he elements of a nation’s weakness must ever be found at the hearthstone” (Harper, “Woman’s Political Future”). She urgently appeals to white suffragists to acknowledge their responsibility “to create a healthy public sentiment; to demand justice ... to brand with everlasting infamy the lawless and brutal cowardice that lynches, burns, and tortures your own countrymen” (Harper, “We Are All”). Harper thus “constructively criticiz[es] the reserve of those white feminists who refused to identify white male terrorism as a feminist issue” (Boyd 225).

Analyzing the political speeches of Frances Harper through Collins’s matrix of domination makes her visible again as an intersectional feminist. Her feminism is, to quote from a recent publication by Jen McDaneld, “a feminism of critique that is intersectional, dynamic, and, significantly, not centered on the white female subject” (McDaneld 402). Quite the opposite, Harper develops her critical thinking from the standpoint of an African-American female subject. She presents the insights gained from this position as a most valuable resource for social change. She laments that “if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America” (Harper, “We Are All”). She positions African-American women, on the other hand, as able to profit from an “inheritance [of] outrage and wrong” (Harper, “We Are All”). She thus “deem[s] it a privilege to present the negro” (Harper 1891). Much like her contemporary Booker T. Washington, she urges white America to let African-Americans “add [their] quota to the progress, strength, and durability of the nation” (Harper 1891).
The aim of this paper was to emphasize the significance of Frances E. W. Harper for U.S. feminism historically and for contemporary critical theory. Harper proves a valuable resource for feminism in a society with what Melba J. Boyd calls a “white-washed and ‘blackmaled’” past (Boyd 29). A reassessment of her work through the lens of intersectionality enables us to see Harper as the African-American abolitionist and feminist she was. Along with her contemporary Sojourner Truth—who has become somewhat of an icon for the tradition of feminism by and for People of Color—Harper can lend credibility to African-American female intellectuality in the male-dominated field of academia. If we re-assess Harper through the concept of intersectionality, she does not have to be either a race or a gender activist any more, but may be both, just as she was affected by both these systems of oppression. In her account of the different domains of power at work in nineteenth-century America, Harper underscores the complexity of the African-American female experience—advocating an understanding of suffrage based “in both racial and gendered injustices that cannot be extricated from each other” (McDaneld 410). I would like to emphasize once more that Harper deserves a more prominent position in the history of nineteenth-century U.S. literature in general, and in the feminist canon in particular.
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Elissa Wittke is currently studying for a master’s degree in British and North American Cultural Studies at the University of Freiburg in Germany. For her Bachelor of Arts in British and American and Franco-Romance Studies she studied in Germany, the United States, and France. With a passion for past and present processes of American identity formation, she regularly contributes within an academic framework to a discussion in favor of a more diverse representation of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic minorities.

Address: University of Freiburg, Faculty of Philology, English Department, Rempartstraße 15, D-79085 Freiburg, Germany. E-mail: elissa.wittke@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de

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PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER IN NORTH AMERICA

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