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## Contents

Gender Politics Orientation. Reflections on <i>Men and Women</i> . <i>Brian Russell Graham</i>	4
New Discussions of Gender in English Romantic Studies. <i>Robert W. Rix</i>	15
Of Male Bondage. Violence and Constraint in <i>Only God Forgives</i> . <i>Steen Christiansen</i>	27
"I am Girl. Hear me Roar". Girlpower and Postfeminism in Chick lit jr. Novels. <i>Maria Nilson</i>	37
The Concept of the Gentleman. PSY's "Gentleman M V". <i>Jørgen Riber Christensen</i>	50
De kvindefokuserede dramedieserier. <i>Mads Møller Andersen</i>	63
Global Gender. <i>Clara Juncker</i>	75
"Mother-in-law, my, we know her!". The role of personal pronouns in constructions of a female identity. <i>Lotte Dam</i>	87
Mary in the Middle. The use and function of a female character in the policing of a male-male relationship in BBC's <i>Sherlock</i> . <i>Louise Fjordside</i>	100
Paglia's Central Myth. <i>Brian Russell Graham</i>	109
Representations of Intercourse in American Literature. Gender, Patience, and <i>Fuck</i> as a Transitive Verb. <i>Kim Ebensgaard Jensen</i>	119
Still Waiting for Madame President. Hillary Clinton and the Oval Office. <i>Joe Goddard</i>	131
The Well-Accessorized Philosopher. The Vincent F. Hendricks Debacle. <i>Bent Sørensen</i>	143

## Gender Politics Orientation

### Reflections on *Men and Women*

**Brian Russell Graham**

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Relating the articles published in this issue to the content of the original call, this piece will turn to the *gender politics orientation* of the various pieces included. I will locate each of the contributions in a discussion dealing with the kind of orientation which makes up the main section of this article. That discussion will point to the enduring appeal of different feminist approaches, although, as I shall explain, not all contributions are easily appropriated to that outlook. Following on from this, I will discuss the possible significance of one pattern which is detectible in the articles, namely the fact that the conception of patriarchy is unchallenged by the articles collected here. Before approaching those tasks, however, I will provide brief summaries of the articles, grouping them in line with three sets: i) pieces which place emphasis on women, ii) articles equally focused on men and women, iii) contributions more focused on men (though they also illustrate the inseparability of the andro- and gynocentric perspectives).

#### ***Men and Women: Article Summaries***

Beginning with the first of these categories, in "I am a Girl. Hear me Roar': Girl Power and Postfeminism in Chick lit. jr Novels",

Maria Milson scrutinizes the state of feminism in Meg Cabot's *Airhead* series of novels. Along with other chick lit jr. works, these novels exhibit a certain amount of dividedness in terms of feminist values. Feminism, "girlpower", and postfeminism are employed in her discussion of the works, and her conclusion is that, while the novels draw on the legacy of feminism and bear signs of its influence, it is difficult to see them as powerful feminist testimonies: "feminism", she argues, "stays on the individual plane and never influences society as a whole". In the same grouping, Mads Møller Andersen's piece turns to recent sitcoms focused upon female characters, HBO's *Girls* and Netflix's *Orange Is The New Black*, in particular. Using the concept of the "dramedy", Andersen sets up a contrast between these more recent TV series and earlier ones, such as *Sex in the City*. He explores the extent to which "conventional values" are subverted in the more recent sitcoms. Compared with the imagology of *Sex in the City*, *Girls* and *Orange Is The New Black* present audiences with alternative representations of women, where, for example, women are neither "beautiful" nor gentle towards themselves or others. Third in this category, Lotte Dam's contribution, "'Mother-in-law, my, we know her!': The Role of Personal Pronouns in Constructions of a Female Identity", focuses on the "work personal pronouns do", especially as they contribute to the construction of gender, women in particular. Dam examines texts taken from the Danish-language magazine *ALT for damerne*. The magazine articles, she explains, are characterized by an elaborate deployment of the personal pronouns – almost strategy, one might say – which draws women into the world of the magazine's particular norms and values, where beauty and fashion, for example, dominate. Pronouns are an integral part of the ideology of the magazine, which, even if they seem to exclude the reader from a female group (the magazine's experts), finally inculcate women readers into the broad category of female. Lastly, Joe Goddard turns his attention to Hillary Clinton's 2008 Democratic election campaign and looks forward to her (highly likely) 2016 campaign. Goddard's piece, "Still Waiting for Madame President: Hillary Clinton and the Oval Office", is a very thorough investigation of the manifold (and towering) relevance of gender to a major election and election campaign of this type. In addition to the blatant sexism which characterizes an enormous amount of the ways in which her candidacy was pro-

cessed, gender is also revealed to be a feature which one must factor in when considering high politics, media, voters, and so on.

Turning to the second category, where the focus is more evenly distributed over men and women, Rix focuses on gender in Romantic studies in his piece “New Discussions of Gender in English Romantic Studies”. Of course greater attention to gender within this area of literary studies has brought about a reconceptualization of Romanticism; as Rix, states, the very category “romanticism” as an organic concept has been challenged, especially owing to the fact that new work destabilizes the canon, which traditionally defined the movement. One of Rix’s aims, however, is to do justice to the fact that, in the Romantic period itself, writers found it important to work with the opposition of masculine and feminine, often contrasting sex and gender in their pronouncements about their peers. The second article in this category is Juncker’s “Global Gender”, in which she turns to recent Chinese and Chinese American fiction – the works of Xian-based writer Jia Pingwa as well as Ha Jin and Yiyun Li – and deals with gender issues, drawing inspiration from Foucault amongst others “to uncover hidden network of relations, the interdependencies between men and women with and without power that now await attention”. In what is undoubtedly, the quirkiest contribution to the issue, Kim Ebensgaard Jensen turns to the use of “fuck as a transitive verb” in recent American fiction in his piece, “Representations of Intercourse in American Literature: Gender, Patience and *Fuck* as a Transitive Verb”, which investigates the extent to which women remain the objects in such phrasing. Ebensgaard discovers (unsurprisingly) that it is women who, in a majority of cases, figure as the subject in sentences containing the verb in question, and that, rather than being imbued with “agency”, they are inscribed in terms of “patience” (presented here as the antonym of agency). My own article, which probably belongs here, enquires into what Paglia actually stands for. Employing the religious metaphors of “fallen” and “restored”, as well as the idea of “sacraments”, I argue that what is uppermost in the work of Paglia is a concern with a “fallen state” connected to sex and gender alignment (disempowering for both men and women) and a risen state in which self-fulfilment is effected by transgenderism. For Paglia, the social

purpose of literature is to help individuals understand their own transgender destiny: writers provide models for that “migration”.

The third grouping contains articles which, it is probably fair to say, are more focused on men than women or an even combination of the two sexes. The first of these is Louise Fjordside’s piece, which turns to BBC’s popular *Sherlock* series. Working with Sedgewick’s discussion of love triangles, in which women effectively serve as a barrier between men who feel homosocial love for one another, Fjordside discusses the matrix of relations between Watson, Sherlock and Mary (John Watson’s girlfriend, and then wife). She investigates what the subtext of “performativity” of the text tells us about the men’s feelings for each other, especially Sherlock’s feelings for John. Next in this grouping is Jørgen Riber Christensen’s piece, “The Concept of the Gentleman: PSY’s ‘Gentleman M V’”, which turns to an idea which was once a cornerstone of our key concepts: that of the “gentleman”. Focusing to a significant extent on the satirical nature of the video in question, Christensen argues that it seems to point to the notion that “the insecure status of masculine identity in an age of post-second-generation feminism demands the seemingly parodic treatment of the concept of the gentleman”. Christensen relates his argument to a taxonomy of contemporary masculine identities, arguing that the “gentleman” of the video seems to invoke two of three types. Thirdly, Steen Christiansen turns his attention to Nicolas Winding Refn’s recent critical success *Only God Forgives* in his article “Of Male Bondage: Violence and Constraint in *Only God Forgives*”. The film, he argues, represents part of a rediscovery of melodrama in our times. Whereas classically the melodrama was viewed as film tied in with a female audience (“women’s films”), Refn’s work might be considered an example of “male melodrama”, in which masculinity and its vulnerability are explored. One of Christensen’s main arguments is that even if characters in the story are unable to weep, we should avoid the conclusion that they are bereft of emotional intensity. Violence becomes an outlet for male emotion in the narrative. And, lastly, Bent Sørensen’s article deals with by a 2012 photo spread bearing the title as “Man of the Month” in *Connery*, which featured professor of philosophy at Copenhagen University Vincent F. Hendricks. Sørensen’s analyses the staging of gender and sexuality in the photo series and proceeds to look at

its subsequent critique before proceeding to a consideration of the larger gender debate issues raised by the event. If his article has a male subject, it is also partly focused on the representation of women as sexual objects, and male naivety about this tendency. Sørensen finds inspiration in the work of Bergson on humour and Henri Tajfel's work on ingroup/outgroup dynamics.

### Gender Politics Orientation

One might discuss these texts in relation to a number of different criteria. One obvious manner in which one might process these texts would involve focussing on their "primary texts" and considering the large number of national contexts included in this collection. Alternatively, one might approach them in terms of the "level of culture" suggested by the primary texts. This angle would lead to observations about the fact that, while some authors focus on literature and engage with a great many canonical authors (Rix in particular), the majority of pieces deal with what we might label mass culture or popular culture. One might also invoke the "theory versus practical criticism" distinction and deal with the fact that most of the contributions represent examples of practical criticism, though they represent examples of cultural studies rather than, say, conventional literature studies.

I have chosen, however, to focus on the *gender politics orientation* suggested by the contributions. In a collection of pieces dedicated to the theme of men and women, it makes sense to approach the contributions in relation to how they orient themselves against the background of today's debates. Turning to the articles again, and reviewing them with an eye for their "men and women" orientation, it is clear that the majority of pieces are informed by different feminist orientations.

- Rix's piece is clearly characterized by a high level of neutrality: he identifies a number of patterns in Romantic scholarship as well as Romantic literature, without siding with any particular position. He does, however, show signs of sympathy for gender criticism (along with post-feminism).
- Nilson's chief sympathy seems to be with Baumgardner and Richards, and their *Manifesta. Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (2000). Postfeminism is tied in with girlpower, and Nilson's



sympathy for Zaslow's and Orenstein's twofold conceptualisations of "girl power" serves to put some distance between her and critics who would find no feminist value in such a theoretical conception. But at the end of her piece, the stress falls on the negative dimension of "girlpower". With the help of the general conclusions of Baumgardner and Richards, who take a less emollient view of such themes, she stresses the fact that there is room for much more feminist content in such books.

- Andersen holds back from identifying with a particular feminist position, but he thinks that feminist strategies are employed in the shows he discusses and takes on the job of "reading" the characters in these shows as signs of progress in female characterization.
- Juncker orients her article in relation to the lives of women and men in "heterotopias" in relation to not just the work of Foucault but also Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Global Woman* (2004), which, as Juncker explains, "problematized the focus the 1960s and 70s feminist movement on Western gender issues and changed the emphasis on white, middle-class men and women to their others in terms of race, class and topography". Her piece, then, is animated by a clear Third Wave approach to issues dealing with women and men.
- Dam's piece is unequivocally social constructionist in its orientation. "This article", she states, "is based on the idea that rather than being reflected in discourse, identity is constructed in discourse". Dam utilizes the insights of discourse analysts and sociolinguistics, social psychology, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, as well as the discourse-linguistic approach, in relation to van Dijk, who directs the author to the personal pronoun.
- Fjordside relies on Eve Sedgwick's *English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), as well as on work which evolves out of it. That theory, as we know, looks into a specific (mis)use of women: her focus is situations in which male-male desire is converted into rivalry over a woman, who is not really the beloved, but rather a cover for male-male desire.
- Jensen's work is related to work done in feminist stylistics. Feminist linguistics generally focuses on text produced by genders in the identification of male and female language(s), while Jen-

sen focuses on representations of genders, rather than on gendered discourse as such. But if, as Sara Mills argues, “feminist stylistic analysis is concerned not only to describe sexism in a text, but also to analyse the way in which point of view, agency, metaphor, or transitivity are unexpectedly closely related to matters of gender, to discover whether women’s writing practices can be described, and so on” (Mills 1995, 1), Jensen’s work, focused on agency and transitivity, belongs here. His work can be aligned with Mary Ellen Ryder (1999), who analyses event structures in romance novels which construe heroines as passive, as well as that of Robin Lakoff, who argues that the language produced by women and men signals a view of women as powerless and lacking.

- Goddard scrutinizes the possible significance of gender, and Hillary Clinton’s gender in particular, in the American presidential races in order to discuss the issue in relation to *disadvantage* experienced by Clinton in her political endeavours. He works with a panoply of concepts which allow him to approach the issue from a number of viewpoints and help him to arrive at his conclusion: male and female political roles, (what “types” emerge in a two-gender political arena), the connotations of femininity, societal openness towards a female President, “suitability” (of a female candidate) for office, the significance of gender-plus-age, the “fundamental sexism” detectible in media coverage, and “subliminal attitudes” related to gender.
- And Sørensen’s piece is also explicitly feminist in its orientation. He focuses on sexism and the sexual objectification of women, and, as such, it has its roots in second wave feminism and/or radical feminism and the work of Laura Mulvey, focused on the “male gaze”, in particular. Towards the end of his article, he considers the possible ambiguity of the issue: “[H]umour also has a liberating potential among the ingroup that laughs along with a humorous representation, so the issue is thorny and not easily resolved”. However, he returns to his second wave feminist orientation. We can thank feminists, he states, for “calling foul on sexist practices inside and outside the academe”.

To provide a characterization of the orientation of the remaining pieces, it is necessary to bring men and masculinity into the fore-

ground. The articles I have already discussed contain a rather modest amount of censure of men and reproof of masculinity. Rix's piece, which engages with gender criticism, re-articulates opprobrium of masculinity and even men. Romantic studies gender criticism focuses, he explains, on a *crisis* in masculinity ("male power is torn by anxieties about its authority"), as well as men's (somewhat nervous) attempts to shore up patriarchy ("analysis may reveal how male writers struggle to maintain patriarchal values rather than presume that they are part of a god-ordained and static universal order"). Sørensen's article is more trenchant in its criticisms. His criticism is of one man, but he is clearly interested in *systemic* sexism, as well as institutional bias.

What is striking about the two remaining articles in terms of their gender orientation is that, in contrast to any discourse characterized by censure of men or reproof of masculinity, these pieces are more sympathetic towards men and masculinity. Christensen's article pulls back from Genz and Barbon's "postfeminist" man, which some feminists might see as being rather uncritical of certain masculinities, but he deals sympathetically with an array of male identities. His conclusion is more descriptive than evaluative (or emotive): "Gentleman M V" has managed to produce a new kind of gentleman that reflects the ongoing negotiation of different male, social identities". And Christiansen's piece, going one step beyond this, is full of sympathy for the *difficulties* faced by men in society, indeed their vulnerability. He is partly interested in how, in Refn's *Only God Forgives*, "pleasure, fear, and pain are primarily embodied in and through *male* bodies" (my emphasis). The film, he argues, "places the strong, violent male protagonist in a disempowered position", and the implied audience, an audience of men, are put in a "passive-masochistic position rarely delegated to men." In his summing up remarks, Christiansen speaks of how the end point of masculinity is "as crippling for men as for anyone else", and "men are as much victims of patriarchal violence as women are".

### **Patriarchy: An Organic Concept?**

In the original call for articles, I state that "One commentator has published a study suggestively entitled *The Second Sexism*, detailing the gender-specific issues which affect men rather than women (David Benatar)", and I go on suggest the importance of "the

burgeoning and persistence of the Men's Movement in the works of authors such as Robert Bly, Warren Farrell, et al., concomitant with the achievement of high standards of living for (some) women in Western societies". Something of an attempted revolution has started to take place in gender studies. Offering a challenge to the wide variety of positions employed in the past few decades, much recent work has started to critique the consensus surrounding the nature of the gender *arche* (Ancient Greek: ἀρχή). Typically, such thinking, like much feminist thinking, is against all *arche* on the prescriptive level, but on the descriptive level it challenges the notion that the conception of "patriarchy" is fit for purpose if our first objective is to describe the matrix of relations between men and women in societies today. When we turn to the work of a thinker such as Christina Hoff Sommers, for example, societal "patriarchy" in, for example, the United States, becomes an assumption which needs to be subject to scrutiny. Work such as hers or Warren Farrell's or David Benatar's, for example, challenges the descriptive dimension of the virtually all academic work dedicated to men and women.

There are at least two views on work such as that of Benatar's if we may take him as the vanguard of this challenge. On the one hand, it might be thought of as work generating a paradigm shift in gender studies. At the same time, it may be seen unsympathetically as the false article and work which changes nothing in terms of the number of positions on gender available to us. Of course the notion that some inequalities may be inequalities affecting men is a troublesome idea for traditional discourses about gender inequality. The very notion of patriarchy relies upon the notion that women are *systematically* disadvantaged in society, and that any inequality facing men is so limited in nature that it makes sense to go on speaking of a general *arche* in society. As one might have imagined, then, a number of feminists have sought to "read" problems faced by men in society not as indicators of inequalities challenging the organic nature of the conception of patriarchy, but, rather, as problems which are in fact *causally related* to patriarchy. Showing signs of nervousness, Julie Bindel gets this point across in a *Guardian* article written by Elizabeth Day about David Benatar's *The Second Sexism*:

"It's total and utter bullshit. There are areas where men are paying the price that male supremacy gives them – there's

absolutely no doubt about that.... The reality is that the public domain belongs entirely to men and the disadvantages they face are just the price they pay. It's tough cheese". (Day 2012)

The conception of patriarchy is relatively unchallenged in the articles in this issue. In Christiansen's piece, patriarchy is the *cause* of violence, even when the victims are men. (Of course Paglia, the subject of my own piece, boldly states: "What feminism calls patriarchy is simply civilization, an abstract system designed by men but augmented and now co-owned by women" (Paglia 1994, 26). A discussion of Paglia's thinking, however, should not be seen as declaration of general agreement with her views, however intriguing the author finds her.) While only twelve articles are collected in this issue, the fact that the conception of patriarchy remains so crucial to these contributions demands a little reflection, and the first thing to say is that this tendency may well be indicative of the organic nature of the conception and the sound judgment of the contributors. Perhaps "patriarchy" describes with accuracy the present-day state of gender relations in both the developing and developed worlds. As that possibility requires little in the way of elaboration, it might be more interesting to consider an alternative explanation. It might also be argued that the case against the integrity of the conception of patriarchy has not been well made as of yet. If we look back at Bindel's word choice, we see that she distinguishes between "supremacy" and "disadvantage". Such a distinction raises the question "In what does supremacy consist?" Two possible answers suggest themselves. Firstly, "supremacy" may consist in men's experiencing only a tiny fraction of "disadvantage". Secondly, it can be argued that feminist discourses were never about isolated instances of subjugation, but rather deeper realities, which are captured in terms such as "social formations" and "general system" (Meagher, 441). It may well be that writers focused on societal difficulties faced by men will have to meet these points.

Clearly, a great deal of work is going to be done in this area over the next few decades. Commentators such as Benatar are trying, in the first instance, to make gender *arche* in society a moot point. It would be fascinating to repeat the theme of this issue in 2024, and see how things have evolved.

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## New Discussions of Gender in English Romantic Studies

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### **Abstract**

Over the past few decades, gender studies have reinvigorated the way in which we talk about romanticism. The article discusses some of the key developments and their critical consequences. Critical interventions have not only redirected our reading of familiar texts, but also fundamentally destabilized the canon and even made us question the validity of the label 'romanticism' itself. Recent critical work is beginning to uncover a mobile syntax of gender roles. The article focuses on how criticism is beginning to discern an unstable distribution of gender characteristics across the spectrum of literary writing.

*Keywords* gender criticism, feminism, romanticism, the sublime, politics, the French Revolution

Over the last two decades, British and American critics have begun a complete overhaul of the way we understand gender in English literary romanticism (a period sometimes given as 1785-1830). This article will analyze how this dimension of the field has been redefined. This I propose to do by surveying some of the landmark

publications in the field. But the purpose is also to point to the fact that gender boundaries and their transgressions were already widely debated in romantic-era writing. “Masculine” and “feminine” were definitions that could be applied to writers of either sex. The article will argue that remembering the fact that gender categories were “mobile” in this way is among the most important renewals in romantic studies.

### **The Revolution Debate as a Catalyst for Gender Criticism**

I will begin by exemplifying some of the issues that gender-oriented criticism of romantic texts may address. One such issue is how expected links between a writer’s sex and his/her public opinion are disconnected. A survey of published writings during the period will show that female pamphleteers were on the forefront when it came to discrediting the suggestion that women could be given extended rights. On the other hand, there are male writers who examined the plight of females. An illustration of the latter (although not entirely unproblematic) is William Blake’s early poem *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). The critical debate on this text has dealt with the heroine Oothoon’s subjection to various forms of oppression. Oothoon’s enslavement takes place through a number of interrelated subjections: she is slave, rape victim, religious subordinate, and wife. These are roles contrasted with the perspectives of various oppressive male figures: Bromion, Theotormon, and Urizen. In this respect, Blake’s *Visions* is of socio-psychological interest because it discusses male domination as a problem that cannot be isolated from the oppressive psychology pervading other areas of human interaction during the age. This is illustrated by Bromion’s lines spoken to Oothoon (after having raped her): “Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north and south:/ Stamp’d with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun” (Blake 1988, 46). The urge to subject females appears to spring from the same source as colonialism (Blake alludes to British expansionist designs, which had been thrown off in the American colonies) and the trade in black slaves (against which British abolitionists were still raging in the 1790s). As a counterweight to the most congratulatory feminist and post-feminist readings, a 2013 collection of essays entitled *Sexy Blake*, edited by Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly, sets out to examine Blake’s fascination with sex and his insistent attempts at



normalizing aberrant sexuality, a tendency that sits uneasily with political correctness.

Romantic-era writers were to a significant extent using gendered categories to discuss politics. The cataclysmic event that brought gender to the forefront in the romantic period was the French Revolution. This was a break with the kind of religious and monarchical tyranny, which Blake campaigned against in *Visions* and his other writings. At first, the Revolution was positively received in Britain, but the patriarchal values expressed in the conservative politician Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) set the debate in motion in Britain. Rather than embracing the overthrow of Catholic despotism, Burke saw the Revolution as devastating the code of "chivalry", which he argued had characterized European culture since the Middle Ages. The Revolution was figured as an attack on "manly sentiment and heroic enterprize" (113).

One of the numerous replies Burke's text invited was Mary Wollstonecraft's political pamphlet *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1791). Wollstonecraft takes a direct swipe at Burke's claim that what constituted the backbone of Europe was the chivalric nobility, which the revolutionaries had now toppled. In a deft discursive move, she instead indicts the nobility for having betrayed "a manly spirit of independence"; this is because a member of this class is pampered from childhood "like a superior being", never receiving "sufficient fortitude either to exercise his mind or body to acquire personal merit" (27). For this reason, the nobility have "ceased to be men". The most obvious example of this is Burke himself, who had accepted a government pension "in a skulking, unmanly way" (19).

A related strategy which Wollstonecraft applies is to feminize Burke. In a rigorous piece of discourse analysis, the critic Steven Blakemore notes that Wollstonecraft constantly accuses Burke of irrationality, and for being weak, imaginative and hysterical (1997, 15-25) – i.e. a female typecast in eighteenth-century parlance. Wollstonecraft says Burke and other "men of lively fancy" follow "the impulse of passion" and thereby fail to undertake "the arduous task" of cultivating their "reason" (1790, 67). In contrast, she presents her own argument as based on reason, judgement and unadorned truth – i.e. what were hailed as touchstones in male debate. Throughout her polemical pamphlet, Wollstonecraft shrewdly inverts the dominant stereotypes.

Wollstonecraft also wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she calibrates the liberties, previously only applicable to “man”, into a focused text for British women. She now confronts the gendered rhetoric of patriarchal society, which stigmatizes “rational” woman, head on (1796, 66-7, 102). As backup for these efforts, Wollstonecraft refers to Catherine Macaulay’s *Letters on Education* (1790) as a text which sets out to expose the mechanics of discriminatory discourse: “When we compliment the appearance of a more than ordinary energy in the female mind”, she notes, “we call it masculine” (2012, 233). Wollstonecraft’s similar affront to such entrenched and culturally adulterated vocabulary is an aspect of her writing that continues to invite intense study (see for example Steiner 2014).

Women who expropriated rational discourse often found themselves pilloried. A famous example of this is Thomas J. Mathias’ hugely popular satire on literary contemporaries *The Pursuits of Literature* (1794), which went through no less than sixteen editions. Mathias refers unflatteringly to “our unsex’d female writers” who “now instruct, or confuse, us and themselves, in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy” (1801, 244). Here, Mathias alludes to the Gothic novel, which he attacks as morally corruptive. Thus, paradoxically, women who try to rationalize will fall into the hysterical “unreason” that characterizes the Gothic novel. By drawing on a complex network of associations, he indicates that Wollstonecraft and other female writers who claim to use “reason” to defeat religious and monarchical authority are like the French revolutionaries which Burke had described as “the furies of hell ... the vilest of women”, dancing beneath beheaded nobility (1790, 106).

Mathias’ criticism of female political writers was expanded and magnified in *The Unsex’d Females* (1798), a poem by Richard Polwhele, an Anglican clergyman and regular contributor to the conservative periodical the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Polwhele pathologizes the “unnatural” body of female writers, such as Anna Barbauld, Mary Robinson, Ann Yearsley, and Mary Hays as constituting a “female band despising NATURE’s law,/ As ‘proud defiance’ flashes from their arms,/ And vengeance smothers all their softer charms” (1974, 6). Not unexpectedly, Polwhele makes Wollstonecraft his main target, devoting twenty lines of the poem (and a footnote) to her.

If recent gender criticism often breaks down the boundaries between the literary text and the arena of political debate in their examinations of romantic-period writing, so the commentators of the age saw the literary field as a politicized arena. Wollstonecraft herself, as a keen purveyor of literary texts, was able influence the public indirectly. One avenue was through her reviewing for the left-liberal *Analytical Review*, which began in 1788. In her review of *Edward and Harriet, Or The Happy Recovery; A Sentimental Novel* (1788) by “a Lady”, Wollstonecraft asserts that she has had to forego an analysis of the novel because “the cant of sensibility” that characterizes the prose on its pages could not “be tried by any criterion of reason”. Rather, such overly sentimental works teach women to be weak: to “faint and sigh as the novelist informs them they should”. By cultivating such “artificial feelings” of heightened sensibility, women readers accustom themselves to enjoy only emotional works and avoid “rational books” that “do not throw the mind into an exquisite tumult” (*Analytical Review*, June 1788, 208).

### The Mobility of Gender

Wollstonecraft’s remark is undergirded by wider concerns over literature. These were concerns riven with anxieties over the easy mobility of gender. During the mid to late eighteenth century, the “cult of sensibility” had established itself as a dominant social convention and a literary ideal in genteel society. In the sentimental novel, the feminine propensity for showing sensitivity and compassion was transferred to men with the effect of improving their manners. This was registered even in the physique of the literary heroes. In Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), for example, the face of the eponymous hero has “a delicacy ... which might have given him an air rather too effeminate had it not been joined to the most masculine person and mien” (qtd. in Barker-Benfield 1992, 341). The romantics’ great interest in feeling also caused them to write “the feminine”. Contemporary reviews show that Wordsworth’s heightened emotionalism was regularly attacked. Wordsworth became an effeminized victim of the *Edinburgh Review*, whose leading critics roughed him up for his unmanly inanities of sensibility (see Gravil, 2010, 73-108). The new critical attention given to the contemporary reception of romantic texts belies earlier feminist

typecasting of Wordsworth as “the epitome of appropriative and aggressive masculinity” (Wolfson 1994, 31).

Overstressed emotions needed not be “artificial” (in Wollstonecraft’s vocabulary) to threaten masculinity. Also outside of the literary sphere, a maudlin sensibility could also unman its practitioners. For example, when Thomas de Quincey shed excessive tears at Kate Wordsworth’s death (William’s daughter), Henry Crabb Robinson, chronicler of the romantic writer, described his “sensibility” as probably “genuine” but also one which was “in danger of being mistaken for a puling and womanly weakness” (1967, 26).

The mobility of gender orientations, which has been described above, began to receive mounting critical attention in the early 1990s. Diane Hoeveler published *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (1990), in which she looked at the six male canonical English poets and how they dealt with the idea of imaginative creativity. This, she argues, was possible for males insofar as they absorbed/cannibalized the feminine principle and thus became androgynous. She shows how male poets self-consciously engage with a feminine as Other, which came to constitute an alternative source of value, in order to complete their psyches. Hoeveler then reads a number of the “women” in romantic poetic discourse as a metaphoric expression of this idea.

Anne K. Mellor’s book *Romanticism and Gender* (1993) works within the confines of the usual two traditional gender orientations, classifying a female romanticism as distinct from a male romanticism. However, she concedes that, in the final analysis, these distinctions are endpoints on a continuum that ranges not only across the board of literary romanticism but also through the corpus of each individual writer. She then focuses on Emily Brönte and John Keats, whom she calls literary “cross-dressers”. The analyses of their work show that any writer “could occupy the ‘masculine’ or the ‘feminine’ ideological or subject position even within the same work” (Mellor 1993, 4).

The investigation of gender as not grounded in biological sex but in the social construct of the writing subject is taken much further in Susan J. Wolfson’s *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism* (2006), in which Lord Byron and his contemporaries Felicia Hemans, Maria Jane Jewsbury, and John Keats are shown to demonstrate how the dichotomy between “masculine” and “femi-

“writing” was difficult to uphold in the period. This non-binaristic reading has since been extended in Gaura Shankar Narayan’s *Real and Imagined Women in British Romanticism* (2009). This is a book relying heavily on the work of Judith Butler and her view of gender as a “freefloating artifice”, i.e. masculinity and femininity are social constructs that may apply to either biological sex.

One example of how romantic aesthetic categories were invested with gender-specific association can be seen in relation to “the sublime”. That this romantic hallmark was conceived as a gendered category has been usefully discussed by Fjelkestam, among others. According to Edmund Burke’s highly influential *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), “the sublime” is connected with power, terror, violence, majesty, vastness, whereas the beautiful is passive and pleasing and can be domesticated. That the two categories were divided on the basis of gendered fault lines was already realised by Thomas de Quincy, who noted that “the Sublime by way of polar antithesis to the Beautiful ... grew up on the basis of sexual distinctions – the Sublime corresponding to the male and the Beautiful, its anti-pole corresponding to the female” (qtd. in Proctor 1943, 75). To some extent, it may be possible to see “the sublime” as the romantic’s masculinist counterbalance to otherwise effeminizing emotionalism. The way in which romanticism was defined according to writers’ engagement with such issues has determined the construction of the category of the “romantic” in essential ways.

### Canon Formation and Dissolution

From the late nineteenth century, when the romantic canon was first established, romanticism was to a large extent seen as a male affair. The writers read and discussed were the “Big Six”: William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley, John Keats, and William Blake. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) was the only novel by a female writer of interest to romantic studies, but practically nothing else she wrote was studied. In the mid-1980s, the male dominance broke up and was replaced by a new attention to female writing, without which a complete understanding of “romanticism” was deemed incomplete. In anthologies and survey works, authors now regularly include Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825), Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), Maria Edgeworth (1768-



1849), Matilda Betham (1776-1852), Felicia Hemans (1793-1835), Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838), Hannah More (1745-1833), Mary Robinson (1758-1800), Anna Seward (1742-1809), Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), and Ann Yearsley (1756-1806).

In fact, writing was one of the few ways in which romantic-era women could make a respectable living, and some of the women just mentioned were even outselling Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats (St Clair, 362, 631, 716 etc.). However, they were still trailing behind Byron, who – ironically – created for himself a very masculine mythology. As a recent study has shown, female writers often developed their fiction in response to Byronism and the Byronic hero (Franklin 2013). This should alert us to the fact that gender-related issues were a key driving force for a number of female writers.

Critical works of the 1980s began to home in on the subject of “women writers and poetic identity” – to use the title of an influential book by Margaret Homans. A prominent critic was Anne K. Mellor, who edited an influential collection of essays entitled *Romanticism and Feminism* in 1988. The critical awareness of females who wrote for public consumption has fundamentally destabilized the validity of using the term “romanticism” to define a unified literary and cultural renewal during the period. It is, of course, nothing new to suggest that romantic writing took a diversity of forms. Already A. O. Lovejoy, in his important essay “On the Discriminations of Romanticisms” (1924), saw the movement as a Venn diagram with no singular common ground, but, as the push for including women in the romantic canon was stepped up, the existence of a significant chasm between male and female writers began to attract attention.

### **The Chasm between Male and Female Writers**

A number of the women romantics tended to focus on subjects that differed from that of their male counterparts: the home, domestic duties, the local landscape, religious piety and other themes deemed appropriately “feminine”. If one dimension of British romanticism was concerned with overturning traditional values, much of women’s writing tried to circumvent public controversy. Furthermore, it appears that a self-regulating mechanism was in force: some genres seem to have been predominantly reserved for male writers, such as the epic, learned classical verse, the scientific poem, and the political satire. This nexus between women writers and the range of

generic conventions is the subject of the essay collection *Romantic Women Poets: Genre and Gender* (2007), edited by L. M. Crisafulli and C. Pietropoli.

In particular, it was women writers who risked public derision if they trespassed into the territory of satire. For instance, the blue-stocking writer Anna Barbauld's anti-imperialist poem "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven" met with hostility in the *Quarterly Review*, the leading Tory periodical of the day. The reviewer expressed the view that "... the empire might have been saved without the intervention of a lady-author" and laments that she had abandoned "her knitting needles" to write this political poem, when she could have stuck with the sentiments seen in her *Lessons for Children* and *Hymns in Prose* (*Quarterly Review* 1812, 309). In these previous works, Barbauld's poetic voice was identified with the culturally approved role of guardian or nurse.

In the face of such clear examples of policing literary borders in the romantic period, there has been an attempt in recent criticism to look for the links between male and female experiences. In a collection of essays from 2009, Beth Lau and other contributors (following a cue originally given in Stuart Curran's 1988 seminal essay, "The I Altered") set out to discover how male and female writers were interlocutors, drawn by centrifugal forces toward common romantic ideals rather than separated by dissimilar spheres of experience.

Since the 1990s, the sometimes single-eyed feminist focus on women writers has been abandoned to allow for the return of the "old" canon of male writers, opening up these writers to a new gender-based understanding. Barbara Gelpi's pioneering study *Shelley's Goddess* (1992) was one such prominent example of this new departure. What has since been labelled "gender criticism" aborts what was the central plank in some early feminist criticism (i.e. promoting the reading and understanding of women writers) and instead aims to situate gender within the wider circulation of social identities. Since the definition of masculinity may be of equal importance to issues of female identity, gender criticism is sometimes referred to as "post-feminist". Gender critics do not pigeonhole men's writing as monolithic, but rather tend to understand it as a series of dynamic social and cultural attitudes. Gender criticism frequently sets out to register the cracks and fissures in the definition of what it is to be a man in the romantic period and scrutinizes how

male power is torn by anxieties about its authority. For example, analysis may reveal how male writers struggle to maintain patriarchal values rather than presume that they are part of a god-ordained and static universal order.

### Conclusion

Over the past decades, there has been a steady destabilization of the canon of writers seen to constitute “romanticism”. Female writers are now to a larger degree included in anthologies and university syllabi, because the notions of the themes that qualify as “romantic” are under reconstruction. Recent gender criticism is also beginning to overcome the biological stereotyping and essentialist notions that characterized some earlier feminist efforts in romantic studies. Instead, criticism now focuses increasingly on the mobility of gender, which writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft were already exploring. Criticism is moving away from an older socio-political understanding of patriarchal attitudes towards new exploration of female vs. male categorizations as essentially cultural constructs. That is to say, rather than fixing on autobiography, criticism is now taking seriously textuality as a primary site for negotiating such categorization. This is the recognition that gender difference functions as a trope, which can be reversed and challenged – precisely because they are textual constructions. Gender categories are seen as mobile values, which continue to subvert the logic of essentialist or biological categories. This has created a new way of understanding romantic literature.

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## Of Male Bondage

Violence and Constraint in *Only God Forgives*

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### Abstract

Classical Hollywood melodrama, often referred to as “women’s films,” are defined through their heightened emotional intensity and their confrontation of social issues. While usually regarded as finished by the late 1950s, in the past decade melodrama has returned in the different form of the male melodrama, articulating a concern with and anxiety of male frailty. In Nicolas Winding Refn’s delirious male melodrama *Only God Forgives* (2013), violence takes the place of crying as the expression of emotional intensity. The movie’s primary deviance from classical melodrama comes through in its emphasis on the body in pain as the locus for contemporary male gender trouble. This paper will investigate the gender negotiations of the movie through its reactualization of melodrama as a male gender form.

*Keywords* masculinity, melodrama, sensation, violence

In the following, I will investigate negotiations of masculinity in *Only God Forgives* (Refn 2013) through the film’s reactualization of melodrama as a masculine form. The movie’s primary deviance

from classical melodrama comes through in its emphasis on the body in pain as the locus for contemporary male gender trouble. I begin with the observation that melodrama is a cinema of heightened emotional intimacy. This is certainly not a radical statement in any way, and versions of this argument can be found in many critical works on melodrama. However, in Refn's delirious male melodrama violence takes the place of crying as the expression of emotional intensity. The film exchanges one form of sensation for another, thereby also changing the expression of classical melodrama's concerns of gender, sexuality, and family issues. My claim is that the concerns remain the same, despite their different sensate forms.

It is the bodily sensation of violence which interests me here, as distinct from Peter Brooks' (1994, 11) argument that melodrama re-invents a semiotics of the body. While Brooks' argument remains true, I find his explanation insufficient. While violence, posturing, and lack of expression are certainly semiotically coded, there is also an intensity which overflows signification. It is this excess of signification which cannot be captured narratively that becomes the focus of my discussion of *Only God Forgives*. Masculinity is at the crux of this overflow, something which is produced in the expression of emotions through violence. Such production of masculinity is presented as limiting and problematic throughout the film, setting up a tension between violence and constraint in unusual ways. How men's emotions play out on and with their bodies as violent sensations and sensations of violence become the focal point for how masculinity is embodied in the film, in ways which allow us to understand a deeper complexity of masculinity.

*Only God Forgives* is the story of Julian (Ryan Gosling), who deals drugs and runs a Thai boxing club in Bangkok. His brother Billy (Tom Burke) rapes and murders a young girl, after which police officer Chang (Vithaya Pansringarm) allows the father to kill Billy as revenge. Julian and Billy's mother Crystal (Kristin Scott Thomas) fly to Bangkok, demand that Julian avenge his brother's death, humiliate Julian for dating a sex worker, and finally hire a hitman to murder the father. This makes Chang hunt down and kill the hitman Byron (Byron Gibson), after which he faces off against Julian. Beating Julian, Chang proceeds to kill Crystal and the film concludes with Julian hallucinating having his hands cut off by Chang. The

final scene shows Chang at his favorite karaoke bar, singing. Throughout the film Julian experiences several hallucinations, and it is often difficult to separate the two levels as they intertwine. The film is hardly an exercise in realism and instead gains a lot from its surreal mode, employing degrees of heightened reality to add layers of intense sensations. Stylistically, the film is kept mostly in vibrant, rich red tones, with a droning ambient sound design which unsettles the tranquility of the *mise-en-scène*.

### Intense Sensations

What makes *Only God Forgives* distinct is the way it vacillates between violent sensations and sensations of violence. I take this approach from Gilles Deleuze's argument in *Francis Bacon* (2005), where violence is viewed as a cliché but all sensations act with violent force upon us. Sensations, for Deleuze, occur when we enter into a work of art and are filled with the most appropriate sensation, "not the most agreeable sensation, but the one that fills the flesh at a particular moment of its descent, contraction, or dilation" (Deleuze 2005, 29). This is, of course, in a different vocabulary, precisely what Linda Williams discusses in her essay "Film Bodies" (1991), where she argues for attention to how certain film genres, including melodrama, affect our bodies directly. Particularly, Williams emphasizes how female bodies are "the primary embodiments of pleasure, fear, and pain" (Williams 1991, 4).

This embodiment of affective states is precisely my interest in terms of *Only God Forgives* simply because pleasure, fear, and pain are primarily embodied in and through male bodies, in ways which Deleuze would identify as sensations of violence through representation: i.e. we see acts of violence directly. Rather than simply regarding Refn's film as a failed melodrama which resorts to clichéd representations, we should pay attention to how male bodies are subjected to violence, and how this affects our experience of the film.

Melodrama viewed this way becomes a set of felt intensities instead of a sign structure; in this case, a figuration of male bodily experience. Stuart Cunningham is on to something similar in an early article in which he argues that melodrama is a force-field – it serves as a dynamic space in which a variety of concerns are drawn into shifting, changing patterns (Cunningham 2000, 191). The problem with Cunningham's account is that he considers melodrama to

be mimetic, i.e. representational, of periods of social crisis. While I agree that melodramas deal with social crises, I am more wary of the notion that melodramas represent social crisis through narrative means.

My concern arises from the fact that most canonical definitions regard melodrama as inherently excessive. It is this excess which makes narrative-semiotic analyses insufficient for properly understanding the emotional and bodily sensations of watching *Only God Forgives*. My resolute turn to embodiment is connected to the fact that male bodies are often seen as central to articulations of masculinity. Fintan Walsh argues that hypermasculinity excessively emphasizes physical strength, often by reducing the male body to its basic motor function of punching, kicking, stretching, and so forth (Walsh 2010, 65). It is the friction of reduced embodiment and failure which turns *Only God Forgives* into something other than a martial arts thriller – what I refer to as a male melodrama with an emphasis on the body as caught between sensations of violence and violent sensations. In this way, Jennifer Barker argues, we feel the film's body and its movements so much so that we often leave a film physically and emotionally exhausted and drained (Barker 2009, 83).

If, as Jane Shattuc argues, melodrama is a major site for political struggles of the disempowered (Shattuc 1994, 148), then *Only God Forgives* does something completely unexpected: it places the strong, violent male protagonist in a disempowered position and by extension makes us feel disempowered. The hyper-formalist framing of the entire film serves as a kind of constraint, not only of Julian but also of us. Narratively, Julian is constantly acted upon by outside forces, while visually he is consistently placed within a limiting *mise-en-scène*. Julian's body is consistently rendered powerless, which produces a significant tension between the typical emotional intensity of melodrama acted on women's bodies with men as the agents of action, and the violence committed on Julian's body. Violence of sensation translates through sensations of violence and registers as disempowering affects on us: we are stunned by the violence and left powerless by the surreal visuals of the film.

## Violence

The violence represented and acted out in *Only God Forgives* comes primarily in the form of Chang, the singing police officer. While the



other acts of direct, bodily violence are either left out in a narrative ellipses (the rape and murder of the girl) or only seen indirectly (the revenge murder of Billy), Chang's violence is presented in all its gory detail and excess. It is this stylized display of violence which turns the bodies into figures of violence rather than the violence of the represented. When the hitman who tried to kill Chang is sliced open, we do not see the blade cutting through his flesh. We only see the pulsing, squirting gap left in his body in extreme slow-motion which abstracts the violence into shock.

Classical melodrama presents emotional intensity through close-ups of teary faces, gestures of dismay, and bodies quivering with sobs. By contrast, *Only God Forgives* revels in broken and beaten bodies, flowing with blood instead of tears. The sensations are no less violent than in classical melodrama but suggest a different vibration. Peter Brooks argues that melodrama is marked by "acting out" rather than repression: bodily actions and gestures represent meanings otherwise inaccessible to representation (Brooks 1994, 19). While there is some truth to this argument, it overlooks that fact that melodrama is a genre of bodily presence, one in which we feel a "lack of proper esthetic distance, a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion" (Williams 1991, 5). I shudder as Chang drills knives into Byron's hands and then legs, my body jolts when Chang thrusts his sword into Crystal's throat and blood spurts as he pulls it out. These visceral shocks are not Brooks' semiotics of the body but the excessive presence of a hysteric's body (Deleuze 2005, 36).

Clearly, violence in *Only God Forgives* is enacted through male bodies, just as male bodies are also the sources of negative affects of lust, pride, and inadequacy. Billy's lust makes him rape and murder, Chang's pride leads him to torture and maim, while Julian's inadequacy leads to his mother's death and his own symbolic emasculation. Masculinity is shown to be fraught with complexities and anxieties but only expressible through violence. What is more, it is also primarily male bodies that suffer violence acted upon them. Billy is murdered, Byron tortured to death, and Julian is maimed. Yet there is an intimacy to this violence, the brutality makes up for, or stands in for, the emotional intensity which the characters clearly feel. While all the actors' performances are generally disaffected, almost numb in their facial expressions, intense sensations play across their bodies and that of the spectator.

The embodied feelings enacted through the excessive violence are overly present; they force themselves upon me and allow for no distance. The slowness of the film, the glacial narrative pacing, the languid acting are all features which almost lull me to sleep, transpose me into a sedate state of mind, only to erupt into stunning images of violence. The sensation of the film is one of placidity and visual hypnosis in contra-point with moments of spectacular pain. The resulting embodiment is intimate and brutal at the same time, a disturbing combination.

If masculinity has traditionally been seen as proceeding from male bodies, as Raewyn Connell argues in her classic *Masculinities* (Connell 2005, 45), then masculinity is positioned as inherently violent in *Only God Forgives*. However, Connell's main argument is that masculinity is not the same as men. In a move drawn from feminist theory, Connell dislocates biology and sociology and insists that masculinity is best understood as multiple - masculinities. While my interest here is not in unweaving Connell's sophisticated argument, I wish to emphasize the importance of her notion that masculinities emerge with male bodies even if these bodies are not static or pre-given and even though we do not experience the world through our body as if it were a medium. Rather, masculinities articulate differently through complex foldings irreducible to identity, being instead embodied relations with itself and other bodies.

### Physical Constraint

I have already pointed out how violence works as one articulation in the film. Through a contrapuntal strategy, *Only God Forgives* opens up an embodiment which is decidedly shocking and unexpected. While melodrama has traditionally emphasized emotion as its bodily excess, *Only God Forgives* emphasizes violence, but keeps the perversion of masochism in place, I would argue. Furthermore, the presumed audience might be women considering Ryan Gosling's star image, but is actually closer to a male audience due to the film's emphasis on men, male emotions, male interaction, and male-on-male violence. While this may appear trivial at first glance, the fact that the spectator position remains primarily passive as well as masochistic is in fact surprising.

The active, action-oriented male with a free range of agency has become orthodox in film studies, where the challenge has primarily



been to articulate how and why others might still enjoy and negotiate films which are inherently chauvinistic. While certainly a necessary approach, what fascinates me instead is how *Only God Forgives* figures a male body primarily placed under physical constraint. While Refn has argued that Chang is the same character as Driver (Ryan Gosling) in *Drive* (2011) (Barlow 2014), the main difference is that Chang is not the protagonist. Instead, any form of narrative identification comes through Julian and he is consistently figured as incapable of action.

Throughout the film hands become the body parts mostly associated with action and capability. There are several close-ups of Julian looking at his hands or fists, the first before he has even spoken. Of course, as punishment for his misdeeds Julian's hands are cut off by Chang in a hallucination at the end of the film, symbolizing Julian's inability to avenge his brother and protect his mother. This importance of hands is also evident in how Julian prefers to be tied up while Mai masturbates, rather than engage in more traditional forms of sex. Julian clearly enjoys being passive and constrained. In the same manner, the raped and murdered girl's father Choi Yan Lee (Kowit Wattanakul) has his hand cut off for letting disgrace fall on his daughter. Byron, as mentioned, has his hands pierced by knives. In other words, hands and their maiming are central in figuring capability and incapability.

The significance of hands comes primarily from their use as fists, clearly on display in the climactic battle between Julian and Chang. Poised narratively to be the moment when Julian vindicates himself, defeats Chang, and wins back the love of his mother, Julian is instead severely beaten. The camera swirls around Julian and Chang as they fight making the fight feel like dance, which first creates an uplifting sensation that turns into frustration as Julian cannot even land a single punch. Constantly Julian's body cannot express itself as it desires, and our embodiment is similarly frustrated and constrained. The scene begins to cross-cut between the fight and a bronze statue of a younger Chang as a Thai boxer. Not only do these shots suggest Chang's Thai boxing skill but also suggests a hardness of his body, something which Julian cannot compete with as his face gets pummeled and begins to bleed, faltering and finally falling over, defeated. In a long shot, we see Julian alone ly-

ing on the floor of the boxing ring, the camera tracking away from him, leaving him behind.

Much like Julian is framed by the boxing ring when he is defeated, so do we generally find him framed by doorways, windows, and porches in the last part of the film, when he goes to Chang's house to kill him. The framing remains tight, so that while the shots are generally plan-american (knees-up framing), Julian is visually constrained and reduced along the visual plane to only one element among others. As his options narrow, he has no place to go, and the walls start to come in quite literally. This sense of confinement stands in contrast to Chang's framing, which at first may seem similar. Chang is framed in the final third of the film by the porch and by windows. However, with his confident stance and his back turned to the spectator, he seems more in control than Julian, surveying a landscape, in charge of his body and his fate.

Julian's bruised, battered body cannot but bend away, bowing in admission that he has been bested. Our embodied feelings curdle into admiration, frustration, and reduction. Julian's final refusal to avenge his rapist brother and defend his controlling mother remains ethically valid, yet does not release the pressure and tension built up throughout the film. We are physically constrained by the film as it offers no embodiment for the conventional feelings of action or agency for a male protagonist. Instead of a climactic battle where Julian vindicates himself, the film ends with his hands being cut off, yet even this reduced embodiment cannot be resolved narratively; it only exists as a hallucination. Presumably Julian fantasizes about this form of punishment as an extension of his sexual fetish of bondage, thereby positioning the punishment ambiguously as both feared and desired.

Yet the spectator position of violence and masochism remains incongruous and unusual for male spectators; we are not used to this blurring of the boundaries between passive suffering and active masculinity. There are no scenes of the type spoken of by Williams (in relation to horror films), where a female stand-in character suffers punishment. Instead, only the male body is punished on screen, while also being visually constrained. The ensuing reduced embodiment is one of violent passivity, an inability to act out sensations and affects through the cinematic images.

Masculine embodiment in *Only God Forgives* is both intense and ambiguous. We are placed in a passive-masochistic position rarely delegated to men, while at the same time even experiencing hints of fetishization of this position. The primary critique of masculinity comes through in the paucity of male emotional expression as limited to moments of violence. Such limited capacity to experience emotions is in itself constraining. As such, the film reveals that the end point of masculinity as a singular expression of power and force is a dead-end, as crippling for men as for anyone else. That dead-end also reveals that the fetishization of a crippling form of masculinity makes it very easy for men (in this case Julian) to step into positions of innocence, and argues that men are as much victims of patriarchal violence as women are. Such arguments always ring hollow in the way they overlook the privileges of being male. *Only God Forgives* does not resolve this tension, but the film does subject the spectator to sensations of violence and constraint in ways that most films rarely do. As such, at least *Only God Forgives* articulates what is at stake in producing new forms of masculinity: forms must be found that are not productions of violence.

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## “I am Girl. Hear me Roar”

### Girlpower and Postfeminism in Chick lit jr. Novels

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#### **Abstract**

The article focuses on an example of chick lit jr., Meg Cabot's *Airhead*-trilogy, and how feminism, postfeminism and girlpower are discussed in this text. The novels portray a conflict between the generations, where the daughter rejects her mother's version of feminism. There is an interesting ambiguity in the text concerning feminist ideals which makes Cabot's novels, along with many other examples of chick lit jr., difficult to define. But even if there's a remnant of feminism in these novels, that version of feminism stays on the individual plane and never influences society as a whole.

**Keywords** chick lit jr, feminism, postfeminism, girlpower, generations

Chick lit as a genre has been declared dead on several occasions and the rather tepid reception of Bridget Jones' latest escapades might be seen as the final nail in the coffin. We seem to be tired of chick lit but chick lit jr., aimed at a younger female reader, seems to be still going strong. Authors like Meg Cabot, Louise Rennison and Cecily von Ziegsar are extremely popular and their books sell in

huge quantities. Chick lit jr. as a genre is dominated by young and feisty heroines, remnants of the “girl-power culture”, who shop, party, look for love, fight and on occasion (more in Ziegler’s novels than in Cabot’s) have sex. These books are sometimes defended by critics such as Joanna Webb Johnson, for example, who applauds the genre that, in her opinion, doesn’t judge or condemn girls’ actions (Webb Johnson 2006). She sees chick lit jr. as a new and improved version of books like Louisa M. Alcott’s *Little Women* and proclaims the genre to be modern and liberating, a new kind of book for girls living in a postfeminist age. But there are also several voices which are against the genre. Patty Campbell, for example, riles against the books and their focus on consumerism and appearances, even if she is unconcerned by the prospect of a generation of young girls being influenced by them – no one can take these books seriously, she argues (Campbell 2006). In Sweden, though, critics have warned parents against letting their daughters read these books. The shopping, the drinking and the sex (especially in Ziegler’s *Gossip Girl*-series) is interpreted as something girls could be influenced by. (See, for example, Olsson 2009.)

Chick lit jr. is often seen as “pink” books. The covers are pink and the content is by many considered to be “pink” in a more metaphorical way, as the young heroines often choose a very different femininity and feminism from that of their mothers’. In “Teening Chick Lit?”, Imelda Whehelan focuses on the pink covers and says that:

[...]sub textually, the pastel colors offer us a palette more regularly seen on baby clothes and suggests that femininity has been re-commodified, color coded and softened for a generation of young women distant enough from feminism to feel that this is a new identity they can grasp and belong to. (Whehelan, 2009, 2)

What is this new identity that young readers can grasp from chick lit jr.? How is it different? In this article I want to focus on Meg Cabot’s *Airhead*-trilogy and discuss the three books with the help of postfeminist theory.

1975 Helen Reddy had a big hit with the song “I am Woman. Hear me Roar”, which captures many of the ideas from the second wave of feminism from the 1960s and 1970s. Over thirty years later, Meg

Cabot writes her trilogy and a lot has happened to feminism over these years. We have had the third wave of feminism, when the critique of feminism as “white”, middleclass and heterosexual was intensified (see for example Segal 1999), we have had a period of what Susan Faludi defined as “backlash” in her famous book from 1991 (Faludi 1991), where she argues that in the 1980s and 1990s feminism was often portrayed as a movement that didn’t improve women’s lives at all, but rather made it more difficult to be a woman, and we have also the notion that feminism is no longer needed. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards argue in *Manifesta. Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (2000) that there is a whole generation of women who do not understand that many of the choices they have are possible because of feminism and who don’t want to define themselves as feminists. Which brings us to the ill-defined concept of postfeminism, a term often used in popular culture, but seldom used by gender theorists, as it can mean many different things, from the idea that feminism is no longer needed as gender equality is now a reality, to the “new” feminism of girl power.

Having spent a few years writing about chick lit, I find chick lit jr. especially interesting as the books are both ambivalent and contradictory. Are these books examples of backlash? How do they relate to the concept of “girl-power”? Are they postfeminist? Antifeminist? Any kind of feminist? I hope to be able to provide at least some answers.

### **A Pink Dystopia**

Meg Cabot is a well known author of chick lit jr. who is famous for both her books about Princess Mia and Allie Finkle. Her books are often funny, there are an abundance of happy endings and there is usually romance, but very seldom sex. The *Airhead*-trilogy is a combination of chick lit jr. and dystopian fiction. After the huge success of Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*, young adult fiction has been flooded with dystopian fiction and, in an earlier article, I compare this trilogy to Collins’ bestselling novels (Nilson 2013). The *Airhead*-trilogy starts with *Airhead* from 2008, in which we meet Em, a strong, somewhat nerdy girl who hates all “airheads”, girls who live for their looks and whose main focus in life is clothes, make up and accessories. After a few pages, Em dies and her brain is transplanted into supermodel Nikki’s body. The second book is *Being Nikki* from



2009, where Em has to live Nikki's life, since almost everyone thinks that she is her. Em cannot be herself, she has to pretend be Nikki, and being a supermodel is not everything it is cracked up to be. Em has to learn to be a new version of a girl, and that leads to all kinds of comic situations, but as the story progresses it becomes darker. The trilogy concludes with *Runaway* from 2010, in which the dystopian traits are stronger. The multibillion dollar company responsible for Em's second chance at life turns out to be an evil force that seeks to sell everlasting youth to those that can afford it. The conflict between generations is somewhat heightened as rich old people can "buy" a new young body and have their brains transplanted into it. The person whose body is used dies. Em, like most heroines in dystopian young adult fiction, has to battle against the corporation to save not only herself but a whole generation of teenagers who will otherwise be sacrificed so that the old and rich can live forever.

However, the focus in these books is not on Em's struggle to defeat the evil corporation but on her struggle to reinvent herself in a new body. Em is in the beginning of the story a tomboy who thinks that she is content with being just that. "What's wrong with jeans, a hoody and converse?" (Cabot 2008, 26). But when her brain is transplanted into Nikki's body, she is all of a sudden "pretty".

### The Old-Fashioned Feminist

"Pretty", Mum said, looking confused, "is a patriarchal construct designed to make women feel less worthy unless they live up to a certain standard established by the male-dominated fashion and beauty industry. You know that, Em. I tell you and Frida that all the time". "Yeah", I said, putting the picture down again. "I know. That might be part of the problem". (Cabot 2010, 137)

Em's mother is a feminist who named her younger daughter after the iconic artist Frida Kahlo. She has taught her daughters to rebel against old-fashioned ideas of what girls should look like and how they should act. She wants her daughters to be strong and independent, she wants them to have a good education, and to make their mark on the world. The idea that it is important for Em to be pretty is something her mother cannot understand and she is



equally baffled by Frida's desire to be a cheerleader. In the beginning of the trilogy, Em is completely on her mother's side, but when she finds herself in a new body, she realizes that she has been unhappy for years. She starts to rebel against her mother and her feminist ideas.

So what is feminism in these novels? In chick lit jr., there is a great deal of discussion of feminism, in which feminism and feminists are usually demonized. Feminists are described as "man-hating", "ugly" and "hairy" and labeled old-fashioned. They are seen as hypocrites and often as prudes. When Em's mother complains about Em's new life as a supermodel with the parties and the sexy clothes, Em realizes that she has misjudged her. "My mum's always been a feminist. But I never thought she was a prude" (Cabot 2010, 132). Should we see these descriptions of feminists as a kind of backlash? Stéphanie Genz argues in *Postfemininities in Popular Culture* (2009) that the discussion of popular culture has been too colored by the backlash concept. Examples like *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are, in her opinion, ambiguous. Instead of condemning them as backlash, we should try to see how feminism has influenced them. She writes: "Postfeminist femininity presents multiple layers of female identification that oscillate between subject and object, victim and perpetrator" (Genz 2009, 26). Emilie Zaslow argues in a similar way in *Feminism Inc.* from 2009. The post-feminism that we see in popular culture is heavily influenced by the concept of girl-power. Zaslow says that girl-power can be an example of backlash but at the same time it challenges the way we think about femininity and masculinity.

Girl power is watered-down feminist position available as stylish accessory, but it is also a meaningful and widespread embodiment of some feminist positions that girls draw upon as they create their gender identities. (Zaslow 2009, 9)

Girl power is a rather vague concept. Is it all about empowerment? And empowerment to do what exactly? Peggy Orenstein argues in *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* that girl power as a phenomenon is double edged. On one hand, it is about taking control of one's own life and not letting society tell you what to do, but on the other

hand, says Orenstein, it is a lot about conforming to a specific kind of femininity that is the norm today. The freedom to choose is only there on the surface (Orenstein 2011).

The sharp criticism against feminism that we can see in chick lit jr. doesn't mean that these texts aren't influenced by feminist thinking. Em may be very critical of her mother, but in another way she embraces the lessons that her mother has taught her. She is assertive, she is strong and even when she becomes the pretty supermodel that has left the jeans and hoodie behind, she cannot be described as a stereotypical female from days gone by. In the final book, as Em and her friends get ready to fight, Em says: “I resent the implication that a girl wouldn't necessarily know her way around explosives” (Cabot 2010, 20). She can now handle lip gloss, but she can also build a bomb. So why is it so important to refuse the idea of feminism in these books?

One aspect is of course the kind of feminism that is described. Em's mother is in many ways not just a stereotypical feminist, but also a parody of what a feminist is. Charlotte Brunsdon argues in “The Feminist in the Kitchen: Martha, Martha and Nigella” that for the last ten years or so, popular culture has been filled with messages suggesting that what women really want is love and marriage, and that to be happy as a woman you need to embrace your femininity.

Second-wave feminism is remembered and demonized as personally censorious, hairy and politically correct, and has been the key other for younger women keen to celebrate the femininity and feminism of Buffy and Allie. (Brunsdon 2006, 43)

Brunsdon talks about “dis-identity”: feminism in popular culture is molded into something old-fashioned and ridiculous, something that belongs to an older generation. Kerry Mallan says in *Gender Dilemmas in Children's Fiction* that feminism has become a “fossil” in young adult fiction:

For many young women and girls growing up in a so-called post feminist age, with its emphasis on consumerism, sexual freedom, and “go-girl” rhetoric ringing in their

ears, it is little wonder that feminism would seem as outdated as a walkman. (Mallan 2009, 37)

A feminist is something your mother is, feminism belongs to the older generation and Em, along with a large group of chick lit jr. heroines, needs to break free from her mother in order to create her own identity.

At the end of the trilogy Em's mother has come to both understand and respect her daughter's choices. In their "manifest" for a new feminism for a young generation, Baumgardner and Richards argue that an important part of the conflict between generations of feminists is that the older generation has often insisted that their "version" of feminism is the correct one. Quoting Diane Elm, Baumgardner and Richards write: "This problem manifests itself when senior feminists insists that junior feminists be good daughters, defending the same kind of feminism that their mothers advocated" (Baumgardner & Richards, 224). It is, then, possible to read the trilogy not as a rebuttal of feminism *per se*, but as an argument for a new kind of feminism.

### The Makeover

The *Airhead*-trilogy is in many ways about getting what we could call an "extreme makeover". Em gets a whole new body complete with a new wardrobe and accessories. In chick lit jr., the makeover is an important theme. The heroine needs to reinvent herself and one of the tools she uses is generally clothes and make up. These books do focus a lot on appearances – there is a great deal in them about what to wear, how to apply lipstick and the horrors of the wrong fashion choice – but clothes also has a deeper meaning. Zaslow argues that the "dress up scenes" should be read as a stage for performing different kinds of identities. "As a marker of class, race and gender, the clothed body becomes a site on which girls can demonstrate their knowledge of fashion, and design identities to perform" (Zaslow 2009, 86). In performing, Nikki Em uses her new body to try out new kind of identities. But is that the only way we can understand the makeover? As a way to experiment with different kinds of identities?

In *Liquid Love*, Zygmunt Bauman describes what he sees as all too common in our modern world, namely our obsession with our-

selves. This is the era of "me, myself and I", and Bauman talks about our narcissism but also our need to constantly reinvent ourselves. We are always on the hunt for our own identity and in this hunt we are often helped by so called "experts". Bauman comments:

If you feel ill at ease in a fluid world and are lost among the profusion of contradictory road signs that seem to move as if on castors, visit one or some of those expert counselors for whose services there has never been a greater demand and of whom there has never been a richer supply. (Bauman 2003, 58)

This need and desire to use experts becomes a bit ambiguous as today's culture is also about making your own choices. Bauman is critical of how we, in his opinion, let other people decide what we should wear, how we should eat and so on.

Rosalind Gill discusses in "The Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of Sensibility" what she calls "the makeover paradigm" (Gill 2007). In today's popular culture the makeover is one of the most dominant themes. With shows like *Extreme Makeover*, *The Biggest Loser* and *Trinny and Susannah* we see so called experts giving ordinary people a makeover, showing them how to dress, exercise and what to eat. If you have ever seen an episode of *Trinny and Susannah* you will know that at the beginning of the program they choose women who, in their opinion, wear the wrong clothes. Usually there is at least one woman on the show that dresses like Em does, and is labeled "unfeminine". This woman is generally seen as not loving her body, and when she learns, with Trinny and Susannah's help, to embrace her femininity, she becomes a happier person.

Em in Cabot's novels is described as one of those girls who hasn't got a clue how to be feminine. "I have been alive nearly seventeen years and I still have no idea what shade of lip gloss looks good on me..." (Cabot 2008, 2). She may be clever, but in the beginning of the trilogy she is also described as silly:

I'm not actually the most feminine girl in the world. I honestly wouldn't mind trying to be, but the two or three times I've experimented by putting on eyeliner or whatever, Frida has just burst into hysterical laughter and told

me to “Take it off! Just take it off right now” before I’ve even gotten out of the apartment. (Cabot 2008, 17)

After her brain is transplanted into Nikki’s body, she needs to learn to perform a kind of femininity that was completely alien to her before.

Why does Em want this? Why isn’t she satisfied being the smart and competent girl that her mother wants her to be? It’s all about the boy. Em’s best friend is Christopher, but the problem is that Em doesn’t want to be just friends. She wants more than that. “Hadn’t all those times I’d sat in our living room, wishing that Christopher would notice me as something more than just someone to play *Journeyquest* with, I sort of longed to be pretty too?” (Cabot 2010, 110). Em says that she wants to be pretty for her own sake, but one of the themes of the novel is that in order to procure true love Em needs to become more feminine.

One of the goals of the makeover is of course to secure a partner, and an overall theme in a lot of makeover programs from *Biggest Loser* to *The Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is that we need a makeover in order to attract the opposite sex. When it comes to shows like *Trinny and Susannah* and novels like Cabot’s there seems to be a common theme which says that women or girls need to be pretty, need to be feminine and soft in order to be attractive. But it is not just that you need to be feminine, you need to be the right kind of feminine. Em might not be able to figure out an eye-liner, but she is portrayed as a young woman who instinctively knows where the borders between sexy and slutty lie. In *Being Nikki*, one of Nikki’s old friends Lulu gives Em a makeover before they hit the clubs. “I looked just like a hooker I’d seen once down the West Side Highway. Thought I hadn’t wanted to hurt Lulu’s feelings by saying so. Especially since the hooker had been a man” (Cabot 2009, 233). Em wants to be attractive but she also wants to be respectable. In chick lit jr., there are “good” girls and there are “bad” girls, and just as Beverly Skeggs argues in *Formations of Class and Gender* from 1997, in order to secure both a position in society and a man (!), the heroines in the genre need to perform the right kind of femininity in order to be respectable.

The novels also say that being pretty is not enough if you want to find true love. On the one hand, you need the makeover, but, on the

other hand, you need to be yourself, albeit an improved version of yourself. When Em first approaches Christopher in Nikki's body, he is completely uninterested. "He'd just blown off the hottest supermodel on the planet" (Cabot 2009, 256). He isn't impressed with Nikki's beauty, and Em is really upset when she realizes that he now treats her like the airhead they used to make fun of. "The one person I thought could help me – or not even me so much as Nikki – and he'd just completely ignored me, as if I was a fly. Or a busboy. Or a *girl*" (Cabot 2009, 215). It is not until Christopher realizes that it really is Em in Nikki's body that he can see past the surface.

There is another aspect to Em's makeover. Before, when she was a tomboy in jeans and a hoodie, she might have been interested in Christopher, but she had no sexual desires. It's Nikki's body that in a way teaches her about sex. Em discovers desire:

There was no denying that my lips felt super tingly where his had touched them. And I was sort of starting to detect some fire in my lointage area now. O my God! Nikki Howard is a total slut! Or maybe I am, and I had just never had an opportunity to discover it until now. (Cabot 2009, 88)

As we know from Adrienne Rich, Monique Wittig and Judith Butler, just to name a few, heterosexual desire is vital to performing both femininity and masculinity in the "right" way. Being female means desiring a male, at least if you want to follow the norms that still govern large parts of our society. Em needs to master the eyeliner, but she also needs to awaken as a heterosexual being.

### **The I of postfeminism?**

At the end of Cabot's trilogy, Em is happy in her new body. She triumphs against the evil corporation, she gets her Christopher and she reconciles with her mother. Em is now pretty, she is attractive and she knows how to make a bomb since she is a girl that does know her way around explosives. She is a perfect example of a "girl power" kind of heroine. So what does that mean? Zaslow argues that

Girl power focuses on style as a mark of one's autonomy, on sexual expressions as a symbol of one's connection



with the self, on independence from men rather from patriarchal systems and relations of power, and on the individual as independent resister rather than as a member of collective social change movement. (Zaslow 2009, 150)

In chick lit jr., there is a focus on the individual and on her or his ability to do anything she or he wants. Are there feminist traits in these novels? Yes, of course there are, but that does not mean that they are feminist books. There is no real discussion about power in Cabot's novels, there is never any desire to change society in any way and even if there is a certain freedom for the heroine to do femininity in different ways, that is only possible if she is firmly placed inside the heterosexual matrix.

In the beginning of this article, I describe these books as ambivalent and contradictory, and I stand by that. They cannot be labeled either feminist or antifeminist. We find in them a lot of old fashioned ideas about femininity, but there are also some modern ones, and Em is portrayed as a strong female subject. The feminism in these novels is, however, completely connected to an individual project. There is no desire to change the world or to improve the conditions that women (and men) live under as Em is focused on her own quest to become who she wants to be, with the help of both a make-over and a boyfriend. Baumgardner and Richards argue that: "[F]eminism wants you to be whoever you are – but with a political consciousness", (Baumgardner & Richards 2000, 57). It's not just that Em lacks a political consciousness; in Cabot's trilogy the desire to change society is seen as unnecessary and slightly ridiculous. Em has won the battle and gained a new kind of femininity but the victory ends there. As Baumgardner and Richards put it: "Without a body of politics, the nail polish is really going to waste" (Baumgardner & Richards 2000, 166).

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# The Concept of the Gentleman

## PSY's "Gentleman M V"

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### Abstract

The ideal of the gentleman has been globally reborn in PSY's colossal YouTube hit "Gentleman M V". This video thematizes the concept of the gentleman, but it is also a reformulation of gentlemanly behaviour. The article analyses the ideal of the gentleman in the light of its gender aspects and its class connotations. The hypothesis of the article is that the insecure status of masculine identity in an age of post-second-generation feminism demands the seemingly parodic treatment of the concept of the gentleman, as in this video. Yet this hypothesis is also a research question. Why is there this strong element of parody in the video? The answer to the question may depend on a consideration of contemporary male identities. It may also be based on a reading of how the music video incorporates these types. Three such types are described in the article: the new man, the metrosexual male and the new lad. It is the conclusion of the article that "Gentleman M V" incorporates the last two of these.

**Keywords** gentleman, PSY, the new man, the metrosexual male, the new lad



Bar code link to the video.

### The Music Video

The YouTube music video “Gentleman M V”<sup>1</sup> by the Korean star PSY has so far (January 2014) received 628,952,819 hits. Its YouTube statistics do not allow specifications according to the nationality of the hits, but another source, *Viral Video Chart (Viral Video Chart 2014)*, offers a breakdown of references to the video and sharing of the video in social media such as Facebook and Twitter based on languages.

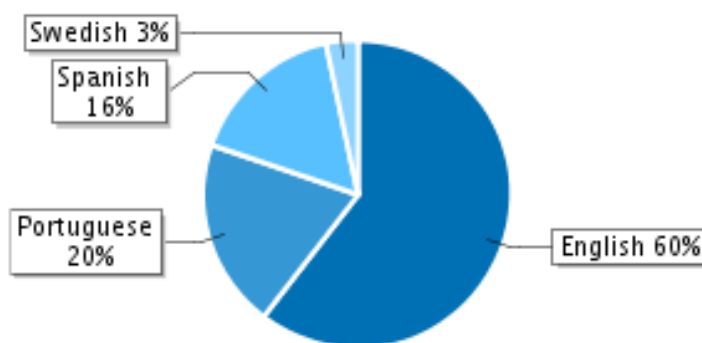


Illustration 1: Sharing of “Gentleman M V” in the social media according to language.<sup>2</sup>

From this (Illustration 1) it is clear that the reach and consumption of the video is global, and by no means a purely Asian phenomenon, though the music video belongs to the so-called K-pop or Korean-pop subgenre (Holden 2006, 144). The lyrics of the video share a corresponding mixture of Korean and English languages, which, when translated into English, read as follows:

*I don't know if you know why it needs to be hot  
I don't know if you know why it needs to be clean  
I don't know if you know, it'll be a problem if you're confused  
I don't know if you know but we like, we we we like to party  
Hey there  
If I'm going to introduce myself  
I'm a cool guy with courage, spirit and craziness*

*What you wanna hear, what you wanna do is me*

*Damn! Girl! You so freakin sexy!*

*Ah Ah Ah Ah I'm a...*

*Ah Ah Ah Ah I'm a...*

*Ah Ah Ah Ah I'm a mother father gentleman<sup>3</sup>*

The point of this article is that PSY's video can be regarded as a global cultural product, and the focus will be on its use of the term "gentleman". However, the fact that a British concept such as the gentleman is included in a music video with Korean roots cannot be ignored. Despite its inclusion of staged dance numbers, the music video is narrative with an action that can easily be perceived. Its characters and locations are distinguishable and recognizable, and its temporal progression and its causality can be characterized as continuity style. In the first 34 second-long part of the video, whose full length is almost four minutes, PSY dressed in a tuxedo and with an entourage of elderly men, is on a shopping spree buying clothes, not unlike the shopping extravaganza scene in *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990), where Vivian is carrying all her shopping bags and dresses home. During this sequence, PSY fondles the breast of a mannequin, practically without stopping his walk. The men then rest outside the shopping centre with a cup of coffee, while a woman dances behind them, and next PSY dances with another man in a playground and also inside the shopping centre again. The following part of the video is considerably longer, and it shows how the behaviour that was anticipated with the mannequin is developed into extremes, as PSY's behaviour towards the other characters turns rude and physically violent. In a fitness centre, PSY is playing a game on his mobile phone, but he then accelerates the speed of a treadmill so that the woman on it is thrown back on the floor, and he laughs and claps his hands triumphantly. This is also his reaction in the next scene, in which he is holding hands with a woman at a café table only to push her cup with hot coffee into her face. The victim of PSY's pranks in the next scene is a young man. This scene has a lift as its location, and the man needs to go to a bathroom very quickly. PSY, however, pushes all the buttons and delays the lift. The next scene in a library also employs a kind of lavatory humour. PSY farts into his hand and takes the hand with the "gas" directly into the face of a young woman reading there.



She reacts with nausea. As a transition to the next sequence, where PSY's interacts with other people, there is a brief dance scene with PSY, chorus boys and girls dancing the trademark horse-riding dance. The next victims are some young children playing football. PSY kicks their ball away, and they are dismayed. PSY now applies sun tan lotion to a girl in bikini, but he rudely unties her bikini top. Her scared reaction is also apparent here. Out of context, a totally bald man is using a hair dryer, and in a scene PSY is lying on the floor under two young men dancing closely together. At a restaurant, PSY is now leading a girl to a table, and he politely pulls out her chair to help her sit. However, he pulls the chair away under her as she is sitting down, and she falls painfully to the floor. Another man helps her up, only to pull her arm forcefully so that she falls again. He and PSY laugh uproariously as if celebrating their deed. In the third section of the video, the tables seem turned. Using the narrative technique of point of view shots, which can be characterized as the male gaze, the video shows PSY's reactions in slow motion when he observes a young woman working out. He is impressed. He takes off his jacket, throws it into her face and start to push up – but unsuccessfully. Nevertheless, the woman follows him to a market café. Here it is the woman that kicks PSY's chair away so that he falls to the ground. He is impressed, and they have a meal together flirting the whole time. They leave for a long dance sequence, also with people partying in the market café. The location and action change abruptly to an indoor swimming pool where PSY is sitting between two young women who are catapulted into the water. This scene leads to more decorative dance scenes of the Busby Berkeley type with more and more dancers of both genders at different locations, and this is apparently the climatic ending of the video. At least the music stops and there is an animated credit sign, saying "PSY GENTLE MAN". However, the music picks up again and the video continues for around 40 seconds with metafictional outtakes, one out of focus, some showing a cameraman with a steadycam, e.g. filming PSY humping a street lamp pole. Finally, PSY rushes towards a photocopying machine, pushes a woman away from it, photocopies his face, and, in the machines tray, the sign from before is shown in a close-up.

When the action of the video, as summarized above, is compared to the title and lyrics of the song, in which the word "gentleman" is

repeated sixteen times (in addition to being shown twice in the printed sign), it may seem appropriate to characterize the relationship between the lyrics and the visual action as contrapuntal or antagonistic. However, it may not be so simple. First, this relationship is not so close because of the numerous dance scenes in the video. There are more than 20 clips with only dance in them with a total duration of 68 seconds or 30 % of the running time of the video, and dance is also an integral part of many other scenes. The breakdown and interruption of the narrative with these dance sequences and the inclusion of dance in some of the narrative scenes lower the modality of the relationship between lyrics and narrative visuals. The word “gentleman” cannot be seen as contrapuntal anchorage of the visual action. There is no simultaneity between the song’s utterance of “gentleman” and ungentlemanly actions. Only four of the 16 instances of the song’s “gentleman” are timed with these: the farting scene, teasing the children, humping the lamp post, and pushing a woman at the photocopying machine.

The lyrics as a whole may be summarized as the singer’s invitation to a woman to party. His arguments are: “I’ll make you gasp and I’ll make you scream/ Damn! Girl! I’m a party mafia!”; and then “I’m a mother father gentleman”, where “mother father” may seem confusing, unless one is aware of the fact that we are not dealing with parental figures but with a Korean pronunciation of “motherfucking”<sup>4</sup>.

The human voice in the video is neither exclusively non-diegetic nor diegetic. In nine scenes, PSY is seen singing, but he is the only one seemingly aware of the song. In fact, his singing is addressed to the audience through the camera as he gazes directly into it and gesticulates towards it, or the singing is an integral part of the dance. Singing is never addressed towards the other characters, nor do they seem to take notice of it. In many sequences with narrative content (not the dance scenes, obviously), the song is non-diegetic. In some cases, PSY’s mouth is even full of noodles, or it is simply closed. The weak connection between lyrics, especially the word “gentleman” and the visual action seems to rule out the idea that the video is only a manifestation of ungentlemanly behaviour.

Additionally, the meaning of the term “gentleman” may be problematic. The claim that the relationship between the word and the narrative of the video is contrapuntal or antagonistic presupposes a

traditional understanding of the term “gentleman” as a man that behaves in a gentle and considerate way, especially to the other sex. This meaning may not be correct in the context of PSY’s music video “Gentleman”, and therefore the article now considers the term “gentleman”.

### The Concept of the Gentleman

Next three contemporary male cultural identity types will be described, and this is in order to position the male behaviour and attitudes of PSY’s “Gentleman” in relation to them. Finally, an explanation of the seemingly parodic treatment of the gendered mores of the music video will be provided.

Etymologically, a gentleman belonged to the English gentry, as a man of gentle birth as found in the derivative word “genteel”. The *OED* defines “gentle”, registered since 1651, as “to ennoble” and “to render mild or pleasant”, but it is described as rare. A more recent dictionary such as *Collins* (1987) doesn’t mention the class aspect, and it defines “gentle” as “kind, mild and pleasantly calm”. In an introductory chapter, “The Gentleman – An Elusive Term”, Christine Berberich questions the meaning of the term: “When we hear the term, we might think of Englishness; of class; of masculinity; of elegant fashions; of manners and morals. But we might also think of hypocrisy; of repression; of outdated behaviour befitting the characters of a Victorian novel, but which no longer holds any value in today’s society” (Berberich 2007, 3). Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the meaning of the term contains two defining aspects, one of class and one of social morals and behaviour. Other sources add to this that it is a British national concept: “A man regarded as having the best British characteristics” (Room 1987, 117). Similarly, Berberich quotes the *Encyclopædia Britannica* from 1929 to point out that the term is lacking in other languages: “the word “gentleman” has supplied a gap in more than one foreign language.” (Berberich 2007, 5) (This is of course relevant to the video, where the word has been inserted into a largely Korean-language text.) This edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* locates the term in the class system: “By courtesy this title is generally accorded to all persons above the rank of common tradesmen”, but also states that the term was moving away from being a distinction of class, to one of social manners:

the Reform Bill of 1832 has done its work; the “middle classes” have come into their own; and the word “gentleman” has come in common use to signify not a distinction of blood but a distinction of position, education and manners. The test is no longer good birth, or the right to bear arms, but the capacity to mingle on equal terms in good society. In its best use, moreover, “gentleman” involves a certain superior standard of conduct, due ... to “that self-respect and intellectual refinement which manifest themselves in unrestrained yet delicate manners”. (Berberich 2007, 9)

Though the term has moved downward in the class system, it nevertheless contains class-defining signals.

Bernhard Roetzel writes in his 360-page coffee table book *Gentleman: A Timeless Guide to Fashion*: “dressing like a gentleman costs not only time, but money as well. An investment in a good garment generally entails further expenditure” (Roetzel 2013, 11), and the book is exclusively about “dressing like a gentleman”, while not being one. In this sense, the concept of the gentleman has moved into fashion and conspicuous consumption. Today the concept of the gentleman can be related to the commercialisation of masculinity.

When the behavioural aspect of the taste and manners of a gentleman is applied to the main character in the music video, glaring discrepancies surface. Compare the video to this description of a gentleman: “The idea of the gentleman comprises so many values – from behaviour and morals to education, social background, the correct attire and table manners” as well as “ancestry, accent, education, deportment, mode of dress, patterns of recreation, type of housing and style of life” (Berberich 2007, p. 5), and PSY’s gentleman does not fulfil these ideals: for instance his table manners consist of pulling a chair away from under a woman. The sartorial aspects of the video, which dominate its prelude and first 30 seconds, are the only characteristics of these retained in “Gentleman M V”, and they are a sign of the kind of upper-class life style that PSY satirized as well as celebrated in his first global hit “Gangnam Style” from 2012<sup>5</sup>. Like Christine Berberich, Philip Mason (Mason 1993) has conducted a survey of the development of the concept of the gentleman. Mason’s empirical sources, like Berberich’s, are not

sociological, but literary, and as in Berberich's work, Mason's conclusion is that the term is changeable. However, he points to the sociological function of the concept, namely that it is an ideal that unifies a nation that is divided by class. Both upper classes and the lower classes have it as an ideal for themselves separately. Nevertheless, it was primarily a necessary attitude for the ruling classes, in order for them to be accepted as rulers, not only in Britain, but it also became an imperial ideal and necessity (Beynon 2002, 29) with long historical roots. In Britain, the history of the concept goes at least back to Chaucer, and the insecure combination of class and morals are included in it:

This the Victorians found ready-made in Chaucer's *gentillesse*, a constellation of morals qualities which ought to go with gentle birth – but doesn't always. Among these were courtesy to women, and more than courtesy, some idealization of women; also generosity, openheartedness, magnanimity. The Victorians added the requirement that the gentleman must be responsible; he must fulfil his obligations and live up to his own standards. (Mason 1993, 12-13).

This description with the demands made to a man to characterize him as a gentleman is negated by the main character in PSY's music video and his actions and behaviour. The question now regards how it is possible to combine the actual content of the video with its lyrics and its title's insistence on the term gentleman. In order to answer this question, the video must be historically contextualized in contemporary male identity roles.

### Contemporary Male Identities

In their chapter "Men and Postfeminism", Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon conclude that the contemporary male or "postfeminist man", as they call him, has since the 1980s "display[ed] a compound identity, revealing the fact that numerous representations of masculinity may coexist in new, hybrid forms" (Genz and Brabon 2009, 143) or "bricolage masculinity" (137). This compound is made up of three male types, which share a common denominator: commercialised masculinity (136). These are the new man, the metro-

sexual male and the new lad, and we are going to read PSYs “Gentleman” music video in the light of these male types.

The new man is a further development of the new, nappy-changing and bottle-feeding, caring man of the 1970s, who seemed to have been influenced by and accepting of feminism, so that he participated in the parts of everyday life traditionally placed in a feminine sphere, such a child upbringing and housework. This male type was predominantly Western and middle-class (137). The later development of this new man was that he became a surface phenomenon riding on a wave of changes that had already occurred, so that the newness had become an empty lifestyle signal and a legitimation of consumption.

The metrosexual male, dating from 1994, is described by Mark Simpson as “a young man with money to spend, living within easy reach of a metropolis... He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference” (Simpson 2002). Late capitalism became the period of the metrosexual male, and David Beckham became the icon of this male type. The description of the metrosexual male stressed the consumerist and narcissist aspects more than actual sexual mores. It was the male gaze directed at a brand-conscious self-representation in the mirror more than one directed at other men or at women. The above example from the book *Gentleman: A Timeless Guide to Fashion* illustrates a contemporary relationship based on consumption between the metrosexual male and the gentleman.

The new lad may be regarded as a reaction to second-generation feminism in the sense that this male identity became what may be called pre-feminist in its outlook. This is, however, to simplify matters, as the new lad may also be seen as a reaction against the new man, and it may also be seen as a stratificational as well as a gendered social phenomenon. New lad subculture may be described as post-industrial just as it may be described as pre-feminist. The lifestyle, social manners and characteristics of new laddism can be compared to historical industrial working-class, male culture, as chronicled by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*, from 1957. Hoggart described a close-knit working-class culture as it was disappearing, with its pubs, football matches, and working-man clubs, but also its



regressive tendencies such as domestic and neighbourhood violence in a chapter called “‘Us’ - *The Best and the Worst of It*”:

We frequently hear that the English working-classes are gentle, gentler than those of almost any other country, gentler today than their own parents and grandparents. Undoubtedly there has been a decrease in the amount of sheer brutality in the towns during the last fifty years, a decline in the rough and savage stuff which sometimes made the streets at night and particularly at week-ends places to avoid. The hooliganism and rowdyism, which caused the police to work in pairs in several areas of many towns have almost gone. We no longer hear, except very occasionally, of bare-fist fights on bits of wasteground, of broken-bottle fights inside bars, of regular assaults by gangs on girls at fairgrounds, of so much animal drunkenness. (Hoggart 1957/1973, 86-87)

Though the new lad has adopted some of these early and historical male attitudes and behaviour, he has also assimilated postmodern irony in his social signalling of them, so that he can celebrate super-annuated patriarchal social mores and privileges without embracing responsibilities, as for instance signing up as a family breadwinner. The magazine *Loaded* (<http://loaded.co.uk/>) illustrates the cultural preferences of this male subculture with articles such as “Casino Royale: Who’s Your Favourite Bond Girl?”<sup>6</sup> and features such as “Hot Girls with Fantasy Derrieres!”<sup>7</sup> combined with considerably more images than text. (In fact, the text for this feature is “Martin Luther King had a dream once. It wasn’t about women’s backsides though. We also have a dream. And in our world it’s definitely okay if they contain fantasy derrieres. That is all.”)

### **Conclusion: The Post-feminist Man as a Gentleman**

It is the argument of this article that PSY’s “Gentleman” is a conglomerate of the last two of these contemporary male identity types, the metrosexual male and the new lad. It is overstating the point to claim that PSY is a global representative of what Genz and Brabon calls the postfeminist man:

In many ways, the “postfeminist man” could be described as the “new lad” grown up or a less sensitive “new man”. Moreover, although the “postfeminist man” is heterosexual, he is style- and brand-conscious, while being slightly bitter about the “wounded” status of his masculinity, which has been affected by second wave feminism. He is a melting pot of masculinities, blending a variety of contested positions, as well as a chameleon figure still negotiating the ongoing impact of feminism on his identity. (2009, 143)

Rather, a more nuanced understanding of PSY’s gentleman can be reached if we return to the patriarchal or pre-feminist concept of the gentleman that had two sides or aspects, the social and the moral. Socially and stratificationally, a gentleman belonged to the upper classes. This allowed a habitus and life style where attire and other signs of wealth were conspicuous and iconic. This aspect of the gentleman is repeated in the metrosexual male, and it is repeated in the video with its shopping spree and most of its settings of consumption. The other aspect of the gentleman, the moral one, described as involving “a certain superior standard of conduct, due ... to that self-respect and intellectual refinement which manifest themselves in unrestrained yet delicate manners” (Berberich 2007, 9) is glaringly absent from the video. It has been replaced by the morals and manners of the new lad. Understood in this way, the version of the ‘post-feminist man’ represented in PSY’s “Gentleman” music video manages to incorporate these two contemporary male identities so that the result is a negation of the gentleman. The video is “negotiating the ongoing impact of feminism on... male identity” (Genz and Brabon 2009, 143). The “gentleman” in PSY’s video does not only celebrate consumption, while attacking women, also physically, on the way; he is also a parodic manifestation on the moral manners of a superannuated gentleman, replacing him with a new lad, which is the bearer of commodification of masculinity.

Conspicuous consumption unites the three contemporary male types described in the article, and the upper-class Gangnam style of shopping and luxurious leisure depicted in PSY’s “Gentleman M V” may be said to reflect and even promote this kind of life style so that it overshadows the moral aspects of gentlemanly behaviour.

The form of the video with its interrupted narrative progression gives low modality to its content through the constant insertion of around twenty dance scenes. Because of this low modality, the relationship between the lyrics and the visuals cannot be characterized as one of direct anchorage, and it cannot be seen as antagonistic or contrapuntal either. The video is not just a manifestation of ungentlemanly behaviour. It actually manages to have it both ways: it promotes the metrosexual male through consumption, and it also celebrates the new lad through the behaviour of PSY. Through this combination, it negates the class aspect of the traditional gentleman. Where the narrative form of the music video reformulates the concept of the gentleman in this way, its mode of distribution with a Korean music video on YouTube also changes the gentleman from a national British icon to a global one. "Gentleman M V" has managed to produce a new kind of gentleman that reflects the ongoing negotiation of different male, social identities.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASO\\_zypdnsQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASO_zypdnsQ), accessed 23 January 2014.
- 2 [http://viralvideochart.unrulymedia.com/youtube?id=ASO\\_zypdnsQ](http://viralvideochart.unrulymedia.com/youtube?id=ASO_zypdnsQ), accessed 25 January 2014.
- 3 <http://www.policymic.com/articles/34701/psy-gentleman-lyrics-translation-full-english-translation-for-psy-s-new-hit>, accessed 23 January 2014.
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## De kvindefokuserede dramedieserier

**Mads Møller Andersen**

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### Abstract

Mads Møller Andersen's article discusses the representation of female roles in TV dramedy shows by exploring previous dramedies such as the glamorous *Sex And The City* and comparing them to the more unconventional dramedies of today: HBO's *Girls* and Netflix's *Orange Is The New Black*. The central thesis of the article is that there has been a certain trend during the latest two decades within the dramedy genre where a group of dramedies have focused on female protagonists, female issues, and a female audience. But this trend in the dramedy genre also stands as a testament to a development in female TV characters because recent dramedies seem to dismiss the conventional values of the previous dramedy shows. *Girls* and *Orange Is The New Black* choose to push the boundaries and exemplify how women on TV can be chubby, self-destructive and even dangerous.

**Keywords** Tv-serie, dramedie, kvinder, kønsroller, amerikansk tv-branche, genre

## Introduktion

De seneste to årtier har budt på et væld af nye tv-dramedieserier. Dramediegenren kan føres helt tilbage til tv-serier som *M\*A\*S\*H* (CBS, 1972-83) og *Moonlighting* (ABC, 1985-89), og begrebet dramedie (eller dramedy / comedy-drama) dækker over en tv-fiktionsgenre, som er en blanding af drama og komedie (Mittell 2010, 252). De allernyeste dramedier som *Girls* (HBO, 2012-) og *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-) bryder med mange kønskonventioner og varsler en mere upoleret iscenesættelse af kvinderoller.

Denne artikels grundlæggende tese er, at der i de seneste to årtier har været en særlig strømning af serier inden for dramediegenren, som meget klart har fokuseret på kvindelige protagonister, kvindelaterede problematikker og en målgruppe af kvindelige seere. Strømningens iscenesættelse af kvinderoller har dog ændret sig med tiden, hvilket *Girls* med tydelighed påpeger ved at parodiere og kritisere kvinderollerne i forgængeren *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-04).

Artiklen vil kombinere et genreanalytisk blik på en kvindefokuseret strømning i dramediegenren med et blik på strømningens relation til den amerikanske tv-branche med dets forskellige kanaltyper (premium cable, basic cable, broadcastnetværk, streamingtjeneste) som kontekstuel ramme. Artiklen vil ud fra en analytisk-deskriptiv og dynamisk forståelse af forholdet mellem genre og mediesystem (Mittell 2010, 234 ff.) også undersøge, hvordan disse serier anvendes i konkurrencestrategiske henseender. Ud over de allerede nævnte serier udgøres denne kvindefokuserede dramediestrømning af serier som *Ally McBeal* (FOX), *Sex and the City* (HBO), *Gilmore Girls* (WB), *Desperate Housewives* (ABC), *The L Word* (SHO), *Weeds* (SHO), *Lipstick Jungle* (NBC), *Nurse Jackie* (SHO), *United States of Tara* (SHO), *Drop Dead Diva* (Lifetime), *The Big C* (SHO) m.fl.

Et andet vigtigt perspektiv på tv-fiktion i dag er den forandringsproces, som selve tv-mediet er inde i: Nye forbrugsformer som streamingtjenester og binge-viewing (HBO, Netflix m.fl.) samt den teknologiske udvikling med f.eks. DVR (Digital Video Recorder) sætter nye rammer for tv-fiktion i denne multiplatformære og reviderer de oplevelsesmæssige og mediespecifikke karakteristika, som vi forbinder med tv-mediet (Lotz 2007; Gillan 2011; Nielsen et al. 2011). Denne forandringsproces for tv-mediet synes for tiden at være til fordel for de mere nicheorienterede premium-cable-kanaler (Højer 2011, 79 ff.) samt streamingtjenesterne, hvilket blot gør



bevidstheden om kanalernes strategiske positionering og genrebrug endnu mere nødvendig.

Tv-branchen har nemlig stor betydning for, hvordan genrer udvikler sig (Bruun 2011, 27), da tv-stationerne hver sæson står over for at skulle vælge mellem et hav af mulige fiktionsserier for til sidst at vælge at satse på bestemte serier og bestemte genrer. Dermed bør den førnævnte strømning også anskues som en branchestrategi, da kanalerne med disse dramadiesatsninger strategisk fokuserer på et udtalt kvindeligt segment. De store broadcastnetværk er underlagt særligt strenge krav vedrørende for eksempel profan sprogbrug, nøgenhed, sex og vold. Det er især Communications Act of 1934 og The Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2005, der lovmæssigt begrænser broadcastnetværkene, hvorimod basic- og premium-cablekanalerne i høj grad har kunnet udnytte denne konkurrencemæssige fordel, som betyder, at de gerne må anvende vold, sex og profan sprogbrug i deres serier til stor glæde for deres seere (Nielsen et al. 2011, 246). Premium-cable-kanalen Showtime har desuden forsøgt at profilere sig ved at satse markant på dramadieserier med sympatiske – men også fejlbehæftede – kvindelige hovedkarakterer: *The L Word*, *Weeds*, *Nurse Jackie*, *United States of Tara* og *The Big C* (Haastrup 2011, 55). Showtime har dermed brugt dramadiesegenren og en række nuancerede kvinderoller som markedsføringsstrategi, og netop Showtime må med disse serier siges at være en afgørende katalysator for udviklingen inden for, hvad vi kan kalde *de kvindefokuserede dramadieserier*. Senest har både DR og TV 2 forsøgt sig med genren i serierne *Lykke* (DR, 2011-12), *Lærkevej* (TV 2, 2009-10) og *Rita* (TV 2, 2012-), men ikke desto mindre er der skrevet meget få akademiske værker om denne genre (Bednarek 2010, 37).

### Hvad er en dramadiese?

Det er grundlæggende vanskeligt at afgøre, hvor genregrænserne mellem henholdsvis dramadiese, drama og komedie helt præcist går. Er dramadiesen en slags drama light? Og er mange regulære drama-serier ikke ligeledes en blanding af drama og komedie? Vil enormt mange serier dermed kunne kalde sig dramadieserier? Muligvis. Men det er værd at hæfte sig ved, at de førnævnte serier selv har valgt at benytte sig af dramadiesen som genreetiket, når de skal positionere og typificere sig selv. Ergo må der være en gensidig forståelse og genreforventning mellem afsender og seere om, at disse serier vil

forsøge at fremkalde både grin og gråd hos seerne, og som på sin vis derfor berettiger genreetiketten.

Generelt kendetegnes hovedparten af dramedieserierne dermed ved både at benytte (melo)drama- og (situations)komedieelementer, ved at anvende enten dramaseriens føljeton eller komediens episodiske format, ved fortrinsvis at benytte locationoptagelser frem for studieoptagelser og ved at fravælge dåselatter (Berg 1991; Haastrup 2011). En nuanceforskel mellem drama og dramedie kan sikkert findes i dramediens opprioritering af flere komiske elementer end i den regulære dramaserie. Det kan godt være, at dramedierne hyppigere brug af comic relief gør disse serier mere letfordøjelige (og mere "light") end regulære dramaserier, men det betyder ikke nødvendigvis, at dramedierne beskæftiger sig med mindre vægtige eller mindre vigtige problemstillinger.

Andre har forsøgt at rumme dramediegenrens enorme forskellighed gennem kategorisering og ved at lancere en række underkategorier (Haastrup 2011), men en dramedie som *Girls*, der har elementer fra alle af Haastrups fire kategorier, lader sig på ingen måde kategorisere så entydigt. Andre har kaldt *SATC* og *Ally McBeal* for komedieserier (Ross 2005, 112), sitcom eller "sexcom" (Scodari 2005, 242), men disse serier prioriterer ofte deres dramatiske dagsorden markant højere end deres komiske dagsorden, og de kan derfor næppe være regulære sitcoms (Andersen 2013a, 41).

På tværs af den kvindedefokuserede strømning er der desuden nogle yderligere træk, som disse serier ser ud til at have til fælles: De kvindelige (hoved)karakterer er 25-40 år, næsten altid single, byboere, hvide, middel- eller overklasse, attraktivt udseende, og handlingen i disse serier fokuserer gerne på den svære balance mellem arbejdslivet/karrieren og privatlivet/kærligheden. Så selvom der ganske vist er en udvikling i de kvindedefokuserede dramediers kvinderoletter, er disse roller stadig forholdsvis ritualiserede og ensartede.

Interessante og innovative kvinderoletter har i øvrigt ikke været udelukkende forbeholdt dramediegenren – tværtimod. Der kan findes flere eksempler på sådanne innovative kvindelige karakterer i de fleste genrer, men især de regulære dramaserier (og især HBO) har bidraget på denne front (Akass & McCabe 2008). Dramatiegenrens udvikling skal også betragtes i forhold til den udvikling som i de seneste 10-15 år er foregået inden for situationskomediegenren, som historisk set ellers har været en enormt stabil og ritualiseret

tv-genre, siden *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-57) fandt frem til grundopskriften på den succesfulde sitcom (Andersen 2013a, 18 f.). Men flere nyere sitcoms synes at fravælge sædvanlige genrekendetegn som dåselatteren og det klassiske multikamerasetup til fordel for et singlekamerasetup og virkemidler som intertekstualitet, indforståede referencer, ironisk/intellektuel humor, selvbevidsthed om seriens egen repræsentationsstatus samt en mere ukonventionel æstetik (ibid., 36 f.; Halskov 2011, 152 ff.). Samtidigt er nogle sitcoms dog stadig trofaste mod den klassiske formel, og derfor kan det diskuteres, om der inden for sitcomgenren findes to strømninger, som udvikler sig i hver sin modsatte retning (Andersen 2013a, 83 f.).

At mange amerikanske tv-stationer har sendt mere eksperimenterende sitcoms end tidligere, er også udtryk for ændringer i deres konkurrencestrategier, som sammenholdt med dramediegenrens udvikling nu er med til at udfordre grænserne mellem sitcom og dramedie endnu mere. Som eksempel herpå kan det nævnes, at *Girls*, *Orange Is The New Black* og *Nurse Jackie* alle kategoriseres som (og dermed skal konkurrere inden for) "comedy series" til den årlige Emmy-prisuddeling, der endnu ikke har en kategori til dramedier, men kun inddeler serier i henholdsvis drama- og komedieserier.<sup>1</sup>

### Hvad er der sket siden SATC?

Siden fremkomsten af tv-mediet i 1950'erne er seernes grænser for, hvad der opleves som nyt, provokerende og banebrydende på tv, gradvist blevet flyttet. Som seere drives vi i forskellig grad af to grundlæggende behov: Vi vil gerne se noget genkendeligt, men vi vil også gerne se noget nyt. Vi har på samme tid behov for både identifikation og innovation.

"Few television series have had such an impact on female culture as *Sex and the City*" (Akass & McCabe 2008, 304). Den populære dramediserie *Sex and the City* (SATC) blev et globalt tv-fænomen og kan i dag betragtes med et positivt eller negativt blik, alt efter hvilke krav man som seer stiller til seriens portrættering af den moderne storbykvinde. I sin samtid bidrog serien med et hidtil uset og uzensureret indblik i storbykvindens sexliv og blev retmæssigt hyllet og kanoniseret derfor, og serien benyttede endda eksplicitte nøgenscener og en vis mængde humor. Men eftertiden har været hård ved seriens prioritering af mode og dens overfladiske glamourisering og stilisering af kvindens hverdagsliv. En af seriens mest mar-

kante kritikere er bemærkelsesværdigt nok en tv-serie lavet af den selvsamme tv-kanal: Tv-serien *Girls* (HBO, 2012-).

De to HBO-serier *Girls* og *SATC* er nemlig bygget op omkring den samme grundlæggende narrative præmis: Fire forskellige typer af hvide kvinder bor og arbejder i New York, og seriens handling koncentrerer sig omkring deres indbyrdes venskaber samt jagten på succes og den store kærlighed. Lighederne mellem de to serier er dermed mange, men ved nærmere undersøgelse kan der også findes store forskelle i deres respektive iscenesættelser af kvindens rolle og selvopfattelse. For ud over en aldersforskel på cirka 10 år har hovedpersonen Hannah i *Girls* også en helt anden kropslig fremtoning end den ekstremt tynde Carrie i *SATC*. Lena Dunham, som er seriens skaber, manuskriptforfatter og hovedrolleindehaver, iscenesætter gang efter gang sin hovedperson Hannah i et væld af mystiske sexscener, hvor Hannahs nøgne krop – som ikke lever op til film- og tv-branchens sædvanlige modeltynde skønhedsidealiser – i høj grad er i fokus. I dag er det ikke længere innovativt at have nøgenscener i en tv-serie og slet ikke hos HBO. Men *Girls* sætter eksempelvis sin kvabsede kvindelige hovedperson til at spille bordtennis med bare bryster (sæson 2, episode 5), hvorved serien ikke blot overskrider konventionelle grænser for nøgenhed i tv-fiktion, men bevidst vælger at sætte fokus på Hannahs uperfekte krop i bevægelse. Og at det i sig selv måske er nyt, peger på, hvor ensformige og uvirkelige film- og tv-branchens sædvanlige slanke kvindekroppe er.

### Ideologikritik og indiefilm

Hannah leverer også parodier på de foregående dramediers overfladiske kvinder. Hannahs himmelråbende egoisme og påfaldende uansvarlighed kan tolkes som en kommentar til tidligere selvcentrerede karakterer som Carrie, der gang på gang sætter sine egne behov før andres behov og ignorerer eventuelle økonomiske problemer. Både Carrie og Hannah er skribenter, men i stedet for at bruge sin computer til at skrive en klumme om newyorkernes seksualvaner skriver den neurotiske, OCD-ramte, selvdestruktive og næsten selvskadende Hannah en række angstfyldte spørgsmål om bakterier, sygdom og død (sæson 2, episode 10). Også karakteren Shoshanna italesætter seriens slægtskab med *SATC*, når hun taler om, hvilken *SATC*-karakter pigerne i *Girls* hver især minder om. Men i det

hele taget gør *Girls* meget ud af at distancere sig ideologisk fra sin forgænger ved bl.a. at fravælge *SATC*'s karakteristiske voice-over og vælge en helt anden narrativ og æstetisk iscenesættelse: et mere nøgternt, rått og indiefilmisk udtryk (Halskov 2012). Dunhams erfaring fra indiefilmen skinner igennem i *Girls*, der nærmest kan betragtes som en serialisering af hendes indiefilm *Tiny Furniture* (2010). Både serien og denne delvist biografiske film er på mange måder bygget op omkring den samme narrative coming-of-age-fortælling og benytter flere af de samme skuespillere, bortset fra at hendes søster og mor i filmen endda spilles af hendes virkelige søster (Grace Dunham) og mor (kunstneren Laurie Simmons) og finder sted i familien Dunhams virkelige hjem. Således implementerer Lena Dunham sig selv i sine værker, og *Girls* abonnerer i det hele taget på en mere upoleret ideologi end de tidligere kvindefokuserede dramedier. En måde, hvorpå *Girls* skiller sig ud fra de andre dramedier, knytter sig dermed til Lena Dunhams rolle i produktionen. For ud over at være skaberen af serien er hun usædvanligt nok også hovedrolleindehaveren, ofte instruktøren og næsten altid hovedforfatteren til den enkelte episode, og hun er dermed seriens helt centrale auteur og bl.a. med til at promovere en særlig auteurvenlig produktionskultur hos HBO, som kanalen har kultiveret i årevis (Edgerton & Jones 2008, 320 f.), og som giver kanalen en strategisk konkurrencefordel.<sup>2</sup>

Generelt set har *Girls* også en større grad af uafgørelighed eller tomme huller (Iser 1974) end mange af de andre dramedier, da serien eksempelvis ikke lader os forstå, om Hannah er seriøs eller ironisk, når hun skriver følgende sætning på sin computer: "A friendship between college girls is grander and more dramatic than any romance" (sæson 2, episode 10). For selvom serien illustrerer disse dramatiske venskaber med op- og nedture for de kvindelige karakterer, er den samtidig ofte ironisk og humoristisk i sin karakteristik af venskaberne, og i episoden "Beach House" (sæson 3, episode 7) afsløres det blandt andet for beskueren, hvor falske og uægte disse relationer reelt set har været i løbet af det meste af serien. Denne form for selvbevidsthed og selvkritik demonstrerer trods alt, hvor nuanceret *Girls* forsøger at være – også i sin genrekritik.

### Den nye mode

En anden ny og interessant kvindefokuseret dramedie er *Orange Is The New Black* (OITNB), som streamingtjenesten Netflix lancerede i 2013. Seriens showrunner er Jenji Kohan, hvis CV også tæller arbejde på dramedier som *SATC*, *Gilmore Girls* og ikke mindst *Weeds*, som hun var både manuskriptforfatteren og skaberen bag. Men blot ved sin titel markerer denne serie et fokus på en helt anden mode end eksempelvis *SATC* – nemlig den orange fængselsdragt.<sup>3</sup> Hovedpersonen Piper Chapman (spillet af Taylor Schilling) synes umiddelbart at besidde alle af de tidligere nævnte træk i strømmingen: 25-40 år, byboer, hvid, middel- eller overklasse, attraktivt udseende og kærester med journalisten Larry (spillet af Jason Biggs). Og så er hun i øvrigt biseksuel og skal sidde i fængsel i 15 måneder, fordi hun engang har været involveret i narkosmugling, da hun var kærester med Alex (spillet af Laura Prepon). Og for at gøre opholdet endnu vanskeligere skal Piper afsone sin dom i det samme kvindefængsel som ekskæresten Alex, der også meldte Piper til politiet.

Således følger *OITNB* Pipers ophold i kvindefængslet, hvor hun møder et væld af forskellige typer kvinder af alle racer og religioner, som alle har det til fælles, at de har begået fejl og nu oplever identitetstabet, upersonliggørelsen og homogeniseringen som følge af den hårde hverdag i fængslet og de nederdrægtige fængselsbetjente. Indtil da havde Piper haft et forholdsvis privilegeret liv, men i fængslet synes de fleste at glæde sig over at se den veluddannede hvide overklassekvinde på glatis, hvorved hun får lov at opleve de andres fordomme om den hvide kvinde. I fængslet bliver alle de indsatte kaldt ved deres efternavn, og i løbet af den første sæson bliver hovedpersonen mindre "Piper" og mere "Chapman" i takt med, at hendes idealer brister. Denne indre følelsesmæssige og seksuelle splittelse bliver mere tydelig, da hendes forhold til kæresten Larry bliver køligere samtidigt med, at hun på ny tiltrækkes af ekskæresten Alex. Derudover benytter serien sig ligesom f.eks. *Lost* (ABC, 2004-10) jævnligt af narrativer om de mindre karakterer fortalt gennem flashbacks fra karakterens liv før fængslet, som dermed bidrager til en forståelse af karakterens historie og baggrund, og som gerne begrænser sig til én mindre karakter per afsnit af serien. Disse korte narrativer om mindre karakterer fortalt gennem flashbacks er således ikke et nyt påfund, men de udfylder nogle



tomme huller i den tilgængelige viden om karakterernes motiver og giver i nogen grad serien en mere kompleks narrativ struktur.

### De farlige kvinder

Den ellers så politisk korrekte Piper bliver også konfronteret med sine egne fordomme i et fængsel fyldt med "farlige" kvinder. Fangerne har valgt at organisere sig efter race, men den store barriere for Piper ender i første sæson med at være klasse- og religionsskellet mellem hende og antagonisten Tiffany "Pennsatucky" Doggett – en genfødt "white trash" kristen. Til sidst er Pipers tolerance forduftet, og i den sidste episode af første sæson giver hun endeligt efter for Pennsatuckys ondsksfuldheder ved at tæve hende godt og grundigt, hvorved forfaldshistorien og transformationen fra den naive "Piper" til den farlige "Chapman" er fuldendt. Et vigtigt tema i serien er også "tid", som ekspliciteres gennem titelsangen "You've Got Time" af Regina Spektor og gennem de kvindelige indsattes forskellige tidsopfattelser af at have mistet vigtig tid i verden uden for fængslet og af at skulle tilbringe lang tid bag tremmer.

I forhold til de forrige kvindedefokuserede dramedier forsøger *OITNB* mere eller mindre bevidst at fremhæve og samtidigt nedbryde bestemte tabubelagte barrierer i tv: Karakterne tæller ikke længere kun hvide middel- og overklassekvinder, men en farverig palet af racer og socialklasser (hvilket *Girls* eksempelvis ikke umiddelbart formår). Serien er ikke blot den første serie om et kvindéfængsel, men også den første dramedie med en biseksuel hovedkarakter. Det er ikke, fordi tidligere kvinderoller i dramedier ikke har flirtet med biseksualitet, men det er første gang, at hovedkarakteren er permanent biseksuel, og derudover går *OITNB* også banebrydende tæt på en transkønnet kvindes liv med karakteren Sophia Buset (spillet af den transkønnede Laverne Cox). Serien viser endvidere, hvordan de homo- og biseksuelle i fængslet bliver diskrimineret af fængselsbetjentene, hvilket kulminerer i, at Piper bliver smidt i isolation for at udvise lesbisk adfærd. Disse elementer i *OITNB* vidner om, at serien bevidst abonnerer på en repræsentationel strategi, hvor seksualitet og særligt bi- og homoseksualitet spiller en markant rolle.

Ligesom Hannah i *Girls* har Piper en iboende selvdestruktivitet, som er en smule utraditionel. Selvom drømmen om det lykkelige liv i begge serier udgøres af det monogame heteroseksuelle forhold

mellem den hvide mand og den hvide kvinde, synes både Hannah og Piper at fravælge den traditionelle forståelse af det lykkelige tv-forhold. I slutningen af sæson tre ser Hannah ud til at droppe kæresten til fordel for karrieren, idet hun er kommet ind på en forfatteruddannelse i Iowa, og Piper giver efter for sit begær efter den farlige kvinde Alex, hvorved hun ødelægger forholdet til Larry og til sidst selv bliver (betragtet som) en farlig kvinde.

### Konklusion

Dramediegenrens kvindedefokuserede serier fra *SATC* og *Ally McBeal* i 1998 til *Girls* og *OITNB* i dag, halvandet årti senere, eksemplificerer en udvikling i portrættingen af kvinder på tv. Måske tænker vi ikke, at kvinderollerne i tv-serier har ændret sig specielt hurtigt eller markant i de senere år, men i så fald behøver vi blot tænde for et gammelt afsnit af *SATC* eller *Ally McBeal*, og så står svaret skrevet hen over skærmen: Disse serier udviste en overfladisk glamourisering og stilisering af kvindens hverdagsliv, og deres kvinder prioriterede i sidste ende altid kærlighedslivet frem for arbejdslivet. Måske var det ikke så i øjnene, da vi så serien for 10-15 år siden, men i dag har noget ændret sig. Det glamouriserede virkelighedsbillede af den moderne storbykvinde bliver ikke vedligeholdt af disse nye dramedieserier. Nogle af disse mere opfindsomme tendenser i tv – såsom meget tilsigtede nøgenscener med en kvabset hovedperson – kan den dag i dag synes overflødige og allerede forældede, idet de tabuer for længst er blevet nedbrudt i nutidens samfund. Men hermed kan denne strømning eksemplificere, hvordan tv nogle gange halter efter virkeligheden og andre gange går forrest.

Og hvilke kanaler leverer så disse mere nuancerede kvindero-ller? I tilfældet med de kvindedefokuserede dramedieserier er det premium-cable-kanalen HBO og streamingtjenesten Netflix, som sætter en ny dagsorden med *Girls* og *OITNB*, og som samtidigt oplever succes blandt anmeldere og til prisuddelinger. Generelt set har Netflix' nyere satsning på markedet for seriefiktion været markant, og med egenproducerede serier som *House Of Cards*, *Hemlock Grove*, *OITNB* og en ekstra sæson af *Arrested Development* har de forsøgt at udfordre konkurrenten HBO på kvaliteten (Nielsen 2013). Men HBO fortsætter også ufortrødent sin strategi og lancerer jævnligt originale serier som eksempelvis den nye dramaserie *The Leftovers*, og denne skærpede konkurrence på markedet lover godt for seer-

ne. Det skal blive interessant at se, om udviklingen inden for kvindefokuserede dramedieserier fortsætter, og om HBO og Netflix også fremover vil satse på at nuancere dramediegenren. En genre, hvis udvikling og diskussion af kvinderoller er med til at forme – men også selv er formet af – den amerikanske mediebranche. De to omtalte serier har indtil nu bidraget til dramediegenren med et helt univers af farlige kvinder, hvor den nye mode i højere grad er selvdestruktivitet end sølvpailletter, og vi har sikkert ikke set det sidste til Hannah og Pipers oprør mod kønsklichéerne.

*Anden sæson af OITNB er i juni 2014 blevet lanceret på Netflix, og tredje sæson af Girls er tilgængelig på HBO Nordic.*

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#### Noter

- 1 <http://www.emmys.com/awards/nominees-winners>
- 2 Det amerikanske (og i dag globale) marked for premium-cable-kanaler har ændret sig ad åre, og tilbage i 1990'erne og især tidligere dominerede de store broadcastnetværk (NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox) markedet. Ældre dramedier som *SATC* og nyere dramedier som *Girls* skal derfor også betragtes i hver deres respektive konkurrencesituation på det pågældende tidspunkt.
- 3 Serien og titlen bygger på Piper Kermans biografi *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* (2010) om hendes oplevelser, da hun afsonede 13 måneder af en dom på 15 måneder i et kvindefængsel for involvering i narkosmugling og hvidvaskning af penge.

## Global Gender

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### Abstract

In *Global Woman* (2004) Barbara Ehrenreich has problematized the focus in the 1960s and 70s feminist movement on Western gender issues and changed the emphasis on white, middle-class men and women to their others in terms of race, class and topography. Michel Foucault has also, with his work on *heterotopoi*, uncovered the hidden aspects of modernity, the residual spaces far from centers of power, whose inhabitants have recently found western publishers and audiences and changed Western discussions of gender already begun. Inside and outside China, writers have offered glimpses of rural Chinese heterotopias, and of gendered experiences both in their native China and in the United States. This paper, "Global Gender", focuses on gender issues in recent Chinese and Chinese American fiction and engages with Foucault and other theorists to uncover hidden network of relations, the interdependencies between men and women with and without power that now await attention, or, if global inequalities turn into violence, explosion.

**Keywords** Gender, Globalization, Chinese American literature, Jia Pingwa, heterotopia

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Western activists and feminists can no longer ignore the global inequality Barbara Ehrenreich addresses with *Global Woman* (2004), which prods the underbelly of feminist victories and world-wide globalization. Contributors zoom in on the waste products of first-world privileges, enabled through the invisible lives of a global underclass: sex workers in Thailand, Filipina domestics in Hong Kong, and exploited maids in the United States. But even the authors of *Global Woman* work as cultural ethnographers in the neglected territories of globalization. Men and women residing in or remembering these spaces have begun to write back, with a fiction of their own. Chinese and Chinese American writers especially have called attention to the bloody 20th Century in their native country and its impact on men and women. Their subject matter includes The Great Leap Forward (1958-60), when Mao boosted domestic industrialization, with starvation and millions of deaths as a result. They further seek to break historical amnesia by narrating The Cultural Revolution (1966-76), when student Red Guards destroyed most of China's cultural heritage and persecuted so-called counter-revolutionaries. Also the silenced June 4, 1989, Tiananmen Square massacre on student protesters returns in contemporary Chinese American fiction, along with the costs of speedy urbanization in post-Maoist China, paid by migrant workers and impoverished peasants. The Xian-based writer Jia Pingwa has offered glimpses of gendered lives in remote Chinese villages, while Ha Jin and Yiyun Li relate gendered experiences both in China and in the United States. In this article, I argue that these writers enhance Western investigative journalism and fiction by offering new perspectives on global migration, enslavement, and gender arrangements untouched by first-world feminism and activism. Rural Chinese women may inhabit recent Chinese fiction, but they do not own their stories, or their destinies.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese and Chinese American authors explore the hidden aspects of modernity, the spaces far from centers of power where underprivileged laborers make possible Western two-career families and middle-class economies.

The drastic changes in women's roles and perspectives began in the West, where feminist authors and activists protested existing gender roles with bestsellers such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1971) by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective and *Fear of Flying* (1973) by Erica Jong. In France, psychoanalytically trained femi-



nists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous theorized a new language intended to articulate feminine bodies and experiences outside of “phallogocentric” linguistic orders. Cixous associated feminine sexuality and marginality with Africa as a “dark continent.” In her influential essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975), Cixous allies herself with blackness and flees to Africa, where non-Western practices and sexualities might fare better, though this destination implicitly suggests her alliance with colonial traditions. Like 19<sup>th</sup>-century explorers, she enters a dark continent, the Other of Western civilization, and inspects its horrors, which she colonizes to destabilize conventional gender structures. Her linking of Europe and Africa nonetheless suggests the interrelatedness of spaces that Michel Foucault theorized in his speech “Of Other Spaces” (“Des Espace Autres”, 1967). His theoretical framework helps explain the often forgotten connection between invisible men and women in the East and middle-class life styles in the West. Foucault points to the interconnectedness of spaces in a global world and to the power differentials between those left behind by modernity, residing in the waste sites of globalization, and those prospering from global economies, whose privileges the residents of developing countries sustain.

Foucault states in “Of Other Spaces” that place is defined by close relations and networks. In stressing the relation of one location to others, Foucault moves on to spaces he labels utopias and heterotopias. Like Cixous’s “Africa”, utopias interact with social realities, but they “present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (Foucault 1967, 1). Foucault’s heterotopias exist, however, as a liminal space between reality and utopia that breaks down binary oppositions of this kind. Foucault maps this space through a mirror, “a placeless place” like utopia, but still with material form (Foucault 1967, 4). His heterotopias hide behind the mirror, or in the cracks of social and psychological configurations. These places sprout on the margins of spheres of production, where those without power reside. André Ouednik explains that Foucault’s heterotopias are “cemeteries, brothels, prisons, boats, psychiatric hospitals... places inhabited by those who’ve either been excluded from society, or are no longer its members (being dead), or

further by those who choose to step outside, in order to engage in 'hidden' practices" (Ourednik 2012).

Heterotopias negate or deny normative social arrangements. They exist in darkness, ignored by those who rely on their existence but fail to acknowledge them. Ourednik calls heterotopia "modern territory's little secret, as foul as Guantanamo, as dark as Fritzel's cellar, as tense as the Korean DMZ, as old as Mount Athos, as well-guarded as the bank vaults of tax heavens." These sites appear as "what is left behind, or at best spared, by the integrating process of modernity. They are left-overs. Remnants. Residual spaces, where diverging realities survive, even grow perhaps, but mostly stall, like algae in a river shoal" (Ourednik 2012). His list might be continued with the impoverished black bodies floating in post-Katrina New Orleans, the textile workers burning in decrepit Bangladesh factories, or the Chinese peasants populating the fiction of Jia Pingwa.

Jia Pingwa writes in Chinese script about his native Shaanxi province. Born in 1952, Jia grew up in the village of Dihua in Danfeng county of Shangzhou prefecture in southern Shaanxi, his impoverished extended family working the land. His family split into several households, and Jia ascribes his poor health to the starvation and malnutrition of his early years. During the Cultural Revolution, Jia's father was labeled a counter-revolutionary and lost all income. His mother, whom no one ever addressed by name, raised four children in her husband's absence and taught them the meaning of endurance. Critics ascribe the bond between Jia and his native place, and his self-identification as a peasant writer, to the resolution of his parents, and the hardship and suffering of his childhood and youth (Wang 2006, 29-34).

Jia devotes his literary production to the Shaanxi peasants far from centers of power, information and educational opportunities, who, like himself, began life in a Foucauldian heterotopia, where hunger, invisibility, violence and hard work determine rural lives. He differs from contemporary Chinese *literati* by retaining close ties to his native place, isolating himself from foreign influence and retaining his regional dialect. Despite his local fame and prolific output, few of his works have been translated into English. The English-language edition of his novel *Turbulence* (1988) won him the American Pegasus Prize and his status in Chinese literary circles. His novel *The Abandoned Capital* (1993), about displaced peasants

and dysfunctional intellectuals, sold six million copies within six months and caused a major scandal due to the explicit sexuality of its characters. The Chinese government banned the book from 1994, following debates about its cultural configurations of China and its response to modernity. Set in a thinly veiled Xi'an, *The Abandoned Capital* is currently being translated into English by local Northwest University faculty members.

The scandal ended the first part of Jia's career, which had begun in the early 1980s with a series of stories set in his native Shangzhou region. These ten novellas, published in 1985, draw on local folklore and myth in making visible the lives of villagers in a "residual" location untouched by modernity, far removed from provincial urbanity or Southeastern affluence. "The Country Wife" or "Darky" explores the lives of rural Shaanxi men and women on the lowest rung of social ladders in the People's Republic of China.

In modern Chinese fiction, peasants function as "reservoirs" of "backwardness," the left-overs of Chinese industrialization and modernization. Yi-tsi Feuerwerker explains this phenomenon with the dichotomy between the scholar-gentry class and the people, objectified and reduced by intellectuals to the "Other" in the modern Chinese imaginary (Feuerwerker 1998, 11). But Jia collapses this dichotomy by writing from within a peasant self, where the bifurcation between peasant and writer represents a crisis of allegiance, or of identity. In the postscript to his novel *Earth Gate* (1996), which records the destruction of a village community, Jia defends rural folk against urban ridicule: "People from the countryside have to work hard so that they have limited outside experience and they look rough and unrefined. After being in the city for more than twenty years, I'm still often laughed at by city folk" (Wang 2006, 147-48). Jia aligns himself with the peasants of "The Country Wife," and he protests the injustice they meet in contemporary Chinese society, where an urban registration card leads to opportunity, even affluence. In his fictional return to the countryside, he tries to recuperate the loss of valuable Chinese cultural traditions, which he locates in peasant ancestry and folklore. He promotes traditional culture and a sense of the past, which modern Chinese literature, and society, cannot do without. The men and women in the novella are imprisoned in Foucault's heterotopia, but they disrupt the center from its ideological and regional margin. They inhabit "the native place," an ideological

site essential to the Chinese nation and the narratives on which it relies. Darky, the title figure, does not speak much, but her life erupts from the bottom of national hierarchies and may destroy, or save, the nation. This project is also Jia's own. In rebuilding modern Chinese literature from its roots, he hopes to give China back to itself, after a violent century of cultural loss and destruction.

Social arrangements in China have undergone tumultuous changes since the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, but notions of gender and sexuality in contemporary China go back to the imperial past. The link between loyalty to the government and loyalty to the family remains strong. The Qing government promoted Confucianism as the predominant ideological structure, according to which a woman's fidelity to her husband and his kin was inextricably tied to her pledge of allegiance to the government. The maxim of producing a son to continue the family line bound her to familial and reproductive roles, and the Qing rule sought ruthlessly to anchor male subjects in family arrangements suited to socialize males into obedient subjects. During the Maoist period (1949-76), women were called to be "just like men" and their domestic roles attacked, but Susan Mann contends in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History* that urban and rural women carried double burdens of work and reproductive/familial roles just the same (Mann 2011, 188). Besides, over the twentieth century, opportunities for female employment did not accelerate at a Western pace, since industrialization outside urban centers such as Shanghai did not take off until the post-Maoist era. The Chinese Communist Party has left the family system intact, and women have been urged to withdraw from the workforce to return to traditional domesticity. The household registration system (*hukou*) assigns each Chinese individual to a household unit, and independent single womanhood remains rare, and ostracized, as Leta Hong Fisher argues in *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (2014). In 2005 only 0.2 % of women aged sixty-five and older had never been married, the percentage of never-married men in the same age group only slightly higher at 2.9 % (Feng and Xiao, qtd. in Mann 2011, 188). New ideas about sexuality and marriage may point towards individual choice and self-determination, but the pull of parents, in-laws, community and state ensures the preservation of traditional roles for rural and urban women in China.

Gender dominates Darky's life and determines the structure of Jia's story. His title is gender-marked, and the opening of "The Country Wife" makes shockingly clear that Jia's protagonist lives at the bottom of Chinese society:

Darky was older than her husband. She did all the work at home. She fed the pigs, rounded up the sheep and went to Black Cliffs to cut and collect firewood. When evening came, her small husband would pester her. He was a short, monkey-like man, but well read. He would use all the tricks he had learned from books to fuck her. It made Darky angry. She came to hate him. At night she was tempted to bump him down from her. [Pingwa 1985, 89]

Flat on her back, her husband crying out names of other women and her father-in-law scolding her from the other-wing room, Darky has only one way to go: up. Her husband and his father grow rich from graft, but even in the family's new house, Darky does all the cooking, cleaning, feeding, field work and sweeping. Her husband now complains of her gluttony and her looks: "He called her 'Black Soy Bean,' for she developed a darker face with her slender body" (Pingwa 1985, 96). Jia's sympathy ensures that Darky now seizes the power of the peasant. When her husband threatens her with a knife, she throws him on the kang, the brick bed where he has violated and humiliated her, "as if it were a manure basket." Her words indicate a new arrangement: "I'm showing you my strength" (Pingwa 1985, 96). Though Darky gets a divorce only because her husband finds a lover with a "foxy" face even Darky admires (Pingwa 1985, 102), her submissiveness has disappeared. Jia sets his peasant woman on a new path.

Newly returned to the village and settled in a cowshed used by the production team, Darky dismisses financial support from her ex-husband, a bed in her parents' home, and her brother's laments. She cultivates her assigned field and becomes a jack-of-all-trades farm worker. She develops a feminist consciousness: "Previously she had thought that without a man, a woman was like a vine that had no big tree to lean on, or a kite without a string. Now it seemed that a woman was also human and could live vigorously" (Pingwa 1985, 105). In a traditional Chinese village, however, community

pressure enters both Darky's mind and her home. As the autumn rain falls, her vigor withers and her mood turns gloomy. Isolated in the outskirts of the village, her hands idle, she finds her present life "wretched and miserable" (Pingwa 1985, 197), with no relief from sorrow, loneliness and anxiety. She fears ghosts and intruders. Ten days later, a matchmaker arrives, and only the choice between Lai Shun and Mu Dan as future husbands suggests a trace of Darky's self-determination and feminist independence.

Both men and women inhabit a Foucauldian heterotopia in the Shaanxi countryside, with limited choices and survival paramount. Mu Du offers 350 RMB and Lai Shun only 300, so Darky goes to the highest bidder, though Mu Du himself works hard for few rewards: "He went to the fields and dug the ground hard, stripped to the waist, with sweat twisting like earthworms down his dusty back. Or he would carry Chinese alpine rush or charcoal on his shoulder pole deep into the mountains. He would trudge the saw-toothed, rugged mountain ridges, black all over, eyeballs wide. . . ." (Pingwa 1985, 114). Soon he disappears into the coal mines of Tong Guan, an underground world echoing Chinese mining disasters and workers buried alive. This mine epitomizes the residual lives and spaces of heterotopia, where the costs of globalization and industrialization appear with overworked bodies and needless deaths. Mu Du returns looking like "a ghost or a devil, as the rough pores of his face were inlaid with coal dust that could not be cleaned by water" (Pingwa 1985, 125). His nightly conversations with Darky reveal the horrors underground, with pits caving in and a rock falling on his workmate, crushing him to death: "the blood burst out from his head like spurting water" (Pingwa 1985, 126). The lives of Darky, the darkened Mu Dan and the crushed worker merge in Jia's story—the work, their coarse bodies, skin color and water imagery establishing their bond. Also Mu Dan's hunchbacked father suggests twisted Chinese work and gender arrangements. In the moonlit night, "the hunchbacked dad helped her in the fields. At his great age, he became so worn out that he coughed blood and had to lie down" (Pingwa 1985, 118). As Darky's responsibility, he adds to her load.

Only the kindness of Lai Shun, who discreetly begins courting Darky in Mu Du's absence, offers relief from her work and worries. Lai Shun's behavior inspires an authorial comment indicating a residual traditionalism:



A woman is blessed with a tender sense of pity and she is pleased by fondness and adoration from men, whose understanding actions or considerate words often win her gratitude. If men, on the contrary, act aggressively, like rascals, that woman's gratitude will soon vanish. But clever men pretend to be wronged and humiliated. Then a woman's tenderness will become as deep as the sea that overflows everywhere. (Pingwa 1985, 124)

Jia's narrative intervention originates in classic *yin* and *yang* discourses about sexual difference, which delegates to men activity, vigor and strength and, to women, complementary traits such as passivity, weakness and receptivity (Mann 2011, 192). This biological binary blocks an emerging feminist narrative with generalizations and gender stereotypes. In the Chinese countryside, and in Xian, a woman equals nature, as the overflowing sea and her tenderness become aligned. Only in her erotic wetness, the fluids flowing through and in her body, might Darky resemble the heroine of feminist fictions. This aspect of Jia's writings became so controversial that his career and reputation plummeted. Too far along the road to individuality and autonomy, his heroine threatens Chinese harmony and nation-building.

Darky's sexuality intensifies as she rises socially. She becomes a restaurant owner, her ample breasts attracting many evening customers. She discovers with the frail Lai Shun forbidden pleasures, as when "naturally and unconsciously, Lai Shun took Darky's hands, licked them with his soft tongue and bit them gently with his teeth" (Pingwa 1985, 132-33). Meanwhile, her strong husband works like an ox and, oblivious to Darky's yearnings, falls asleep at night on the kang. Jia here engages in a gender bending project, in that Darky prefers the feminized Lai Shun to her strong and active husband, while she herself takes on masculine traits, both in her business and in her love life. Darky and Lai Shun elope and thereby increase not only their own but also their author's difficulties: they have nowhere to go in the Chinese countryside or in Chinese moral and political landscapes. In a hamlet deep in the mountains, villagers find a naked couple in an abandoned shed, bound with rope. They gawk at the unfortunates, untie them, tip a pail of cold water over the two from head to toe, and let them loose. Jia does not name the

couple, but the man helps and supports his companion and tells her to run, or the chilly air will sink into her bones. With a sweet-tempered “green man”, who echoes the masculine ideal of the Women’s Liberation Movement, Jia sends his female protagonist off into the night, since Darky’s new identity and destiny have yet to be invented: “Raising her head, the woman was encouraged to run, although she did not know how long was the road ahead or what waited at its end, bitterness or sweetness, sorrow or happiness” (Pingwa 1985, 142). Like a feminist heroine in the fiction of Erica Jong or Mary French, who in the final pages might move into a woman’s commune, buy a vibrator, or walk the beach alone, Jia’s country woman wins an uneasy freedom, and plenty of uncertainty. Unlike her feminist sisters in the West, however, she still needs her man, the inoffensive Lai Shun taking the lead. In a society where unmarried women quickly become “faded flowers”, a Chinese woman alone cannot yet be imagined (Mann 2011, 195). Ultimately, Jia Pingwa gives his country wife a story, not a destiny of her own. But she survives, no mean feat in Foucault’s heterotopia.

Other Chinese (Americans) writers have also begun exploring left-behind or silenced spaces in China, though they can be introduced only briefly here. Ha Jin, who chose exile in the US after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, situates his writings in China, in the US, or in the global topographies they inhabit. In *Nanjing Requiem* (2011), he zooms in on the place of terror where the Japanese Central Expeditionary Forces in 1937 committed the atrocities the novel recounts. Jin snatches the body of an American missionary, Minnie Vautrin, to tell his story, which, like the college itself, becomes a safety zone, where Jin investigates hybrid constellations of gender and culture. In *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2006), Yiyun Li asks herself in relation to the executions and horrors of the Cultural Revolution: “What Has That to Do with Me”? She explores in this final essay the links between herself and the brave, incarcerated women who were mutilated and executed while she as a bored five-year-old kindergartener watched. She realizes that only her writings can establish the link between herself and the men and women who spoke out and rebelled in the past. Especially the women in prisons, on the scaffold, in battle, or the mythic heroines of Chinese folk tales help her reinvent a place for herself in Chinese and in American cultures, as in other works devoted

to Chinese heterotopias, such as *The Vagrants* (2009), and, most recently, *Kinder than Solitude* (2014).

Yiyun Li joins the projects of Jia Pingwa and Ha Jin in breaking the silence about global horrors and giving its victims and survivors if not their own voice, then at least the visibility they deserve. The work of Chinese and Chinese American writers supplements and enhances, rather than replaces, the explorations of Barbara Ehrenreich and others into global migration, exploitation, and modern slavery. With journalists, sociologists and writers reaching from East to West and back to investigate global gender, those caught up in Foucauldian *heterotopoi*, whether in rural obscurity, historical silence, isolated prisons or Shenzhen factories, may now appear on Western radars. As Ehrenreich writes, the essential first step involves bringing “the world’s most invisible women into the light” (Ehrenreich 2014, 13). Jia Pingwa, Ha Jin and Yiyun Li also focus on female protagonists, but the men with whom they live and work enter their stories and help them survive. The literary and cultural encounters between East and West, between feminists and activists in both locations, may ultimately promote equality and visibility to the men and women struggling in a globalized world.

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## Notes

- 1 See, for example, Brook Larmer, "The Price of Marriage in China," *New York Times* (March 8, 2013), [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/business/in-a-changing-china-new-matchmaking-markets.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/business/in-a-changing-china-new-matchmaking-markets.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) and Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (London: Zed Books, 2014).

## “Mother-in-law, my, we know her!”

The role of personal pronouns in constructions of a female identity

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### Abstract

Language constructs and reproduces different types of generalizations, for example concerning gender categories. By way of certain linguistic choices speakers construct or reproduce identities for men and women and other categories. Specific lexical and functional items are used for this purpose, consciously and unconsciously. One linguistic item that is used for this purpose is the personal pronoun. This article provides an analysis of data extracts taken from a Danish magazine with the aim of illustrating how personal pronouns contribute to the construction of identities related to particular categories, mainly a female identity, and serve a particular purpose in interaction with other elements in context.

*Keywords* discourse, language, identity construction, gender, personal pronouns

### Introduction

There is no general agreement as to what extent – if at all – the psychological make-ups of the two sexes are different by nature, but there is no doubt that, discursively, the two sexes are often repre-

sented differently in society. The ways in which male and female identities are represented in society have implications for how individuals are met on different occasions. Fixed images of certain identities maintain people in static roles and contribute to the creation of particular expectations of members of the two sexes. This influences their possibilities in different contexts.

The discursive representation of gender occurs through language. By way of certain choices of lexical and functional items, speakers present the world in particular ways, e.g. by (re)constructing categories and identities. One of the linguistic items used for this purpose is the personal pronoun.

The aim of this article is to illustrate how personal pronouns contribute to the construction of identities related to particular categories, mainly the female identity, and serve a particular purpose in interaction with other elements in context. The interest in a specific linguistic item at a general level means that the article, in contrast to many other discourse analyses, does not take a specific discursive event as its point of departure. This has affected the choice of data, as this does not represent a discursive event as such, but instead has been selected on the basis of the category which has been chosen as an example of the work personal pronouns can do, namely the female category. The article presents a discourse analysis of data extracts taken from the Danish magazine *ALT for damerne* (“All for the ladies”). The analysis centers on the textual level and aims at unfolding the use of personal pronouns in the construction of the female category.

### **Identity and group constructions**

It is well-known that if more traditional views on identity conceive of it as something fixed which belongs to the individual, most recent research in sociolinguistics, social psychology and cultural studies is based on a constructionist view on identity (see for example De Fina et al. 2006, and Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). This article is based on the idea that rather than being reflected in discourse, identity is constructed in discourse. According to this view, people assume different identities on different occasions in alignment with the specific situation. Individuals construct identities for themselves as well as for other people.



As De Fina has observed (2006, 351), we have seen a growing interdisciplinary interest in the field of formation, negotiation, and development of identities. For discourse analysts and sociolinguistics the challenge has been to show not only the centrality of the role of language in the construction and transmission of identities, but also the concrete forms in which and through which language practices index such identities.

Also representatives from social psychology consider the relevance of language and discourse in their approach to identity. An important aspect of identity construction is categorization, because identities are often attached to categories in terms of specific attributes or properties. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987), categorization is an important and pervasive part of people’s discourse. Many stories in for example newspapers will concern people who are described, evaluated and understood not in terms of any unique features of their biography but through their category membership (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 116). Davies and Harré (1990) have also emphasized the role of language in the construction of identity by introducing the concept of *positioning* to denote the discursive production of selves.

Other examples are scholars drawing on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, who argue that identities are constructed “live” in the exchange of talks (see Antaki and Widdicombe 1998).

To access the specific discourse-linguistic approach further, it is relevant to involve van Dijk (2006). He conducts a discourse analytical study of ideology, but it provides tools for analyzing more than pure ideology. According to van Dijk (2006, 116), ideologies are belief systems shared by specific groups, typically in relation to other groups, e.g. one political ideology as opposed to another; *ingroups* and *outgroups*. Group members use discursive structures and strategies to express their ideology, in terms of positive speaking about themselves as well as negative speaking about other groups (van Dijk 2006, 124-125). A speaker speaks *as* a member of a group, and/or addresses the recipient *as* a group member. One of van Dijk’s specific linguistic examples is the personal pronoun *we*, which is typically used to refer deictically to the ingroup of the current speaker. Nevertheless, not all collectivities are ideological. Van Dijk (2006, 120) applies the term *social categories* to those such as gender or ethnicity. As I will explain, his theory on discursive structures, by, for

example, means of the personal pronoun, is also useful in relation to these kinds of collectivities.

Constructing an identity in discourse can be constructing an entirely new category (“those people who...”); it can be reproducing an already constructed category (i.e. making a category relevant), or it can be ascribing some specific attributes to a category (typically but not always by reproducing). With regard to gender, for example, the categories male and female are already constructed, and a lot of attributes have been ascribed to both during history.

In the analysis of the personal pronouns in *ALT for damerne*, I will use the discursive approach to identity presented in this section to show how the use of personal pronouns contribute to constructing different categories / groups and identities, how this happens in interaction with other text elements and the context (that is both the text itself, the profile of the magazine in question and the social context), and uncover what purpose the categories and identities are constructed with. In order to focus on the personal pronouns, specific information about the properties of this linguistic item is needed. This information is provided in the following section.

### Personal pronouns

An enunciation always includes a speaker and an addressee. These roles are often marked linguistically by the first- and second-person pronouns. It is a well-known fact that the plural of the first-person pronoun has an inclusive as well as an exclusive use, as in (1) and (2):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) Come on, we are leaving now.
- (2) We are fine. How about you?

Furthermore, there are also examples in which the referent apart from the speaker (and possibly the addressee) includes individuals beyond the situation. This is the case in (3), an example which forms part of a reply in an agony column to the problem presented in parenthesis:

- (3) (Q: He has also signaled that he likes me, but he doesn't really act. I believe that I have served myself on a silver platter on a number of occasions, and he could just

have picked me. But nothing much happens).

A: I recognize something there, and it seems to me that this is a typical women’s issue, “serving oneself on a silver platter”. [We]<sup>2</sup> women seem to think that our body language and signals are very clear. Unfortunately, this is not how it is perceived from the perspective of the opposite sex.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas (1) and (2) are pure deictic constructions, this is not the case in (3), as it does not only point to referents in the situation. Instead, this type has as its referent a whole group, which in (3) includes the speaker, the hearer and someone else, i.e. all members of the female category. In this example, the speaker, a woman just like the questioner, constructs a female identity; a community to which they both belong. Using this strategy of inclusion, she not only demonstrates comprehension by signaling that she herself knows what it is to be a woman, but also provides an explanation of the perceived problem.

Bennett (2002, 67) points to the fact that politicians amongst others use *we* in an inclusive sense to try to foster some kind of identification of interest between speakers and addressees. Svennevig et al. (2002, 181) make the same point based on the example of the Norwegian king and the Norwegian prime minister, who in their New Year’s speeches to the Norwegian people apply *we* with the aim of constructing a feeling of national community and erasing oppositions of interests.

As we see, an example such as (3) holds some of the features described by van Dijk (2006): the speaker speaks as a member of a group, and she addresses the recipient as another member of the same group. Furthermore, the speaker constructs ingroups and outgroups, women and men, although in this example not in a positive/negative manner.

The pronoun in (3) is followed by a noun that designates the group in question, but this is not always the case. In (4), an example from Gustafsson (2013, 4), translated from Spanish, there is no such noun:

- (4) What an afternoon yesterday. I watched the football match live and we played so badly. What a bad performance! We lost for a good reason.

Despite the omission of the noun, it is easy to grasp that the group/category which is constructed here is a national (or a more local) one which the football team represents and with which the speaker identifies. Gustafsson (2013) introduces the term *unauthentic* or *parasitic* deixis to refer to the phenomenon that the plural first-person pronoun becomes naturalized as an ontological and not an ideological fact. According to Gustafsson (2013, 3), the mechanism is not based on a situational *we*, but on a discursive interpellation (in the sense of Althusser, 1971) which takes this *we* for granted, although it is actually produced as a result of the interpellation, and thus, it is not its precondition.<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon is the same in (3). Although the existence of the biological sexes cannot be denied, the idea of an identity community is ideological. As the following analysis will show, a huge discursive interpellation exists which takes a female community for granted.

According to Lozano Domingo (1995, 243), so-called women’s magazines apply different strategies to get close to the reader, and these are primarily based on inclusion and have as their goal making the reader recognize herself in the text. The magazines try to erase the boundaries between the roles of the editor and the reader, and instead insist on the shared quality of womanliness; a shared female identity. One of these strategies is the use of personal pronouns. I have already mentioned the inclusive use of *we*, but also the singular second-person pronoun is used with the aim of getting close to the reader. As pointed out by Svennevig et al. (1995, 182), the direct addressing by means of the singular second-person pronoun in mass communication is adopted from personal face-to-face communication and indicates closeness between the participants.

### **The use of personal pronouns in ALT for damerne**

*ALT for damerne* is a Danish magazine published by Egmont Magazines. On the website of Egmont Magazines, the chief editor presents the magazine as follows:

*ALT for damerne* includes in-depth interviews about subjects with relevance to you and your everyday life. We present trends in fashion with clothes that you can actually wear and give lots of ideas for your home. We keep you updated on beauty, health and exercise, and give you inspiration for exciting everyday food. You can, of course, also read about the newest films, books and music. Every week.<sup>5</sup>

The title of the magazine explicitly says that it is directed at women – including every woman due to the definite plural form. The presentation of the magazine and the title serve to construct women as a category whose areas of interest include fashion, clothes, homes, beauty, health, food, movies, books and music. In other words, these areas of interest form part of a female identity. Of course, it is not surprising that *ALT for damerne* presents women in a predictable and stereotypical way. The point is that the magazine with its way of explicitly addressing the one sex takes as point of departure an already discursively established difference between the sexes and thereby assumes that their readers identify with this image. This is the point of departure of the content, the language, and the discourse of the magazine, which are the elements that serve to obtain the aim of the magazine: to reach as many buyers as possible.

The analyzed examples are from *ALT for damerne*, No. 8, February 2013, and *ALT for damerne*, No. 9, February 2013. The source of the examples is indicated in parenthesis, the first number referring to the issue of the magazine and the second to the page number.

The first example is composed by the chief editor:

- (5) Are you familiar with the feeling of wanting to know what the nice-looking lady on her way out from the posh shop is carrying in her shopping bag? On the editorial board of *ALT for damerne* we pretty much agree that we enjoy poking our noses in other people's shopping bags. (8, 4)

The example is followed by an uncovering of four recognized designers' purchases with comments from these. In the beginning of the example, the addressee is addressed by the singular second-per-

son pronoun. By way of contrast, *we* is used to refer to representatives from *ALT for damerne*. The adverbial *On the editorial board* marks that *we* is exclusive, as the addressee obviously does not form part of this board. The contrast, however, is erased by suggesting that the reader is just like the members of the editorial board, with the same curiosity when it comes to designers' shopping. This is an example of a strategy employed to get close to the reader, based on inclusion. Despite the exclusive *we*, this strategy attempts to make the reader recognize herself in the text. The chief editor constructs a kind of community or group and invites the reader to be a member. It is presupposed that the editorial board is a kind of expert in this context and by disclosing their own interests, the reader is indirectly asked to align herself and do the same and thus identify with the group. Having constructed a community and invited the reader to join it, the editorial board might expect that the reader will find the ensuing content more interesting and relevant. Variants of this phenomenon are seen in the following two examples:

- (6) Look after your skin with the facial treatment mask that is best suited for your skin type – we have tested all our facial treatment masks on ourselves! Check out the latest beauty news on [ALTfordamerne.dk/skonhed](http://ALTfordamerne.dk/skonhed). (8, 14)
- (7) “We really want to get our hands on that!” [We] The fashion editors of *ALT for Damerne* are constantly filled with new impressions from the season's collections, all kinds of glossy magazines, cool bloggers, and regular visits to the designers' show rooms. But what do we end up buying when the spring collections hit the stores? Look here and get all the insider tips. (8, 48)

In (6) *we* is also exclusive and refers to representatives of the magazine. The reader is invited to find a facial treatment mask among several which have been tested by the representatives of the magazine. Again the referents of *we* represent experts, and the reader (in this case addressed by the possessive pronoun *your*) is supposed to be interested in following the advice. The referents of *we* in (7) are the fashion editors, i.e. fashion experts. By showing what they themselves buy and offering insider tips, the reader is invited to be



a member of their group – the “smart ones”. Text (8) differs slightly from these examples:

- (8) You can get some very effective treatments at the cosmologist, but if you feel like doing the work yourself, we present a number of new products that can help even out your skin tone and contribute to an even pigmentation. (9, 82)

In this example, the referents of the exclusive *we* do not invite the reader to be a member of a group. But the plural of the first-person pronoun and the singular of the second-person pronoun are used to offer expert advice to the reader.

(6) to (8) play on the overall identity already constructed for the magazine: a female identity which includes an interest in fashion, beauty, etc. Within the scope of this identity, to which the representatives of the magazine as well as the readers belong (according to the set-up), the personal pronouns are used to refer to varying sub-communities. The examples are all followed by photos of products with indications of the specific brand and price, and the rhetoric is supposed to have an advertising function for these products, too.

(9) is the magazine’s introduction to a personal narrative from a woman who is not otherwise affiliated with the magazine. The narrative concerns experiences with her father-in-law:

- (9) Mother-in-law, my, we know her! She looks in a criticizing manner at the laundry and the fluff in the corners. She shakes her head in lack of understanding when she notices that we do not adore her son unconditionally (...) This broad generalisation may be unfair, but if you do not have such a stereotype for a mother-in-law yourself, you may know a woman who has to put up with one, or perhaps you have seen her incarnated in the worst form by Jane Fonda in “Monster-in-law”, or you may remember Charlotte’s mother-in-law in “Sex and the City”? (8, 23)

The entire example is built on the construction of a mother-in-law with some very specific properties. The objective of the introduction seems to be to put the reader in a certain mood, ready to read

the narrative (although this is about a father-in-law), and it is therefore important that the reader recognizes the feeling that the text tries to evoke. This feeling will only be evoked if the reader accepts the idea of this mother-in-law-category. The stereotypical history concerns the relationship between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, and the two *wes* seem to include the whole female category and is as such inclusive, as the reader is supposed to be a woman. The example constructs a community between women in general. Anticipating an objection to the generalization, as there might be women who have not experienced the phenomenon, a variant is provided in which the reader, addressed by the singular second-person pronoun, is positioned as belonging to a group who does not have a personal experience but know another woman with the experience. Even a third possibility is offered: if this is not the case either, the last possibility is that the reader knows this mother-in-law-category from a movie or TV series. In this way, the magazine takes all precautions, leaving the impression that this mother-in-law-category exists for sure.

The last three examples are parts of the same article written by a (female) journalist on *ALT for damerne*. The first part of the article, to which the three examples belong, is an introductory text to an inquiry among the readers of *ALT for damerne*.

- (10) HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR HUSBAND? (...) We have asked our [you] readers what they [you] think men request from [us] women. (9, 27)
- (11) Research shows that the brains of the two sexes develop in different ways and that we use the centers of the brains in completely different ways. So, yes, men are, in many ways, inhabitants of Mars, of the red planet. But, have [we] women actually solved the Gordian knot: men? Do we now know, after many years of practice, what men really want, what they request from [us] women? (9, 27)
- (12) Nevertheless, we hope that we can kill some of your myths and confirm some of your ideas of the man of your life or men in general. (9, 27)

The question in (10) is the headline of the article, and the other part of the example forms part of the lead paragraph. In the beginning

of the example, *we* is exclusive and refers to the (representatives of) the magazine and is opposed to *you*, the readers. However, the second use of the plural first-person pronoun is inclusive and refers to women in general and as such to the representatives of the magazine as well as to the readers. In this example, the female category is marked directly by the noun *women* and is also directly opposed to the male category. It emerges from (10) that the inquiry is based on the assumption that women believe that men as a category want the same from women.

In (11) we see a distributional use of *we*, as it refers to both women and men, but as two different categories. Subsequently, this pronoun is used inclusively to refer to all members of the female category as opposed to the male category.

(12) is the conclusive text of the introductory text to the inquiry. In this example, the magazine returns to the boundary between themselves and the reader. *We* is again exclusive, and the function of the example seems to be to present themselves as the experts who offer a relevant inquiry to the readers.

## Conclusion

Even in the description of *ALT for damerne* on its website an overall identity for its readers is constructed (or reproduced): a female identity which includes interest in fashion, beauty, etc. This constructed identity forms the basis for the content of the magazine and for the way in which the magazine addresses its readers. The application of this identity is related to the purpose of the magazine which is merely (or at least mainly) commercial, and is used as a strategy to maintain current buyers and get new buyers. Apparently “innocent” functional items, in this case the personal pronoun, contribute to construct an identity.

The analysis has shown that personal pronouns are used in *ALT for damerne* to create different groups and communities within the scope of the constructed female identity. These groups are sometimes the representatives of the magazine as opposed to the readers, and sometimes the entire female category itself, to which the representatives of the magazine as well as the readers belong. A huge discursive interpellation exists which takes a female community for granted. Though the pronoun *we*, which is used to refer to this category, appears to be of an ontological kind, it is ideologically based.

When the pronoun constructs different groups, the aim on several occasions seems to be to create a situation in which the expert women give advice to the non-expert women and invite them to be members of their groups. On the other hand, when the pronoun – typically in conjunction with the noun woman/women – refers to the female category as a whole, the aim seems to be to spur an interest in the reader by making her identify with the group to which she “naturally” belongs. The use of personal pronouns is generally employed as an intimacy strategy based on inclusion – even when the plural first-person pronoun has an exclusive meaning.

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### Notes

- 1 This difference in reference is marked linguistically in several languages, but not in Danish or English. See for example Bennett (2002, 67) and Benveniste (1997, 170).
- 2 Some of the translated examples do not contain a personal pronoun in the English translation. In these cases, a personal pronoun in square brackets indicates that there is a personal pronoun in the original Danish example.
- 3 This example is taken from the Danish tabloid newspaper BT: <http://m.bt.dk/f/?article=21804486-Brevkassen-Hvordan-faar-jeg-fat-i-ham>
- 4 See Gustafsson, 2013 for more details on this phenomenon from a philosophical, a linguistic and a sociological perspective. For more details on personal pronouns in general, see Bennett (2002), Goddard (1995), Benveniste (1997), and Wodak (2006; 112)
- 5 <http://www.egmont-magasiner.dk/index.php?mod=-main&parent=86&id=57>.

## Mary in the Middle

The use and function of a female character in the policing of a male-male relationship in BBC's *Sherlock*

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### Abstract

The addition of Mary Morstan to Series 3 of the BBC's *Sherlock* is analysed through the application of Eve Sedgwick's theory of homosociality as well as performativity theory to shed light on how a female character can be used not to only police a male-male relationship, but also create a safe space for them to express sentiment. The analysis of Mary's role in BBC's *Sherlock* suggests that she is mainly used to ensure that the performance of sexuality in BBC *Sherlock* was mainly heterosexual, although the performative level of the program leans towards a homosexual reading in regards to John and Sherlock. The main thesis of this article is that female characters are used to police male-male relationships, ensuring that heterosexuality is the true sexuality of the main characters; though homosocial and homosexual tendencies might be expressed.

*Keywords* BBC *Sherlock*, subtext, queer theory, homosocial, performativity



## Introduction

Applying Eve Sedgwick's theory of homosociality and Bollobás' expansion of Butler's theory of performativity to Series 3 of *Sherlock* (2010), this analysis examines the nature of the queer subtext – characterized by heterosexual coupling – in the BBC's latest adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's novels. As Eric Savoy has explained, Sedgwick's sees queer performativity as "resistantly unaccountable, as a 'torsion of mutual perversion', of what the text imagines as reference and what it invokes beyond its structures" (Savoy 1999, 153). There has been a proliferation of definitions of performativity; the definition that this article will deal with is closely related to that of subtext. There is a danger in relating the *performance* of *Sherlock* (2010) to the heteronormative intentions of the narrative and the *performativity* to the apparent homosexual undertones. Yet, using this approach helps accomplish two goals: it serves to help detect the homosexual subtext's visibility in *Sherlock* (2010), whilst also keeping in mind that this performative level of sexuality may not be intentional.

As it shall be explained, the apparent heterosexual basis for John and his love interest Mary is used as a cover that John and Sherlock can hide behind to ensure that their relationship with each other cannot be perceived as being of a homosocial nature. However, this paper argues that by using Mary as a cover the nature of John and Sherlock's friendship becomes more difficult to label. This analysis exhibits the tensions that can be created by having a double reading in a television show; by never refuting nor agreeing with the performativity of Sherlock and John's relationship, the text is placed in a grey zone where the best label for their relationship would be homosocial. However, Mary's presence, which in theory should dispute any notions of homosexuality between John and Sherlock, ultimately places the homosocial explanation on shaky ground. The analysis starts by focusing on how Mary is introduced to the audience in *The Empty Hearse* (2014) and then moves on to take a closer look at how she intermediates between John and Sherlock. The paper will then turn to look at the peculiarity of *The Sign of Three*' (2014) taking place in a wedding setting, which somewhat surprisingly manages to have Mary not acknowledge the part she is playing in the proceedings. Finally, the labelling of Mary as John's "pressure point" will be examined to determine if it is indeed a way of policing the apparent love triangle.

### Is There Something About Mary?

The last minutes of *The Reichenbach Fall* (2012) featured a grief-stricken John Watson staring at Sherlock's supposed grave, so it is only fitting that the first scene featuring John in *The Empty Hearse* (Lovering 2014) is him standing in front of the same grave. However, two important things have changed since the audience last saw John, the first being that two years have passed since *The Reichenbach Fall*, the second that John is not alone. John is standing alone in front of the gravestone in the first few seconds of the scene, looking every bit the part of a still grief ridden man, and this impression of him would have stayed with the audience were it not for the fact that he is joined by a woman – later introduced as Mary – in the last seconds of the scene (Lovering, 0:5:00-0:5:18). Having Mary appear at the last second might very well point to her serving as what Sedgwick terms a 'conduit': she provides John with a safe space to express his feelings towards Sherlock without the 'fear' of being perceived as being homosexual (Sedgwick 1985, 26). Indeed, Mary's presence, be that in spirit or in body, may work as a way of pushing the apparent homosexual tension between John and Sherlock into the subtext.

As Enikő Bollobás argues in her *They aren't until I call them: Performing the Subject in American Literature* (2012), subtext is connected to "performativity": "homosexuality is performatively brought about in the subtext, whilst the heterosexual performance happens in the text", argues Bollobás (2012, 156). Subtext is *performativity*, whilst the text is the "main" performance. Having a coded subtext, which performatively implies a homosexually orientated reading, and a text whose performance denies any other reading than a heteronormative one, thereby creates a double narrative (Bollobás 2012, 156).

*The Empty Hearse* highlights this tension by having the performance and the performativity differ from each other. The addition of a moustache to John's appearance seems to be an on-going joke in the first part of the episode as everyone from Mrs. Hudson to Sherlock and Mary proclaim their distaste for it; their utterances result in him shaving it off. John could be shaving it off because everyone seems to hate it, but, interestingly enough, Mary believes there to be a more particular reason: Sherlock (Lovering 0:30:52-0:30:54). Indeed, she carries on, somewhat mocking John, by declaring "[she]

had six months of bristly kisses and then His Nibs turns up” (Loving 0:31:10). The use of the nickname “his nibs” could either refer to how Sherlock holds himself in high regard or it could refer to a person in authority – or it could very well be a mix of the two; especially taking into consideration John’s opinion of Sherlock at that point in time. The scene as a whole could be seen as an indication of John caring more about Sherlock’s opinion than that of his girlfriend.

Nevertheless, John manages to turn the focus away from Sherlock’s hold over him, by cheekily stating to Mary that he will marry her. By turning focus back on Mary, he manages to steer the conversation away from the idea of Sherlock being more important than Mary, which was indicated in the performativity of the scene. Consequently, the significance of Mary’s presence appears to be lessened in the reappearance of Sherlock, making her role in this love triangle follow the structure proposed by Sedgwick (1985: 26).<sup>1</sup>

Sedgwick argues that the bond between the two men in a love triangle is stronger, because she believes the bond between the rivals to be the strongest in that triangle; yet that is not the case in *Sherlock*. Thus, agreeing with Sedgwick’s theory of the bond between the two men being the strongest presents a slight problem in regards to applying that structure to John and Sherlock: they are not rivals, but are indeed the lover and the beloved. In fact, the roles of the rivals fall to Mary and Sherlock, who seemingly do not have a stronger relationship than the one found between John and Sherlock. However, that is not to say that the theory of a female character being introduced to a homosocial relationship does not police and facilitate the heterosexual undertones, which further analysis will highlight. Sherlock and John might be outliers when it comes to Sedgwick’s theory on love triangles, but when it comes to the use of Mary as a conduit for their homosocial relationship, they seem to follow the description word for word.

Male-male friendships seem to be muddled with homophobia, a consequence, perhaps, of the heteronormative patriarchal structure that historically permeates the Western world. Sedgwick agreed that homosocial friendships, particularly between men, are characterised by intense homophobia and genuine hatred of homosexuality (1985: 3). This need for a male kinship to be heterosexual is perhaps the reason Sherlock and John continuously use Mary as a proof of their heterosexuality. *The Sign of Three* (2014 McCarthy) is set at a

wedding reception, but instead of relying heavily on the wedding itself, the main plot is placed on the best man's speech, a job which falls to Sherlock. However, one flashback shows the audience that it was not easy for John to ask Sherlock for this. Indeed Sherlock's confusion forced John to state that he wanted to stand "up [at the altar] with the two people that [he] loves and cares about most in the world. Mary Morstan and you" (McCarthy 0:21:48-0:23:29).

John's usage of Mary can either follow the trend proposed by Sedgwick, or create a double reading of how John perceives his relationship with Sherlock. By grouping Sherlock and Mary together, the statement of John caring about them most in the world is not seen as homosexual, as his fiancée is mentioned in the same sentence. Mary's presence in the sentence creates a heterosexual safe space for John to express sentiment, without it being perceived as being more than homosocial. However, Mary's place in the sentence also equals her to Sherlock, which creates an ambiguous reading of the scene. Following Bollabas' definition of the performativity of sexuality, it could be said that by equating Sherlock to Mary, the performativity of the utterance is homosexual, whilst the performance is strictly heterosexual.

Furthermore, Sherlock similarly uses the structure of adding Mary to a declaration of sentiment. During his best man's speech he states that John is "[sitting] between the woman you have made your wife and the man you have saved. In short, the two people, who love you the most in all this world" (McCarthy 0:26:20-0:26:28). Sherlock mirrors John, but where he stops, Sherlock goes on to say "and I know I speak for Mary as well, when I say, we will never let you down and we have a lifetime ahead to prove that" (0:26:28- 0:26:36). The addition of Mary in this sentence prevents it from sounding like a groom's speech, instead of the best man's speech. It seems that the love Mary has for John, which intriguingly is not voiced by her during the episode, is placed on the same level as the love Sherlock holds for John.

"We'll have a lifetime to prove that" seems somewhat reminiscent of the marital promise of "till death do us part" and consequently, the performativity of homosexuality could be said to move from the subtext into the text itself. However, by including Mary in the sentence, the text resists a homosexual reading; the theme remains confined to the subtext, despite what gets said. There is a tendency for

the acknowledgment of male intimacy to be policed by the inclusion of heterosexual love interests (Thomas 2012, 41). If Mary had not been included in this promise made by Sherlock, the performance of the text could have shifted drastically, as it could have been perceived as him plainly stating his (romantic) love for John. Indeed, it would be difficult to deny any type of homosexual undertones in Sherlock's promise *without* the addition of Mary.

### The Performance of Pressure Points

Pressure points are quite telling. They are the weak spots that can be used to expose any person, and in regards to subtext and thus also performativity and homosociality, they are quite interesting. John's pressure point is his wife, which Magnussen, the villain from *His Last Vow* (Hurran 2014), has no problem figuring out (0:24:06). Sherlock's pressure point seems more difficult to pinpoint for Magnussen, yet he manages in the end to tell Sherlock (as well as John): "[it is] very hard to find a pressure point on you Mr Holmes [...] But look how you care about John Watson. Your damsel in distress" (Hurran 1:11:47-1:12:05). The choice of the words "damsel in distress" is interesting, as it is a trope most often found in connection with women, and one that is often interconnected with the prospect of love and marriage. However, whilst "damsel in distress" has the performativity of homosexuality, it is also important to keep in mind that it could merely foreshadow Sherlock saving John minutes later in the episode. Furthermore, "damsel in distress" seems to be used more as a taunt towards John, as it suggests that he needs saving, and that he is passive in his friendship with Sherlock. It seems as if the hints of a homosexual coupling are then performative, and perhaps not as intentional as could be believed. Indeed, it seems that the main performance of sexuality in *Sherlock*, particularly John's heterosexuality, makes it difficult to determine if John and Sherlock are engaged in more than a homosocial relationship.

However, whilst the pressure points alone are interesting, as they show how John and particularly Sherlock feel about each other, they also show that weak spots can be used as an advantage. During *His Last Vow*, Sherlock is shot, and, as he flat lines at the hospital, the audience is shown fragments of his internal "mind palace". In a padded cell, Sherlock meets his nemesis, Moriarty, who taunts him during what seems to be his final moments. However, as Moriarty



keeps on listing people who will mourn him, something seems to happen as he reaches John: “John will cry buckets and buckets. It’s him that I worry about the most. That wife... You’re letting him down, Sherlock. John Watson is definitely in danger” (Hurrant 0:39:57-0:40:20). The moment Moriarty mentions that John is in danger, Sherlock opens his eyes and starts to fight his way back to the land of the living. Even Moriarty, who in this scene is a figment of Sherlock’s imagination, comments by saying “Was it something I said?” (0:40:36). The fact that Sherlock comes back from the dead for John mirrors Sherlock’s utterance “John Watson, you keep me right” (McCarthy, 1:09:22) in *The Sign of Three* (2014). Is Sherlock’s display of high regard towards John then performativity – or is he performing it? It is difficult to decide whether or not Sherlock’s level of affection towards John is performativity; perhaps a more fitting question would be if Sherlock’s level of care is that of a friend or of a potential lover? A question such as this one is difficult to answer, as there is no true indication in series 3 of *Sherlock*. However, a possible explanation could be that Sherlock does not want to scare John away.

There is a strong indication of John not having realised the full extent of what Sherlock would do for him. John seems unsure about whom Sherlock would bother protecting and is quite passive, as he is being used as more of a spectator of the proceedings than an active participant (Hurrant 0:46:32). If there is a romantic relationship going on between Sherlock and John, it seems quite unrequited on John’s part; particularly because his pressure point is his wife, whilst Sherlock’s is John. Yet, Sherlock uses John’s pressure point, Mary, ultimately to save him; once again showing that pressure points can be exploited to save people. As Magnussen is flicking John’s face, Sherlock realises that the only way John will be left alone is by killing Magnussen. After making the kill shot, Sherlock speaks three lines that go back to using Mary as a cover: “Get away from me John. Give my love to Mary. Tell her she’s safe now” (1:21:50-1:22:08). To John, it might seem as if Sherlock kills Magnussen, in front of MI6 and his brother, to save Mary. Yet, to the audience it seems obvious that Sherlock exploits John’s pressure point to save him. By choosing to give his love to Mary, and to say that *she* is safe now, Mary is used as a cover. However, in this instance it appears that the cover is being used for John’s sake rather than for the



audience's. Had Sherlock given his love to John and told him that *he* was safe now, the blurred line between homosociality and the heavily featured queer subtext would have been crossed. By using Mary, and thus reminding John and the audience of his heterosexuality, balance is restored, making John feel secure in his heterosexuality. At the same time, it ensures that the main performance of the show is still heterosexual rather than a more queer or homosexually oriented one.

That said, the last minutes of *His Last Vow* play one last game with the subtext. As Sherlock is saying goodbye to John before what the audience knows is his impending death, he delivers a revelation: "John there's something ... I should say, I've meant to say always and I never have. Since it's unlikely we'll ever meet again. I might as well say it now... Sherlock is actually a girl's name" (Hurran 1:25:46-1:26:02). This declaration is strange, because it seems through most of it that Sherlock, in his last moments with John, is trying to declare his love for him. However, he ends with a joke about his name, and perhaps that is the essence of this episode. Sherlock's pressure point is John, but because John is *not* gay and is married, Sherlock seems forced to follow the rules of subtext and to laugh off any indication that the two of them could ever be more than best friends. Perhaps Sherlock merely has trouble following the rules of social behaviour and emotions as he is a self-proclaimed sociopath and thus tries to diffuse a tense situation with a joke. It is difficult to tell. Either way it seems that Mary functions as a safe space for John, in particular, to express feelings, without being perceived as being gay. Sherlock seems to use Mary as a way to not frighten John with the idea of them having more than a homosocial relationship. However, it is important to note that it is difficult to define the nature of John and Sherlock's relationship, as the evidence is constituted by homosexually-oriented subtext or performativity, which is perhaps not enough for definitive conclusions.

## Conclusion

Mary personifies why homosociality is a difficult matter to deal with, as it is neither confined to the performance nor the performative level. Indeed when it comes to love between friends, there seems to be a difficulty in differentiating it from either being intimate or platonic. C. S. Lewis states, in his book *The Four Loves*, that

characters' sexuality can neither be proved nor refuted as the lack of evidence is customarily treated as evidence: "the absence of smoke simply proves that the fire is carefully hidden" (26). Perhaps, that is an important point to keep in mind; when looking at subtext, performativity, and homosocial relationships, they can never really be proved nor can they be refuted, simply because the evidence of them is either vague, circumstantial, or absent.

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## Notes

- 1 In her theory on the love triangle, Sedgwick build upon René Girard's *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1976), where he argues that when a plot involves a literary love triangle, a mediator is situated between a subject's desire for an object. Girard's main argument is that the impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator.

## Paglia's Central Myth

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### Abstract

This piece aims to rescue Camille Paglia from waves of unsympathetic critics. The article asks what it is that she actually stands for. Employing the religious metaphors of "fallen" and "restored", as well as the idea of "sacraments", it argues that what is uppermost in the work of Paglia is a concern with a fallen state connected to sex and gender alignment (disempowering for both men and women) and a risen state in which self-fulfilment is effected by transgenderism. For Paglia, Graham argues, the social purpose of literature is to help individuals understand their own transgender destiny: writers provide models for that "migration".

*Keywords* Apollonian, Dionysian, feminism, transgender, liberalism

Camille Paglia is the subject of a veritable mountain of journalistic work, in print, on-line and on TV. Academic material on her output is dwarfed by the journalistic treatment, but the scholarly work of her writings has been slowly taking shape over the past few decades. In the appendix to *Sex, Art, and Culture*, Paglia documents her

own appearances in all media (cartoons included), and a follow-up record is provided in *Vamps & Tramps*. If we divide the critical response to her into "defense" and "attack", we see that the hostile treatments vastly outnumber the more sympathetic accounts. In the early nineties, Naomi Wolf turned her fire on Paglia, accusing her of "howling intellectual dishonesty" (Wolf 1992, 23). In "Feminism's Unfinished Business", Katha Pollitt stated that Paglia was guilty of "glorify[ing] male dominance" (Pollitt 1997). In *Antifeminism and Family Terrorism*, Rhonda Hammer discusses Paglia as a "'feminist' bashing feminist" (Hammer 2002, 43) and a "feminist impersonator" (Hammer 2002, 61). It is important to analyze the quality of Paglia's feminism – not to mention her view of homosexuality – but there is a danger that these elements are emphasized so much in (negative) commentaries on her that we lose sight of the larger context – the central myth, one might say – she is always articulating.

A clarification of that myth is the task I have set myself in this piece. Such a myth typically involves a notion of "where we are", "where we want to be" and "how we get there". In this piece, I shall use the metaphors of "falleness", "restoration" and "sacraments" when discussing the distinct aspects of her central myth. Such a commentary does not necessarily represent a defense; but, as an attempt to give a neutral account of what Paglia actually stands for, it is, in terms of mood, at some distance the negative appraisals of her outlook.

### The Fallen State

From Paglia's point of view, the 1960s was a time when Dionysian power was unleashed in society. "This was the Sixties: energy. *Energy* was the Sixties!" (1992, 271), she declares. But, significantly, her attitude to the record of the 60s is ambivalent. Her general opinion is that, unchecked, Dionysian energy becomes chaotic – in one essay she speaks of the Dionysian spinning into barbarism (1994, 330), and when she turns to the Sixties she unreservedly levels the same charge, despite her identification with the Sixties experiment. "My generation", she admits, "inspired by the Dionysian titanium of rock, attempted something more radical than anything since the French Revolution. We asked: why should I obey this law? And why shouldn't I act on every sexual impulse? The result was a descent into barbarism" (1992, 216). If we ask what lies behind this

strangely damning analysis, the answer appears to be “sex” to a significant extent, or better the twin issues of sex and nature. “The Sixties”, she states, “attempted a return to nature that ended in disaster. The gentle nude bathing and playful sliding in the mud at Woodstock were a short-lived Rousseauist dream” (ibid.). Playing the part of *agent provocateur*, she connects Sixties’ license in sexual matters with the development of the AIDS epidemic, and it is this factor which lies at the root of her ultimate judgment of that decade and its revolution<sup>1</sup>

Fallenness in Paglia’s view is not simply a question of the ascendancy of Dionysius. Rather, Paglia thinks of history as cyclical and alternating between periods of Apollo and periods of Dionysius, which represent two types of fallenness. If the Dionysian may spin into barbarism, the Apollonian hardens into fascism (1994, 330). Whether Dionysus or Apollo is in the ascendancy, society, in Paglia’s view, is organized along what can only be described as authoritarian lines. (A libertarian might wish to distinguish between the authoritarianism of the Left (economic) and the authoritarianism of the Right (social), but Paglia seems to have little interest in that distinction.) Generally, there are too many restrictions placed upon pornography and prostitution, for example. Great restrictions are placed upon gender and sexual orientation, too. In discourses dealing with gender and sexuality the stress is customarily placed upon women and homosexuality, but in Paglia we have something different. Restrictions on gender result in gender stasis: women are encouraged to be feminine and men masculine. What we have, then, is a cloven society, with men here and women over there. If, in Rousseau, we come across the notion that, in a better society, men would be masculine and women feminine, for Paglia this is the current – entirely undesirable – state of affairs. The same logic applies to sexual orientation: it is also divided. Restrictions on sexuality result in monosexuality. People are either hetero- or homosexual. Society, then, is doubly-cloven.

### Pagliopia

One might assume that an ambivalent attitude to the Apollonian/Dionysian opposition marks an opportunity for a thinker to begin to think dialectically. The moment we cease to identify with one side and cast off the other it seems that the only way beyond such

an *impasse* is to begin to think in terms of a higher level of thought where opposition is reconciled, and we move onto the level of *co-incidentia oppositorum*. And Paglia does actually make a number of remarks which point to her desire to move somewhat dialectically beyond the Apollonian/Dionysian opposition. "We need a new point of view", she states, "that would combine the inspiring progressive principles and global consciousness of the Sixties with the hard political lessons of the Seventies and Eighties, sobering decades of rational reaction against the arrogant excess of my generation" (1992, viii).

To be more precise, Paglia advocates a "social liberal" reorganization of society, characterized by a *laissez-faire* attitude towards, for example, pornography and prostitution. In her M.I.T. lecture she hits a stretch where, in her customary *ad lib* manner, she provocatively explains her outlook: "I'm someone who is on the record as being pro-pornography [...] I'm pro-prostitution – I mean *really* pro, not just pro-prostitute and against prostitution. I'm pro-abortion, pro-homosexuality, pro-drag queens, pro-legalization of drugs" (1992, 252).

We might well wonder if, despite the anti-conservatism of such a position, a society based on such extreme social liberalism would not be very hierarchical, and Paglia at times suggests society always will be. Indeed, she seems to resist the idea that inequality could ever be abolished. "We are", she states, "hierarchical animals. Sweep one hierarchy away, and another will take its place, perhaps less palatable than the first" (2001, 3).

What we might ask – perhaps somewhat aghast – would be the fate of historically disempowered groups in society in such a world? Would they not experience a far worse form of oppression in a society entirely free of state control? What of women, gay and straight? Would women remain the second sex? Would gay people's sexuality symbolize the "second sexual orientation"?

The short answer for Paglia is "No". There is an element of utopianism in Paglia's thinking, and it is partly focused on women and sexual orientation. Her central work of social criticism is titled "No Law in the Arena", and early in that piece she describes how women should orient themselves in the kind of world she wants them to live in:



The ultimate law of the sexual arena is personal responsibility and self-defense. We must be prepared to go it alone, without the infantilizing assurances of external supports like trauma counselors, grievance committees, and law courts. I say to women: get down in the dirt, in the realm of the sense. Fight for your territory, hour by hour. Take your blows like men. I exalt the pagan personae of athletes and warrior, who belong to shame rather than guilt culture and whose ethic is candor, discipline, vigilance and valor. (1994, 23-4)

Paglia thinks of women as very powerful: "Man has traditionally ruled the social sphere; feminism tells him to move over and share his power. But woman rules the sexual and emotional sphere, and there she has no rival" (1992, 31). Now, in her view, it is time for women to consolidate their power, and, a strong – in her lexicon, "masculine" – female personality will be a necessity if women are to flourish in a world free of statism. In Paglia's view, women have inescapable ties to femininity, but transgenderism – here a migration away from a hormonal base – is nonetheless possible; indeed compulsory.<sup>2</sup> She repeatedly refers to her own personal intellectual heroes – "Great women scholars like Jane Harrison and Gisela Richter" (1992, 244) – but it is certain figures of the silver screen as well as ordinary public life that she turns to for her role models. In her view, these figures are emblematic of resistance to gender stasis. Critiquing contemporary American femininity, she states "Movies from the Thirties and Forties [...] showed a quite different kind of woman, either bold and pioneering, like Katherine Hepburn in *Woman of the Year*, or elegant sophisticated, and sexual, like Marlene Dietrich in *Dishonored*" (1992, 111). A whole gallery of other figures such as Dorothy Parker and Mary McCarthy ("I loved their tough realism, bare-knuckles pugnacity, and witty malice" (1994, 347)) are also included in her various celebrations of great women, but it is "intrepid, masculine Amelia Earhart" who gets the most attention from Paglia: "Amelia Earhart to me was an image of everything a woman should be. It remains that for me. Amelia Earhart, my obsession. She is woman alone" (1992, 258).

One could be forgiven that masculine women would ideally be the first sex of the "arena" society in Paglia's view. However, it

seems that the basic contrast Paglia has in mind is between masculine women (the dominating) and masculine men (the dominated). However, the feminine male is a match for the masculine woman.

What of sexual orientation? Turning to sexuality, Paglia's resistance is to monosexuality. Just as she favors androgyny for women (and men, for that matter), so she argues for openness towards the both same-sex and other-sex sexual relations. Paglia identified herself a lesbian woman for many years, but, in "No Law in the Arena", she argues in favor of bisexuality, making it clear that she sees sexual orientation as partly a matter of conviction. The distinction between homosexual and heterosexual is illusory for Paglia, but the distinction between monosexual and bisexual is genuine, and bisexuality is to be preferred to monosexuality, be it gay or straight monosexuality. Freedom also involves liberation from monosexuality. It is, she says, "our best hope of escape from the animosities and false polarities of the current sex wars" (1994, 94). Maleness or femaleness may be a question of hormones; sexual orientation may be partly related to experience; bisexuality may be helped along by an effort of will.<sup>3</sup> Bisexuality is the "compulsory" sexual orientation of the arena, though, in an afterthought, she admits that "Perhaps bisexual *responsiveness* is all we can hope for" (ibid.).

In Rousseau's ideal society, men would be masculine and active, and women passive and feminine. ("One should be active and strong, the other passive and weak," as Rousseau declares in *Emile: Or, On Education* (1979, 358).) For Rousseau, active men are the elite; underneath them, passive women enjoy an enviable position on the hierarchy; masculine women and feminine men, however, are Rousseau's psychological and social underclass. For Paglia, masculine women and feminine men, both of whom are at least bisexually responsive, are the elite. Their social inferiors are the – hopelessly monosexual, in her view – masculine men and feminine women. Such is the pecking order in Pagliopia.

### Literature as Sacraments

I have spoken (in brief) about the logic of the "fallen word" as well as Paglia's notion of what a restoration might indicate. What is missing is the "sacraments" which might, in her view, serve to lift mankind up to the level to which it truly belongs. For Paglia, the most obvious "sacrament" is literature itself, not to mention popular cul-

ture. In her view, the social value of literature and popular culture descends from their representations of transgenderism. In her view, our literary and cultural heritages are structured around the opposition between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, but, in her view, both strains are connected to transgenderism. Literature, Dionysian and Apollonian, represents a repository of the kinds of examples we need and should imitate in the "arena" society.

I will conclude with just a few examples of the way in which literature furnishes us with this kind of "capital". Apollonian Wilde, Paglia argues, teaches society all about the androgyne of manners. In this context, she speaks of "the male feminine in his careless, lounging passivity" and the "female masculine in her brilliant aggressive wit" (2001, 532), and these are crucial types for her social ideal. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *Cleopatra* are every bit as socially useful as Wilde. Where Paglia speaks of the androgyne of manners in relation to Wilde, it is a figure called the Mercurius androgyne she connects with *Dionysian* Shakespeare. "Shakespeare's great Mercurius androgyne is the transvestite Rosalind and, after her, the male-willed Cleopatra. The main characteristic", she continues, "is an eclectic wit – dazzling, triumphant, euphoric – combined with rapid alterations of persona" (2001, 199).

## Conclusion

"I honor Apollo and Dionysus equally, as the Sixties did not do", Paglia claims (1992, 122). And clearly it is through transgenderism, bisexuality, as well as the social liberalism which facilitate them, that this synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus is effected and the promise of the sixties realized.

This article has taken umbrage with scholars and journalists who simply dismiss Paglia as someone who has offensive views about (sex and) gender and sexuality. If it successfully effects a change in the response to Paglia, the new response should be based on new questions, which include the following. How might we evaluate her version of the opposition between the Apollonian and the Dionysian? If not (extreme) social liberal, which type of political sensibility serves the goals of the feminist movement most efficiently? How are we to finally *reconcile* men and women, not to mention gay and straight? What is the larger significance of the presence of

masculine female characters and feminine male characters in canonical literature?

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## Notes

- 1 Somewhat humorously (and much less controversially), Paglia says that her Sixties vice was not free love, however. "With me it wasn't sex, it wasn't drugs", she confesses in her famous M.I.T. lecture, "with me it was challenging authority and just being absolutely *impossible* in every situation. And I just had to learn my lessons. My career has been a disaster, an absolute disaster" (1992, 254). The only disaster to match her career, she self-mockingly assures us, is that of her love life.
- 2 Paglia's insistence upon "sex" and her refusal to think in terms of "gender" provokes a great many feminist thinkers who subscribe to the attitude to human identity most often referred to as "social constructionist." Paglia explicitly speaks in terms of "maleness" and "femaleness" as the basis of human identities. "As mammals, we are each an unstable idiosyncratic mix of both male and female hormones, but human males have an average of eight to twenty time more testosterone than females. I have found the words *masculine* and *feminine* indispensable for my notations of appearance and behavior, but I apply them freely to both sexes, according to mood and situation. Here are my conclusions, after a lifetime of observation and reflection. Maleness at its hormonal extreme is an angry, ruthless density of self, motivated by a principle of 'attack' (cf.

'roid rage', produced in male bodybuilders by anabolic steroids). Femeness at its hormonal extreme is first an acute sensitivity of response, literally thin-skinned (a hormonal effect in women), and secondly a stability, composure, and self-containment, a slowness approaching the sultry. Biologically, the male is impelled towards restless movement; his moral danger is brutishness. Biologically, the female is impelled toward waiting, *expectancy*; her moral danger is stasis. Androgen agitates; estrogen tranquilizes – hence the drowsiness and 'glow' of pregnancy. Most of us inhabit not polar extremes but a constantly shifting great middle. However, a preponderance of gray does not disprove the existence of black and white. Sexual geography, our body image, alters our perception of the world. Man is contoured for invasion, while woman remains *the hidden*, a cave of archaic darkness" (1994, 108).

- 3 As if to deliberately provoke the gay and lesbian community – having already annoyed most feminists – she constructs sexual orientation as an aspect of personality partly based on experience, presenting a view which goes against the grain of the contemporary preference for purely biological explanations of sexual orientation. Paglia argues that lesbianism "seems to be primarily produced by social pressures" (1994, 73). Male homosexuality, on the other hand, may involve genetic factors. But she is mostly interested in what kinds of experiences may foster homosexuality in men. If a man is interested in same-sex sexual relations, it is owing to a biologically-determined artistic tendency *and* how that is handled in life, she argues. "No one is 'born gay'", she states. "The idea is ridiculous, but it is symptomatic of our overpoliticized climate that such assertions are given instant credence by gay activists and their media partisans. I think what gay men are remembering is that they were born *different*. [...] My tentative conclusions are based on a lifetime of observation and experience in the modern sex wars. [...] Men are not born gay, they are born with an artistic gene, which may or may not lead to an artistic career. More often, they are connoisseurs, aesthetes, or simply arch, imperious commentators with stringent judgments about everything. [...] A sensitive boy is born into a family of jocks. He is shy and dreamy from the start. His father is uncomfortable with him, and his brothers are harsh and impatient. But he is his mother's special favorite, almost from the moment he is born. He and she are more alike. Repelled by male roughhousing, he is drawn to his mother's and sisters' quietness and delicacy. He becomes his mother's confidant against her prosaic husband, a half-eroticized relationship that may last a lifetime and

block the son from adult contacts with women. He is fascinated by his mother's rituals of the boudoir, her hypnotic focus on the mirror as she applies magic unguents from vials of vivid color, like paints and palette. He loves her closet, not because he covets her clothes but because they are made of gorgeous, sensuous fabrics, patterns, and hues denied men in this post-aristocratic age. Later, he feels like an outsider in the schoolyard. There is no male bonding; he tries to join in but never fully merges with the group. Masculinity is something beautiful but "out there"; it is not *in* him, and he knows he is feigning it. He longs for approval from the other boys, and his nascent sexual energies begin to flow in that direction, pursuing what he cannot have. He will always be hungry for and awed by the masculine, even if and when, through bodybuilding and the leather scene, he adopts its accoutrements. Thus homosexuality, in my view, is an *adaptation*, not an inborn trait. When they claim they are gay 'as far back as I can remember', gay men are remembering their isolation and alienation, their differentness, which is a function of their special gifts. Such protestations are of little value in any case, since it is unlikely that much can be recalled before age three, when sexual orientation may be already fixed. Heaven help the American boy born with a talent for ballet. In this culture, he is mocked and hounded and never wins the respect of masculine men. Yet this desperation deepens his artistic insight and expressiveness. Thus gay men create civilization by fulfilling the pattern of Coleridge's prophesying, ostracized poet, dancing alone with 'flashing eyes' and 'floating hair'" (1994, 72-4).



# Representations of Intercourse in American Literature

Gender, Patience, and *Fuck* as a Transitive Verb

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## Abstract

This article investigates representations of sexual intercourse in American literature expressed via the use of *fuck* as a transitive verb. Its goal is to identify possible trends in the differentiation between men and women's roles and power relations in such literary representations. Drawing on theoretical notions from cognitive poetics, the present article assumes that literary representations of intercourse reflect and replicate in readers cultural-cognitive models of intercourse and the roles of, and power relations between, men and women therein. The analysis presented here is quantitative and falls under the rubric of corpus stylistics, and it is based on data from the FICTION component of the *Corpus of Historical American English*. The analysis measures the preference of male or female passive participants in propositional scenarios denoted by transitive *fuck*, thus allowing for the identification of large-scale patterns in sexual objectification of men or women in American literature.

**Keywords** American literature, cognitive stylistics, COHA, corpus stylistics, sexual objectification of women in literature

## Introduction

In this article we will investigate representations of SEXUAL INTERCOURSE in American literature in which the word *fuck* is used to denote the act of INTERCOURSE. The concept INTERCOURSE is particularly relevant to the topic of gender, since INTERCOURSE is physically, biologically, emotionally, and culturally perhaps the most intimate type of interactive relation between men and women (and, of course, members of the same sex). The relations between the INTERCOURSE PARTICIPANTS are subject to construal and may be presented either as reciprocal or unidirectional, such that either both PARTICIPANTS are ACTIVE or only one PARTICIPANT is ACTIVE and dominant while the other is PASSIVE. *Fuck* may be used to express both specifications. If used intransitively, as in (1), it denotes reciprocal intercourse, and, if used transitively, as in (2), it represents intercourse as involving a PASSIVE-ACTIVE relation:

- (1) Within minutes, it seemed, they were fucking on the beach. (COHA 1998 FIC Ploughshares)
- (2) "You've got as much chance of fucking some woman as you've got of pole-vaulting six and a half feet," Baker said. (COHA 1978 FIC Whistle)

This is simply a fact of the English language, and, consequently, creators of verbal art who use *fuck* to denote INTERCOURSE must choose between the two construals. If choosing the latter, they also have the choice of assigning patiency to a MALE or a FEMALE PARTICIPANT (or a non-human entity). Patiency is the opposite of agency and thus refers to PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in propositional scenarios. Agency and patiency are what define the ACTIVE-PASSIVE relation.

In a large-scale perspective, it will definitely be interesting to see whether there is a tendency to assign patiency to men or women in American literary tradition. If this is the case, it may be reflective of deep rooted cultural conceptions of power relations in INTERCOURSE. Analyzing occurrences of *fuck* as a transitive verb in a large diachronic corpus of American literature, we will investigate whether or not there is a tendency towards construing one gender as PASSIVE in representations of INTERCOURSE by quantifying the distribution of MALE and FEMALE PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in the expressed INTERCOURSE scenarios.

### Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework is cognitive poetics, as defined by Stockwell (2003). Cognitive poetics is a branch of literary stylistics that draws extensively on contemporary cognitive science. Like traditional stylisticians, cognitive poetics are concerned with the functions of literary language, but their particular goal is to relate literary effects of linguistic forms to processes and structures in human cognition, including social and cultural cognition.

The analysis presented here assumes that literary representations of INTERCOURSE are reflective of underlying cultural-cognitive models of INTERCOURSE in American culture, and, as such, resonate with (or offend) readers at a deep cognitive level. In that sense, literature constructs MEN, WOMEN, and their roles in INTERCOURSE in the reader: whenever a reader encounters a literary representation of INTERCOURSE, the cognitive structure associated with it is activated, replicated, and further entrenched in the reader's mind.

Cognitive poetics operates with a broad conception of literature which is adopted in this article. Literature, then, to be understood broadly as including not just novels and short stories, but any genre of verbal art, or multimodal art in which the verbal is a substantial expressive element. Thus, literature in this article encompasses novels, short stories, poetry, theater, and cinema.

### *Fuck* as a transitive verb

*Fuck* is arguably the epitome of profane language in Anglophone cultures. Perhaps the most notorious studies of profane language are those by James McCawley's pornolinguistic alter-egos Quang Phuc Dong (Dong 1971a; 1971b) and Yuck Phoo (Phoo 1971), which combined serious and insightful linguistic work with low-brow satire. Profane language is, as McEnery & Xiao (2004, 235) point out, "a part of everyday language use" which "has been infrequently studied". Notable examples of research into profane language include Sagarin (1962), Jay (1992), Sheidlower (1995), McEnery et al. (2000), McEnery & Xiao (2004), and McEnery (2004).

In Dong (1971a), McCawley observes that there are two types of *fuck*. The first type, designated *fuck*<sub>1</sub>, displays verb behavior and semantically denotes INTERCOURSE. The second type is labeled *fuck*<sub>2</sub> and has a more expletive function. *Fuck*<sub>2</sub> does not necessarily predicate INTERCOURSE, scenarios and has more of a maledictive function.

Here are McCawley's own examples of the two types of *fuck* (Dong 1971a, 5):

- (3) Fuck seven old ladies by midnight or I'll take away your teddy-bear.
- (4) Fuck irregular verbs!

McEnery & Xiao (2004, 257) provide a more fine-grained typology of *fuck* which includes nine types. In their typology, *fuck*<sub>1</sub> is classified as a category L *fuck* and described as "[l]iteral usage denoting taboo referent". *Fuck*<sub>2</sub> is also included in their typology and classified as a category C *fuck*, whose function is that of a "[c]ursing expletive" (McEnery & Xiao 2004, 257). In this article, we are only interested in usages in which *fuck* actually denotes INTERCOURSE and not in its more pragmatic uses, so our focus is on *fuck*<sub>1</sub>.

The following description of the propositional semantics of *fuck* as a transitive verb denoting INTERCOURSE takes its starting point in the distinction between *fuck*<sub>1</sub> and *fuck*<sub>2</sub> and is theoretically anchored in the cognitive theory of frame semantics (Fillmore 1982), in which linguistic units activate, not just their denotational contents but entire conceptual structures in speakers' minds, called semantic frames. Now, compare (3) and (4). The example in (3) clearly denotes SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, while (4) is an expletive with a maledictive speech act function and expresses the speaker's dislike towards, or frustration with, irregular verbs. Both *fucks* are associable with semantic frames, but the frames differ considerably. *Fuck*<sub>1</sub> in (3) would seem to have the semantic structure of PARTICIPANT ← INTERCOURSE → PARTICIPANT, in which the two PARTICIPANTS actively engage in the act of SEXUAL INTERCOURSE. Let us call this the INTERCOURSE frame. In contrast, *fuck*<sub>2</sub> would have the semantic structure of PERSON → MALEDICTION → OBJECT OF MALEDICTION, in which a PERSON utters a MALEDICTIVE CURSE towards someone or something that the PERSON dislikes. There is a metalinguistic dimension to this frame as well, as it contains the speech act type that features *fuck*<sub>2</sub>.

We mentioned that *fuck*<sub>1</sub> activates the INTERCOURSE frame, but it is transitivity that specifies the relations between the two PARTICIPANTS. Let us revisit examples (1) and (2) to see role of transitivity. The cause of the different construals of the intra-INTERCOURSE PARTICIPANT relations is that *fuck* semantically interacts with two different argu-

ment structure constructions. Such a construction is an abstract constellation of sentence constituents which is associated with schematic propositional content (Goldberg 1995). In (1), *fuck* occurs in the intransitive construction. The intransitive construction combines a subject and a verb and expresses a scenario in which an AGENT engages in an ACTIVITY which is not directed at any other object or entity. By including both INTERCOURSE PARTICIPANTS into the subject via the third person plural pronoun *they*, (1) presents both PARTICIPANTS AS ACTIVE. In contrast, the transitive construction, which combines a subject, a verb, and a direct object, expresses a scenario in which an AGENT ACTS ON a PATIENT, such that the AGENT IS ACTIVE and the PATIENT IS the PASSIVE object of the AGENT'S ACTION. Seeing that *fuck*<sub>1</sub> in (2) and (3) is transitive, it arguably specifies INTERCOURSE in terms of this ACTIVE-PASSIVE relation, and its propositional scenario is better represented as ACTIVE PARTICIPANT → INTERCOURSE → PASSIVE PARTICIPANT.

### Data and method

The overall methodological framework of the present study is that of corpus stylistics, described by Mahlberg (2014, 378) in the following manner: "Corpus stylistic research applies corpus methods to the analysis of literary texts, giving particular emphasis to the relationship between linguistic description and literary appreciation". While traditional stylistics is typically qualitative, corpus stylistics is quantitative and is often used in the identification of various patterns of style and other aspects of literary language – typically across multiple literary works. In comparison to qualitative stylistic analysis, which allows for in-depth analysis and close-reading of literary works, quantitative stylistic analysis may lack certain types of depth, but it enables more objective and empirical statements about patterns and trends in literary genres, periods, and authorships.

Our study is based on data from the *Corpus of Historical American English*, or *COHA*, which is a diachronic corpus of American English, covering the period 1810-2009 (Davies 2010). Since our focus is on patiency in representations of INTERCOURSE in literature, our study investigates only the FICTION component of *COHA*, ignoring the NEWSPAPER, MAGAZINES, and NON-FICTION components. The FICTION component covers literary texts such as, for instance, novels and short stories as well as scripts from films and theatrical

plays. The FICTION component consists of 207,633,395 words out of COHA's total size of 406,232,024 words.

All instances of *fuck* as a transitive verb in the active voice and in the passive voice were retrieved from the FICTION component of COHA in a series of queries. The data were then sorted such that all instances of *fuck*<sub>2</sub> and other cases where *fuck* did not refer to INTERCOURSE were weeded out. After the sorting process, there were 331 instances of transitive *fuck*, which were categorized in accordance with the gender of the PASSIVE PARTICIPANT. Our classificatory system consists of these four categories:

- MALE: the PASSIVE PARTICIPANT is a male human; see example (5)
- FEMALE: the PASSIVE PARTICIPANT is a female human; see example (6)
- UNSPECIFIED: the PASSIVE PARTICIPANT is a human whose gender is unspecified; see example (7)
- ANIMAL & INANIMATE: the PASSIVE PARTICIPANT is either an animal or an inanimate entity; see example (8)

In most cases, the gender of the PASSIVE PARTICIPANT was easy to determine. Examples of such cases are direct objects or passive voice subjects realized by a personal pronouns, a proper nouns, gender-specific common nouns (like *woman*, *husband*, *guy*, and *girl* as well as *pussy* or *cock*), and nouns determined by third person singular possessive pronouns (such as *his ass* or *her hole*). In some cases, the PASSIVE PARTICIPANT itself appeared to be unspecified in terms of gender, but could be determined from the co-text. Co-text is defined by Catford (1965 p. 31, fn. 2) as "items in the text which accompany the item under discussion" and essentially covers the text portion that immediately surrounds the linguistic phenomenon in question. Cases where the gender was truly unspecified were placed in the UNSPECIFIED-category. Below are illustrative examples of each category:

- (5) British girls want to fuck Arab men? (COHA 2005 FIC Mov:Munich)
- (6) Only by then, you're so mad at me, for being right about we never should have come here, that you fuck this maid, and you keep fucking this maid till she gets pregnant. (COHA 1988 FIC Play:SarahAbraham)



- (7) We've popped every pill, fucked the wrong people at the wrong times. (COHA 1982 FIC TrueLove)  
(8) "Shit, nobody fucks pigs," he told her. (COHA 1978 FIC Mortal-Friends)

The four categories were then quantified and subjected to a Fisher test to determine the statistical significance of their frequencies of distribution. The diachronic nature of *COHA* allows us to track any changes in literary representations of *INTERCOURSE* over time, so our quantitative analysis is applied to both the *FICTION* component of *COHA* in its entirety and to those decades in which *fuck*<sub>1</sub> appears. *COHA* is divided into twenty subcorpora that correspond to the twenty decades in the 1810-2009 period, and, because these subcorpora are of different sizes, frequencies of distribution of *PASSIVE PARTICIPANT* types were normalized to frequency per million words (FPM), allowing for comparison across decades.

Given that our focus is exclusively on *fuck*<sub>1</sub>, there is no need to distinguish between *fuck*<sub>1</sub> and *fuck*<sub>2</sub> anymore and we will simply use 'fuck' or 'transitive fuck' with reference to *fuck* as a transitive verb literally denoting *INTERCOURSE* in the rest of this article.

### Analysis

Having quantified the overall distribution of the four types of *PASSIVE PARTICIPANT* of *fuck* as a transitive verb in the *FICTION* component, we can see that *PASSIVE PARTICIPANT* belonging to the *FEMALE* class are the most frequent:

Table 1: Overall distribution of transitive *fuck* in the *FICTION* component:

<i>PASSIVE PARTICIPANT</i> type	Frequency
<i>FEMALE</i>	66.77% (n = 221)
<i>MALE</i>	27.49% (n = 91)
<i>UNSPECIFIED</i>	2.11% (n = 7)
<i>ANIMAL &amp; INANIMATE</i>	3.63% (n = 12)

$p = 0.00372$

This seems to suggest a tendency in American literature to assign patency to female characters in literary representations of *INTER-*

COURSE, such that female characters are primarily seen as PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS and thus the dominated, or maybe powerless.

Table 1 provides an overview of the distribution of the four types in the entire FICTION component, but it might also be interesting to track them over time to see if there have been any changes in this tendency since 1810. The following graph is based on the frequencies of transitive *fuck* in each of the twenty subcorpora:

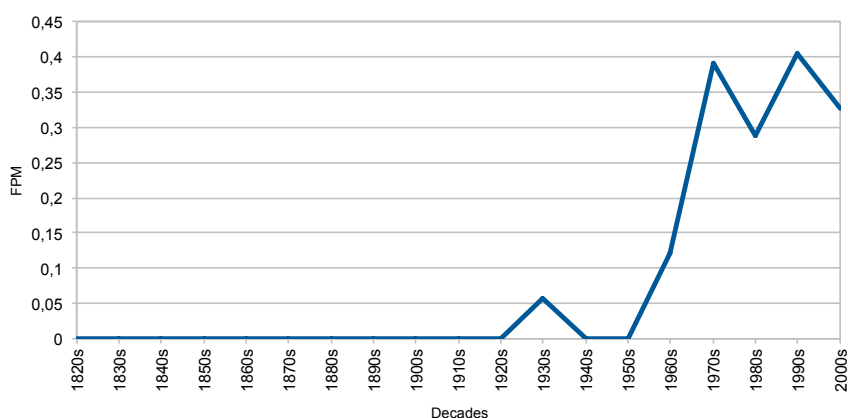


Figure 1: Overall frequencies of transitive ‘fuck’ from 1810 to 2009

It is not until the 1930s that transitive *fuck* appears in the FICTION component, and it is only in the 1960s that it really takes hold (its appearance in the 1930s primarily owes to the inclusion of Walter D. Edmonds’ 1933-novel *Erie Water* in COHA). There is a massive increase in its use in the 1970s, and subsequently, in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, transitive *fuck* remains relatively frequent. It is interesting to note the occurrence of transitive *fuck* in the 1960s and 1970s seems to coincide with the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, which also encompassed the sexual liberation movement and a general anti-establishment attitude. It makes sense that the arts’ embrace of sexual language, which was otherwise taboo, should follow on from such a cultural revolution, and it is probably no coincidence that there is an explosion in the use transitive *fuck* in American literature in the 1970s, during and immediately after the cultural revolution.

The following tables account for the distributions of the four types of PASSIVE PARTICIPANT in those decades where transitive *fuck* occurs:

Table 2: Distribution of PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in the 1930s

PASSIVE PARTICIPANT type	Frequency	FPM
FEMALE	11	0.9261601166
MALE	1	0.0841963742
UNSPECIFIED	0	0
ANIMAL & INANIMATE	0	0
Total	12	1.0103564908

Table 3: Distribution of PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in the 1960s

PASSIVE PARTICIPANT type	Frequency	FPM
FEMALE	23	1.9863751935
MALE	2	0.1727282777
UNSPECIFIED	2	0.1727282777
ANIMAL & INANIMATE	0	0
Total	25	2.1591034711

Table 4: Distribution of PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in the 1970s

PASSIVE PARTICIPANT type	Frequency	FPM
FEMALE	53	4.5583904444
MALE	23	1.9781694381
UNSPECIFIED	0	0
ANIMAL & INANIMATE	5	0.4300368344
Total	81	6.9665967169

Table 5: Distribution of PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in the 1980s

PASSIVE PARTICIPANT type	Frequency	FPM
FEMALE	43	3.5383366016
MALE	15	1.2343034657
UNSPECIFIED	1	0.0822868977
ANIMAL & INANIMATE	1	0.0822868977
Total	60	4.9372138627

Table 6: Distribution of PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in the 1990s

PASSIVE PARTICIPANT type	Frequency	FPM
FEMALE	45	3.3905553594
MALE	29	2.185024565
UNSPECIFIED	4	0.3013826986
ANIMAL & INANIMATE	6	0.4520740479
Total	84	6.3290366709

Table 7: Distribution of PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in the 2000s

PASSIVE PARTICIPANT type	Frequency	FPM
FEMALE	46	3.1528275586
MALE	21	1.4393343202
UNSPECIFIED	1	0.0685397295
ANIMAL & INANIMATE	0	0
Total	68	4.6607016083

PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS in the FEMALE class are by far the most frequent in all six decades, which suggests stagnation rather than change in the construal of the roles of men and women in literary representations of INTERCOURSE – women are still represented as PASSIVE and dominated. What may be surprising, given the general perception of the 1970s as a decade in which social equality and women’s liberation were promoted, is that it is in this decade that the FEMALE category has the highest FPM and where the difference between the FEMALE and the MALE categories is the largest. There seems to have been a conflict between the gender ideology expounded at the time and the way that sexual intercourse was represented in American literary tradition. It seems that only the liberation of sexual language was

embraced and not so much the liberation of women’s sexuality. Indeed, it might even be the case that the liberation of sexual language, at least in literature, actually served to further the representation as women of sexual objects rather than sexual subjects.

The reader may have noticed that the FPM of FEMALE type PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS has progressively dropped from the 4.5583904444 of the 1970s to the 3.1528275586 of the 2000s. Could this be indicative of the cultural-cognitive model of INTERCOURSE changing towards a more reciprocal one? The following graph, which tracks and compares the frequencies of all four categories of PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS across time in the period from the 1930s to the 2000s, seems to suggest otherwise:

As you can see, the MALE category, while less stable, has also

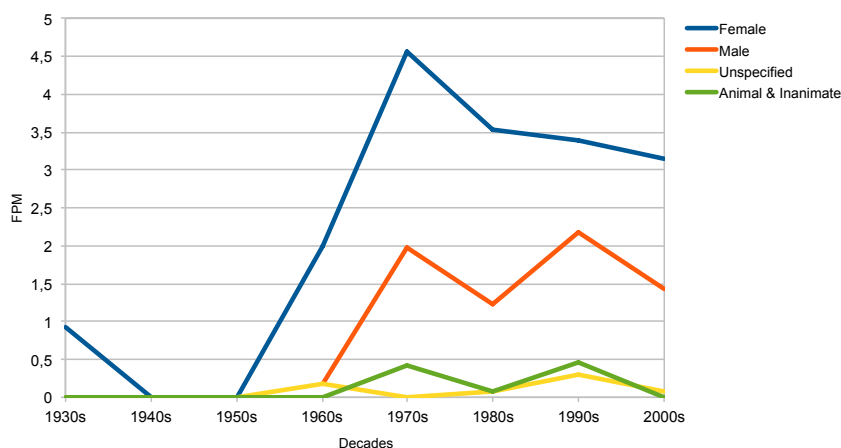


Figure 2: Frequency distributions of the four types of PASSIVE PARTICIPANT in the period 1930-2009

dropped, and the drop of the FEMALE category may simply be a reflection of the overall diachronic development seen in Figure 1 rather than of progressive leveling out of the differences between FEMALE and MALE PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS of transitive *fuck*. In fact, the preference for female passive participants over male ones is bigger in the 2000s than in the 1990s, suggesting an increased sexual subjectification of MALE characters in literature and an increased sexual objectification of FEMALE ones.

### Concluding remarks

This study is admittedly quite limited in scope, as it only focuses on one verb and its *PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS*, and an investigation which also addressed agency would allow for more fine-grained analysis in which typical *ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS* could also be accounted for as well as relations between *ACTIVE* and *PASSIVE* ones, which would further provide insights into literary representations of both *HOMOSEXUAL INTERCOURSE* and *HETEROSEXUAL INTERCOURSE*.

However, I would argue that our study of the patterns of usage of transitive *fuck* and the assignment of patiency in the propositional scenarios it denotes has produced interesting results, which are worth following up on in future research. In our data, a model of patiency in *INTERCOURSE* in recent and contemporary American literary tradition emerges in which women are primarily presented as *PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS*. While one might expect a progression towards a more equality-based representation of *FEMALE* characters as *PARTICIPANTS* in *INTERCOURSE* which construes them as sexual subjects, it seems that *FEMALE* characters continue to be sexually objectified. This raises an interesting question that definitely needs to be addressed in future stylistic research into this issue – namely, if *FEMALE PASSIVE PARTICIPANTS* constitute the norm in representations of *INTERCOURSE* in American literature, are instances of transitive *fuck* in which the *PASSIVE PARTICIPANT* is *MALE* (and the *ACTIVE PARTICIPANT* is *FEMALE*), as in example (5), to be seen as examples of deviation as defined in traditional stylistics (e.g. Gregoriou 2014) and, if so, then what is their foregrounding function?

The findings presented in this study are probably not sensational, and many people would probably already have guessed, and maybe take for granted that there is this sexual objectification of women in American literature. In essence, this belief could be seen as a hypothesis, and what this study does is to provide statistical support for this hypothesis.

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# Still Waiting for Madame President

Hillary Clinton and the Oval Office

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## Abstract

This essay investigates gender in politics through the prism of Hillary Clinton's 2008 campaign for the Democratic nomination. It looks at the reactions to that campaign in the media, both in 2008 and as a probable second Clinton campaign emerges for 2016. Topics explored include whether the reactions to Clinton's campaigns are generic or specific to Clinton herself, and whether gender remains a limiting force in American political life.

**Keywords** Gender in politics, Hillary Clinton, American elections, equality, public discourse

In 2008, enthused and confused by Hillary Clinton's battle for the Democratic nomination, observers contemplated how demographic markers affected presidential campaigns. This entailed journeys considering the realms of sexism, racism, ageism, and religious bigotry, though this essay will concentrate on gender in politics, especially as it is constructed in public discourse. The 2008 primaries spotlighted how gender and politics interact. Clinton seemed set to become America's first female president, as women voted for her in

droves, putting “eighteen million cracks” in the glass ceiling (Clinton, in Milbank, 2008). Revisiting 2008 is particularly relevant, as Hillary Clinton will probably run in 2016.

Clinton’s 2008 campaign showed that substantive gender equality in politics was close. Clinton virtually tied the Democratic primary contest with Obama, signaling a diminution of the exclusion of women and African Americans from politics (Cheever, in Morrison, 2008). Sarah Palin’s campaign for vice president arguably confirmed the bipartisan passing of gender prejudice. Seen a generation after the 1964 film comedy *Kisses for My President*, in which female president Leslie McCloud disempowered her man for comic enthrallment, this augured momentous change. Sometimes popular culture provides predictive powers.

Election 2008 spotlighted the flux of contemporary attitudes on gender and race. With no incumbent from either party, the field was open. Outstanding candidates, Clinton and Barack Obama allowed Americans to consider if sex and race still mattered in public space. After 2008 analysts wondered how much public discourse had changed, substantially and tonally, and become “post-racial” or “post-gender”. This essay focusses on Clinton’s pursuit of the presidency and what her campaign says about gender and politics. Exploring the interworking of gender, media, and representations in the public sphere, sources used in this essay include news-media articles and their electronic responses and opinion surveys.

Aspiring woman leaders must tread a precarious balance between power and empathy. Female political roles tend to accentuate the rule-keeping and fair play associated with empathetic contests. Oppositely, male ideas of power contain essences of behaviorally expedient domination and anything goes: better to fight dirty and win than nurture moral superiority and lose (Ehrenreich, 2008; Faludi 2008). Female ideas of power hold consensual elements: a first among equals. Arguably, there is a gap in culture between a “Who does she think she is?” where feelings are considered, and an anything-goes “Who does he think he is?” These ideas endure in ways which belie the rhetoric of equality. Coalitions of the historically-disempowered are often more disparate and fragile than those built by ideology. Precisely here woman presidential candidates face obstacles. The power system is evidentially gendered, leaving less room for a candidate who is not male and not white. Gloria Steinem

claims that “Gender is probably the most restricting force in American life” (Steinem, 2008). Steinem’s words arguably held in 2008 and will probably echo in 2016.

A “double bind” of mutual exclusives separates the attributes of a good leader and a good woman (Lithwick, in Morrison, 2008: 179-80). Femininity undermines leadership, making the aspirant a stranger to herself and compromising her credibility (Tannen, in Morrison, 2008: 127). Women candidates tread warily: uniting woman voters can be undermined by the need to lead effectively, undercutting expectations of equality. In 2008 women expected different standards of themselves than they expected from men. A March 2008 CBS poll (CBS, 2008) found slightly more women than men (35% against 34%) judged that America was not ready for a female president, and that people they knew were disinclined to vote for women (47% of women and 44% of men), consistent with other polls. Moreover, in a supposed “postfeminist” era, many women questioned the importance of voting en bloc (Zernicke, 2008).

Conversely, 2008 polls and results showed disproportional support for Clinton’s campaign by women, raising the question of whether her candidacy was generic for the groups she was assumed as representing (a female candidate), or whether it was specific to the candidate herself (a candidate who is female). The presumption of the electability of a woman appears to be tempered by the attributes of the candidate; a process which often seemed to dominate the primaries. Clinton suffered and suffers endless microanalysis over her marital role, her qualifications, her femininity, her sexual orientation, her emotional life, her focus, and her judgment which left her integrity fragmented (*Critical Mass*, 2008; Chozick and Alter, 2014). Each of these fragments held something for everyone – the chance of a positive, or the potential for a negative marker. Danish Social Democrat Prime Minister Helle Thorning Schmidt suffered shades of the same treatment prior to the 2011 Danish parliamentary elections.

Polling on gender in presidential politics since 2008 has been sparse, though that is changing as candidates like Clinton gear up for 2016. A March 2014 Gallup Poll analyzing her “shadow campaign” surveyed Clinton’s top selling points, and found that nearly 20% of respondents felt her unique quality was that she was potentially the first woman president (double the second-ranking point).

Four percent of respondents stated they didn't want a woman president: the same proportion reported they wouldn't vote for Clinton because she was a Democrat. Gallup's findings echoed a January 2014 Rasmussen poll, in which three-quarters of respondents stated they thought it likely that the US would see its first female president within ten years. Less than one-in-five respondents thought that a female president was unlikely within ten years. These percentages indicated less resistance towards women candidates than in 2008 polls: one-sixth of respondents had changed their minds and by 2014 considered a woman president likely (Newport, 2014; Rasmussen Reports, 2014). Tempering the modestly overt prejudice, however, some respondents named negative factors which probably contained indirect gender prejudice, such as the 6% who found Clinton unqualified or the 3% who just didn't like her (Graham, 2014).

March 2014 Pew polls also found that one-third of Americans saw Clinton's gender as a positive. Conversely, one-in-five still believed Clinton's gender would hurt her, while nearly half thought it wouldn't matter. Pew's poll chimed with Rasmussen's findings that gender had become less of a factor since 2008 (Pew, 2014; Rasmussen 2014). Nevertheless the cards are "still stacked against women in politics" (Madkour, 2010), with a fifth of voters seeing Clinton's gender negatively. Moreover, 4% is less than the margin of victory in the 2000, 2004, and 2012 presidential elections.

The instinct for candidates to keep something — some inner essence — back can result from the intense public scrutiny. For Clinton, the quest for "electable" familiarity opposes the need for privacy — for some secrecy. This privacy promotes rumor, and everything mentioned in the public domain sticks: Clinton has been called a vacuum, a phony, and calculating, with writers specializing in smearing her selling hundreds of thousands of books (Fuller, 2014). Aligned with this is the tendency to "read" women's suitability for office through the "three H's: Hair, Hemlines, and Husbands" matrix, which constructs women candidates differently from male candidates, whose appearance and family status is downplayed (Kornblut, 2009; Applebaum, 2014). Female candidates must consider these factors in their campaign storytelling. Scrutiny of her family, her authenticity, and supposed artificiality have surfaced in connection with Clinton's likely 2016 campaign

over Chelsea Clinton's role as proxy, her relationship to Bill, and her effective fundraising (Dowd, 2014).

Much Clinton critique stems from her multi-dimensionality. Complexity is natural for a sexagenarian. People evolve with their surroundings, their relationships, and as circumstances alter. Clinton has been through law school, motherhood, policy advocacy, administration, and political service. "Containing" Clinton, given the balance of contemporary female roles and the necessity of selling complexity as simplicity, would be tough even in a neutral media environment. The assumption that femininity disadvantaged Clinton suggests that aspiring female candidates need to play to masculine stereotypes like decisiveness and hawkishness. Depth of personality is a mark of experience, not of duplicity — yet the media often ignore this.

Media polarization has intensified the perils for Clinton. Talk radio has chased her mercilessly since the early 90s, peaking with Rush Limbaugh's contention that while American culture saw men as "more authoritative, accomplished and distinguished" when they aged, it was questionable whether people would "want to watch a woman get older before their eyes" (Nason, 2007). Gender prejudice increases when age factors in: news media aired images of a drawn Clinton during 2008 campaigning. These citations indicate the hurdles which female candidates must overcome. Eight years on, in 2016, as a grandmother, Clinton's age will figure.

Even had Clinton won the White House in 2008, commentators would probably have feted the "Bill-helped-Hillary" narrative to devalue her victory: men's spouses attract less scrutiny than women's. But for that victory to have happened, Clinton's path to office would have needed strong support from younger women, African Americans, and the entertainment industry. Clinton failed in this for reasons of strategy, and through the separation of gender and ethnicity coalitions. African American women faced the dilemma of voting on gender or racial lines. Most opted for Obama while sympathizing with Clinton. Clinton lost support among younger Democrats as she was seen as a *lesser* change than Obama, in a year in which "change" blew strong in the primaries and the general election.

TV star Oprah Winfrey endorsed Obama, seeing in him greater renewal than Clinton. In May 2007, Winfrey stated that her endorse-

ment was “worth more than any check I can write”. Winfrey’s endorsement connected Obama to the six million people, predominantly women, who watched *Oprah* daily. It resounded widely, confirming that an African American male could dream of highest office. The *New York Times*’ report of Oprah’s endorsement attracted several hundred comments online, two of which stood out (Zeleny, 2007). “Oprah is the most powerful and influential woman in America. Pelosi, Rice, and Billary (Bill and Hillary Clinton) bow to her”, by “Elliot” indicated Winfrey’s influence. Conversely, “Shame on you Oprah, all the time I thought you were a woman first and then black”, by “Maria”, showed how hard it was for some African Americans to choose between gender and color, but most comments favored Winfrey’s endorsement.

Over forty million 18 to 30 year-olds “Millennial” eligible voters fed the change dynamic in 2008; many cast their ballots (Teixeira, 2008). This technologically-savvy cohort expressed strong tolerance towards racial and sexual diversity and took equality for granted. Clinton labored with this group: because of her age; because she ran as an experienced pair of hands; and because she ran as heiress to the “Roaring Nineties” economic growth. Young voters hastened change, and exercised a cultural shift — pushing race and gender from center stage. Clinton attracted less support from this “post-feminist” and “post-civil rights” generation (Caldwell, 2014).

Clinton will be 69 years old come election 2016. Having served Obama as Secretary of State, she risks being classed as a candidate of incumbency and continuity (Kornblut 2011). Incumbency is a cross Clinton must bear; her paradox is that the experience she has gained helps legitimize voters’ choices in supporting her and the fundamental change that her presidency would represent, while conversely identifying her as a candidate steeped in the history of the last generation. The contours of a change and continuity narrative in election 2016 are naturally still unformed; though the upcoming (2014) midterm elections suggest that it will be fought against a background of seesaw political change. Vice President Joe Biden isn’t seen as a strong candidate for 2016, and the Republican race is currently wide open. Such open races encourage “change” candidates to run. This would hinder Clinton, as it did in 2008; rather than being portrayed as the radical re-shaper of gender in politics, she



risks being painted as pragmatic, centrist, process-obsessed, and the status-quo candidate (Applebaum, 2014).

A minority of 2008 voters recalled the equality struggles of the sixties firsthand, and that minority will shrink in 2016. Clinton's foreign policy hawkishness as supporter of the 2003-2011 War in Iraq, service in Obama's first administration, and recent calls for a more hands-on foreign policy will probably not inspire younger voters (Goldberg, 2014). Electing a woman to the White House in 2008 because she is a woman was seen as less urgent for younger women than for their mothers and grandmothers. This imperative — because she is a woman — will probably diminish towards 2016.

In 2008 older veterans of the civil rights era weren't fired up over Clinton's candidacy. "Why Women Hate Hillary," by historian Susan Douglas, charts a group of middle-class, middle-aged women at a dinner who became increasingly ambivalent towards Clinton. Douglas writes:

We sat around the dinner table, a group of 50-something progressive feminists, talking to a friend from England about presidential politics. We were all for Hillary, weren't we, he asked. Hillary? We hated Hillary. He was taken aback. Weren't we her base? Wasn't she one of us?

Even prior to serving as Secretary of State (2009-13), some argued that Clinton smacked of the warmongering "patriarch" who was female, rather than a feminist. Douglas' article spurred a ten-month debate, attracted over 160 intensely conflicting comments (Douglas, 2007). Clinton was regarded as the lesser of two evils, her gender was seen as secondary, as a hawk who happened to be female, and not as "the one". American, meanwhile, was "not ready for a female president". Many posters were ambivalent towards Clinton; she was seen as irrelevant. More positively, one post noted that women were their own worst enemies in not wanting Clinton to succeed, another that Clinton was undoubtedly a feminist but definitely not constrained as a stereotype, and a third that she was a "woman fighting in a predominantly male world".

Many critics hit Clinton from the left; she hadn't opposed the Iraq war. Some grass-roots Democrats were disappointed over Bill Clinton-era "New Democrat" centrism and wanted payback. Repeat-

edly (and still) internet comments questioned Clinton's femininity, which, coupled with Barack Obama's anti Iraq-war stance, seemed an inversion of female "Venus" and male "Mars" gender stereotypes. Observers argued that Clinton's 2008 campaign director Mark Penn deliberately used the "Mars Strategy" to compensate for voter belief that female candidates are softer on foreign policy (Kornblut, 2011), thereby garbing her as a candidate of Bush-era continuity rather than change. Clinton-the-Hawk narratives will be reemployed in 2016 if she runs, presaged in her summer 2014 critique of Obama's second administration policy softness over Syria (Goldberg 2014).

The revolutionary effect of new technology challenges insider candidates. The growth of social media broadened the potential and diminished the control of public space. For instance, reader feedback became immediate and unfiltered, leveling hierarchies and diminishing civility in the mediation of ideas between journalists and readers. Media articles generated hundreds of combative responses. A *CNN* article scrutinizing Chelsea Clinton's role in Clinton's campaign, spawned five hundred responses in two days. Clinton's reticence towards taking questions in the 2008 Iowa primaries generated similar, strident volumes of responses (*CNN Political Ticker*, 2008). The language used was significantly more confrontational than in printed responses. This new social media public space developed an "anything goes" culture, leaving celebrity candidates more vulnerable than in previous contests, especially where they sought to break gender or racial molds. Internet analysts argued that connective technologies had refashioned politics in 2008 and empowered the loudest, most radical voices. Clinton suffered; she was seen as representing the intensely polarized Bush-Clinton era, while Obama galvanized anti-establishment and anti-Washington support among younger voters. Similar clashes between continuity and change are brewing for 2016, with new public space even more important.

Will election 2016 repeat 2008? Then, Clinton's campaign momentum finally halted, leaving commentators and journalists to ask why name recognition, front-runner status and huge fundraising ability failed. Was it her policy proposals, her stance on Iraq, her data-driven campaigning, her sloth, her denial of gender, her arrogance in the face of Barack Obama's challenge, or her campaign

style (Calmes, 2008)? Was it gender, aggravated by technology? One journalist wondered if the near-dead heat between Clinton and Obama showed how far women had come, or how far they still had to go (Orenstein, 2008). Tiny margins matter in the US political system and gender prejudice can be decisive. Camille Paglia claimed that Clinton's feminism represented "Male-bashing feminism": Clinton's problems resulted from her personality and not her gender (Paglia, 2008).

Other voices muddied the issue of whether *that* woman or *all* women would suffer gender discrimination. Clinton's flaws were surely amplified by the media. Respected media and commentators employed a fundamentally sexist approach — in terms of imagery — towards Clinton's campaign (Cocco, 2008; Seelye & Bosman, 2008). MSNBC's Chris Matthews equated her with a "she-devil" and Mike Barnicle — also from (liberal) MSNBC — suggested Clinton's concession speech had the air of "looking like everyone's first wife standing outside a probate court". Andrew Sullivan compared Clinton with the knife-wielding female character in *Fatal Attraction* (1987). NBC's news anchor Katie Couric blogged — accurately, and gaining much support — on the centrality of sexism in America (Couric, 2008). This sexism — reflective of inherent collective bias or refractive of individual opinions — mars politics and the public sphere more than racism, as reflected in 2008 polls (Seelye & Bosman, 2008; Pew, 2008b).

Subliminal attitudes towards gender lead to the expectation that candidates will be men permeating political culture with masculine values, despite progress towards substantive gender equality. Topical factors are also play in: the nature of the campaign and the candidates themselves. Clinton may have won if she had pushed a narrative of herself as embodying change as a woman: a mistake she may repeat in 2016 (Kornblut, 2011; Traister 2014). Clinton will have to analyze why she was unsuccessful in 2008, and what she must do to avoid failure in 2016. Though 2014 polls suggest it matters less than in 2008, gender remains important at the margins.

Already under the microscope, Clinton will probably formally announce her candidacy in early 2015. The attacks have begun. Possible Republican candidate Rand Paul has reprised the "Bill back-in-the-White-House" issue. Republican strategist Karl Rove has suggested that a 2012 blood clot impaired Clinton's health (Beinart,

2014). There is another parallel to 2008, taking us back to Clinton's personality: how could Clinton "present herself as someone hungry to serve rather than someone entitled to office?" (Chozick, 2014). Can a "crown princess" be a revolutionary choice? In March 2014, around three-quarters of Democrats supported Clinton as nominee (Pew, 2014). Yet, Clinton's inevitability was not enough in 2008 to hold off the buzz and fizz of the Obama campaign. Potent women challengers may emerge in 2016 to energize the Democratic field, "normalize" gender's role in politics, and help explore whether Clinton's candidacy is generic or not (Traister, 2014; Franke-Ruta, 2014). While gender might be less of an overt factor, there is a degree of consensus that female candidates are judged by different criteria than male contenders and are more liable to personal scrutiny.

Fifty years ago, the film *Kisses for My President* (1964) created images of a female president in Leslie McCloud. President McCloud is finally undermined by the strains her family suffers because she must prioritize office above family, in a comedic inversion of the patriarchal norm. McCloud's downfall is her gender: she becomes pregnant and gives up office, restoring "normality." Despite the objectionable stereotyping, by casting a woman as president the film reached ahead in political time. Real life still lags behind. In 2016, it remains to be seen whether Hillary Clinton — or another Madame President — can catch up with President Leslie McCloud.

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# The Well-Accessorized Philosopher

The Vincent F. Hendricks Debacle

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## Abstract

A 2012 photo spread in a life-style men's magazine, featuring young women clad in sexualized pastiches of school uniforms, was used by a Copenhagen University Professor of Philosophy to create what he thought of as light-hearted publicity for his Logics course that semester. This article analyses the images of the photo spread (contextualizing them with insights from humour theory), their reception in the philosophy community and the public at large, and discusses the implications of the ensuing chain of events in a gender debate perspective.

*Keywords* Sexism, philosophy, feminism, humour, costume

## Introduction

This article analyses the contents of and subsequent events and debates aroused by a 2012 photo spread featuring a professor of philosophy at Copenhagen University and minor Danish media celebrity, Vincent F. Hendricks, as "Man of the Month" for *Connery*, a self-billed "Life-Style Magazine for Men" (Connery, 2012). The magazine is an online publication specializing in stories about male ce-

lebrities within the Danish public sphere, international icons of cool masculinity, and events within sports, entertainment and other arenas where a display of male prowess is prized. *Connery* – which was described by Anglophone bloggers during the ensuing debate as basically a “lad mag” (Jezebel, 2012) – rarely misses an opportunity to illustrate its stories and profiles with scantily clad female models, and the Hendricks set is certainly no exception to the rule, containing as it does 25 photos of Hendricks and four young female models in school uniforms.

The present article commences with a detailed analysis of the staging of gender and sexuality in the photo series, proceeds to look at the subsequent critique of Hendricks’ use of the images on his own website and the entanglement he created between them and the philosophy curriculum at Copenhagen University, and ends with a consideration of the larger gender debate issues, both those brought forth by his responses to the critics and those left open by the rather swift closure of the debate on the representation of women within the academic field of philosophy.

### **Analysis of the photo set**

The *Connery* photo series (Connery, 2012) consists of 25 images – 11 of which are colour photographs, and 14 of which are black and white. (All photos can be easily viewed by following the hyperlink to *Connery* given in the references section, but individual photos that are discussed in-depth can also be accessed directly by following links in the endnotes provided.) Most photos in the b&w category are a species of behind-the-scenes candid shots, some showing the four female models getting dressed up for the shoot or fooling around with props or other items they have found lying about in the actual Copenhagen University classroom where the shoot took place. Hendricks is featured prominently in the first four colour shots, three of which also feature a number of the female models, dressed up in stereotypical sexualized school uniforms, of the variety that is often associated with pornography shoots. The female models have bared midriffs, show cleavage, and wear very short plaid skirts and full length stocking hose, leaving a few inches of bare skin between skirt and hose. The other seven colour photos are portraits of the four models in relative close-up, with each image dedicated to one model. The models seem to have been carefully

selected or accessorized to show a variety of girl types: one blonde, one brunette; one model with black hair, one with her hair dyed red. All the girls wear conspicuous make-up not usually associated with classroom activities but rather with going to a party or on a date. If indeed the main subject of the photo spread is the “Man of the Month”, Hendricks, it is curious that the unnamed models take up almost twice as many of the colour shots displayed. One clearly senses that the models’ visual attributes receive more than equal billing on *Connery’s* part.

In the three colour shots that show interaction between him and the models, Professor Hendricks maintains a serious, almost surly demeanour, sometimes folding his arms across his chest, sometimes wielding a black marker writing, or pretending to write on the whiteboard of the classroom. Hendricks is dressed in a three piece worsted suit, but does not wear the suit jacket, presumably having decided to get more comfortable working only in his shirt sleeves (an impression underscored by his having loosened his tie as well). Perhaps we are meant to infer that the hotness of the situation has mandated this dressing down of his otherwise formal attire, which incidentally seems somewhat archaic, involving as it does the wearing of sleeve garters and cufflinks. The costume Hendricks wears in this shoot is in fact identical to the costume he has been known to wear in one of his TV-shows, “Gal eller Genial” (DR2, 2010-11), a show where Hendricks decides, based on an inventor’s pitch of his crazy/genius idea for a gadget or procedure, whether the candidate deserves encouragement to proceed into a development phase for his project. One might speculate why Hendricks needed to wear a costume that seems to be a pastiche of a 1920s outfit to adjudicate this show, and indeed also why he needed to wear that outfit at the shoot at Copenhagen University, but the obvious answer would be that his masculinity is thought to be accessorized and underscored by formal and archaic attire.

Hendricks is featured solo in one colour photo<sup>1</sup>, where he sits at the classroom desk, hands folded in front of the lower part of his face, hiding his mouth. The photo displays a fashionable, large men’s watch quite prominently, presumably in an instance of product placement; whether initiated by the magazine or by Hendricks himself is hard to guess. This shot is also one of several to feature a whiteboard in the background, containing elaborate reams of logics

formulae, written by Hendricks during the shoot (as documented in one of the black and white shots), giving the classroom an authentic university ambience. Again the careful accessorizing of Hendricks elevates his status as a person of authority. He not only masters time and timekeeping, but also the intellectual discipline of formal logic. Here masculinity, teaching and scientific rigour are connected in one semiotic chain. His portrayal of himself as a self-made man bears resemblance to well-known American rags-to-riches figures such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby. Perhaps Hendricks has even borrowed his costume ideas from just such jazz age masculine, successful role models.

The lone solo image of Hendricks referred to in the above shows him as a stereotype of the serious professional philosopher. He gazes into the distance (as opposed to one of the interaction images where he gazes sidelong at one of the models' *derrières*), apparently lost in thought, having "forgotten" the presence of camera and photographer. His glasses are casually placed on the desk in front of him, showing us that he no longer needs to gaze outward, but is communing, without need of further sensory input, with his inner man. Two of the shots that feature both Hendricks and the models have Hendricks occupy the foreground of the picture, looking directly at the camera, with the models forming the backdrop to his large, masculine frame. He is not in any way registering their presence or behaviour (the blonde model is wielding an iPhone in one shot<sup>2</sup>, texting or perhaps taking a selfie), but one senses that Hendricks realizes the display behind him and how his body is aligned to dominate the composition as a whole, but not hide the amount of unclad skin displayed by the models. In these photos, the male gaze<sup>3</sup>, directed straight at the reader, organizes the entire image and sorts out the foreground/background distribution.

The third colour shot<sup>4</sup> that Hendricks shares with the models is the most provocative of these group shots. As mentioned, Hendricks' gaze targets the behind of one model, while he simultaneously wilfully avoids acknowledging another model's attempt to hand him a red apple. His black marker is pensively poised at half-mast and paused an inch from the whiteboard, no writing issuing forth in the moment of the shot being taken. The presence of the apple is of course a play on the temptation of Adam by Eve in the Garden of Eden, the apple being the forbidden fruit of the tree of

knowledge. Here ironically, the already knowledgeable professor is impervious to the offer of more knowledge, instead preferring the rather more carnal roundness of Eve's rival's buttocks. One feels that the marker will soon symbolically rise higher. In this shot the male gaze of Hendricks didactically shows the reader how to navigate the positioning of female bodies in a specific space – that of the classroom – objectifying them in the process.

The black and white shots are not exclusively candid behind-the-scenes shots (although nine of them are), as indeed five of them are posed shots of the models alone (two photos) or Hendricks and the models. Of these latter three shots, two are variations on the Eve and the apple theme already discussed, but with the significant difference that these are apparent outtakes, deemed unsuitable because Hendricks breaks pose and laughs in one of them, and in the other cannot quite control his smirk as he glances at the blonde model's bottom. These shots can therefore be read as showing a) how much fun Hendricks and the models were having, or b) how casual Hendricks was concerning his self-staging, or his taking directions from the art director or the photographer (both shown in one of the behind-the-scene shots). This adds an important narrative layer to the shoot – one that Hendricks made recourse to in his later justification of the shoot – namely, that the images were always intended to be playful and tongue-in-cheek. The photos, however, only manage to show the nature of the sense of humour that Hendricks subscribes to – one that is parallel to his use of off-colour race humour mentioned earlier.

### The Reception

Having analysed the images and some of their connotations and potential story lines, we now turn to the reception of the spread. Here we are not concerned with how the images were read in their original context within the frame of *Connery*, but rather in how Hendricks himself employed the images on his personal website (Hendricks, 2012-4) (which at the time served as a form of dynamic online CV) and linked the images to an announcement of an official course Hendricks was about to start teaching at the Copenhagen University Philosophy Department.

It was the latter use that caused the most immediate stir and led to severe criticism of Hendricks' judgment and etiquette. The an-

nouncement on the page was quite terse: “The undergraduate course in Argumentation, Logic and Philosophy of Language starts February 7, 2012”, immediately followed by a link, presumably to the official Copenhagen University page announcing the course with more information. The accompanying image was the group shot of Hendricks in front of the four models, and possibly several of the other Connery shots (the page was removed, so we only have surviving screen shots to go by, viewable at Flickr, 2012). Hendricks was quickly accused of sexism and improper use of suggestive images in a teaching context.

The initial response came from a blog entitled *Feminist Philosophers* (Feminist, 2012) which reported on February 22, 2012 that Professor Hendricks was using the *Connery* pictures “apparently [on] the webpage for Vincent Hendricks’ logic course”, and that this fact left the blogger virtually speechless: “Wow. Just ... wow.” The blogger however, quickly recuperates and waxes quite lyrical in her condemnation: “Now go put on your schoolgirl outfit and hand your manly logic teacher an apple. You are a sexy accessory to his awesomeness.” The post quickly garnered over a hundred comments, rather uniformly condemning Hendricks’ action as inappropriate, unintelligent and ill advised.

Other professional philosophy blogs such as *Leiter Reports: A Philosophy Blog* (Leiter Reports, 2012) and *ReadMoreWriteMoreThinkMoreBeMore* (ReadMore, 2012) followed up on breaking the news of Hendricks’ latest transgression (he was already on some of these bloggers’ “watch-list” for an earlier infraction involving his editorship of the influential journal *Synthese*, where it seemed to these bloggers that he had been swayed by Intelligent Design lobbyists to request rewrites of already published articles). Professor Leigh Johnson, who blogs as Doctor J. at the latter of the blogs mentioned, went as far as to draft a protest letter, which she urged Copenhagen University students of both the female and male sex to sign (or modify and sign) and send to Professor Hendricks, expressing – among several other points – the following sentiments:

I assume you are aware that the images you posted in your advertisement were manifestly and overtly sexist. Those images simultaneously objectified, infantilized, depersonalized and dehumanized the women depicted in them.



Although I am aware that such images are standard fare in the larger world of advertisements, I am deeply disappointed to see you appropriate them so uncritically.

I assume you are also aware that the profession of Philosophy is grossly underrepresented by women. Less than 1 in 5 tenure or tenure-track professional Philosophers are female. If you wonder why students like myself-- i.e., female undergraduates interested in Philosophy-- depart from the discipline in statistically significant numbers, I suggest that you take a critical look at your course advertisement. (ReadMore, 2012)

This blast from Doctor J. frames the use Hendricks put the images to in two distinct ways. First, she accuses him directly of sexism, not only through his act of disseminating the photos, but also stating that the photos *per se* were inherently sexist in their objectification of women. Secondly, she points to a larger problematic, namely the gender inequality that still persists in the philosophy field, and which is only exacerbated by acts such as Hendricks'. This analysis nowhere considers that humour might have been intended on Hendricks' part, nor does it seem likely that a humorous intent would have ameliorated the criticism offered by this blog.

Within a day of the issue causing a stir in rather insular and specialized philosophy publics, a much more damaging type of website picked up on the issue, no doubt fuelled by the inviting visual material the case involved. The gossip blog *Jezebel* brought a brief *précis* (Jezebel, 2012) of the case with one illustration borrowed from the *Connery* site. This blog reaches an estimated 10 million readers pr. month, and therefore the mention of the Hendricks case in this setting meant that the issue had left the narrow confines of academic spheres and become a matter of more general interest, turning Hendricks into a potential target for universal ridicule. After the case had received this exposure internationally, i.e. particularly in the U.S., where the philosophy blogs all originated and chiefly were read (after all they were in English), Danish media began slowly reporting the issue, led by tabloid press papers, which generally are anti-intellectual whenever they deign to report on academic matters at all, but also in quality dailies such as *Politiken* (Politiken,

2012). Suddenly Hendricks found himself dealing with newspaper placards and front pages (further fuelled by the C-list celebrity status his numerous TV appearances had already ensured him).

Hendricks attempted damage control from the minute the case first broke within the philosophy blogosphere. He removed all images from his own webpages as a first move, but bloggers had already taken screen-shots and posted them to image repositories such as Flickr, where they can still be accessed. However, he did not initially remove all connection to the *Connery* site, but simply used a text link to the article instead. As the scope of the outrage he had caused began to dawn on him, he, however, also quickly removed this link from his website. Of course *Connery* has only been pleased by the extra exposure for their article and the site in general, and the story and accompanying picture gallery is still publically available from their site. Hendricks was pushed onto the defensive by continuing exposure and ridicule and, as a next line of self-defence, attempted the “humour” excuse. He posted a public apology on his website where he basically rolled over and exposed his throat to the attackers, hoping that they would be swayed by his argument that he had learned his lesson, but that he really had not meant (and therefore probably still could not see) any harm to be done:

#### To the Philosophical Community

Some recent pictures on my website have caused some debate. The intention was that the pictures, as a cover on a forthcoming magazine, might be used to view logic from a somewhat humorous and untraditional perspective appealing to larger audience which the magazine covers. However, it had the opposite effect offending various parties in the philosophical community. I truly apologize for this and I stand completely corrected. I have removed the pictures from the website. (cited at ReadMore, 2012)

This excuse, of course, did not placate most of Hendricks’ critics. After all, it only raised more questions about his judgment, if indeed he seriously could entertain the thought that most people would be amused by the images, and in fact had originally imagined that they might attract more people to the subject of logic. This further criticism meant that Hendricks pulled another “excuse” out of his arse-

nal of legitimizing discourses; one that was particularly designed to silence his American critics: he had done the whole thing for charity in the first place, and he appealed that critics cease and desist before they ruin his charity efforts completely. This stratagem was largely successful. Most sites presumably felt the case had run its course anyway, and it was hard for most American sites to counter the charity argument, since the so-called charity Hendricks claimed his appearance on *Connery* benefited only had a website in Danish. The site in question, *Youmeshopping*, is an outfit that sells goods and services at discount prices, advertising that a portion of the proceeds will go to the charity of choice of their so-called ambassadors – celebrities that lend their name to these products that the site markets (*Youmeshopping*, 2012-4). This scheme is thus perhaps more accurately labelled product endorsement rather than a charity, but no one in the blogosphere or in the Danish press followed up on this. Hendricks was let off the hook in the public sphere without further exposure (after all he was only a philosopher, not a politician, and only a minor celebrity at that).

### Underlying Issues

The issues behind the Hendricks case do remain salient, however, and are prime material for teaching and researching gender issues. Two of the larger questions raised by the photos and their reception were: can humour be a mitigating circumstance in connection with the presentation of sensitive image material that minority groups perceive as insulting; and were the images in fact demeaning of women, as feminist bloggers were quick to claim? Copenhagen University's student magazine (*University Post*, 2012) interviewed a number of female and male students in connection with the case. Many students offered the opinion that the feminist critics were devoid of a sense of humour and were missing the point that all that took place during the photo shoot was obviously harmless role-play by all parties involved. A majority of the students expressing this point of view were male, but not exclusively so. Other commentators expressed viewpoints to the effect that these images were pale in comparison with true pornography of the costume play or indeed of any variety. And finally the argument was forwarded that all commercials routinely tend to objectify female bodies in order to

sell products, whether these are related to the female body or not, ranging from soft drinks to automobiles.

To these critical voices one must of course first point out that it is not acceptable to mix academe or aspects of higher education with pornographic image codes, unless they themselves are the objects of study. In other words, if Hendricks needs to bolster his masculinity or general public image via the representation of models in school uniforms, that is his problem, but the second he tries to indicate that such discourses are legitimate in the classroom, or even in connection with marketing philosophy as a study programme, he oversteps a boundary that should not be crossed.

The largest of the contextual issues could be summed up as follows. Can and should humour be allowed to transgress good taste and decency in general, even if it offends minorities and special interest groups– or are these areas also off limits in general for humour? I am inclined to cite Bergson's tenet that humour always creates a dichotomy between target and perpetrator, and that all humour is a form of violence and creation of a hierarchy. To quote Bergson: "You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others. Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo. Our laughter is always the laughter of a group" (Bergson, 1911). However, humour does not solely and innocently create an in-group feeling bolstering identity, but also creates a distance to others (the targets of the humour in question) who then function as an out-group formation. In other words, one group laughs together at non-members, or at other groups that therefore are Othered by the first group's practice of humour. For a discussion of ingroup/outgroup dynamics, see the ground-breaking work of Henri Tajfel, "Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination", in which he states succinctly: "Intergroup categorizations of all kinds may bring into play what seems to the individual to be the appropriate form of intergroup behavior. [...] Whenever we are confronted with a situation to which some form of intergroup categorization appears directly relevant, we are likely to act in a manner that discriminates against the outgroup and favors the ingroup" (Tajfel, 1970: 98-99). In sum, humour is often an aggressive speech act directed against a perceived other, whether individual (as presupposed by Bergson) or an outgroup (as stated by Tajfel)

That being said, humour also has a liberating potential among the ingroup that laughs along with a humorous representation, so the issue is thorny and not easily resolved. Perhaps the safest policy is to not humorously target groups that cannot speak or write back with equal force and institutional platform access. Feminists have certainly demonstrated that they can fight back ably in most discursive settings, but their point remains that many male discourses are blind to their own sexism and that there is a risk that institutional sexism has repercussions in real life. Philosophy as an academic discipline is to this day marred by under-representation of female students (in 2012 only 140 out of 517 undergraduates at Hendricks' own department in Copenhagen were female (University Post, 2012)), teachers and canonized figures. One concrete outcome of the Hendricks issue was a movement to combat institutional gender bias against women within the field of philosophy, a movement that among other things called for a guarantee that philosophy conferences include female keynote speakers, or else open themselves to the risk of boycott. (See Inside Higher Ed., 2012 for more.)

In summary, the Hendricks debacle taught us the following: Some male, privileged professors still have blind spots as to the limits of humour and acceptable self-staging within the academic public. The boundaries between private and public are still in place to an extent that is surprising to some, when it comes to mixing academic and pornographic discourse codes. Feminist interventions are still serving an important purpose in calling foul on sexist practices inside and outside the academe.

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### Notes

- 1 <https://connery.dk/image/box/221577/1440/10000.jpg?oversize=1>
- 2 <https://connery.dk/image/box/221578/1440/10000.jpg?oversize=1>
- 3 This term is borrowed from Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytically informed film analyses in which "the controlling male gaze" (Mulvey 1999:841) is theorized as tending to objectify women ("woman as image") and cast males as "bearer of the look" (837). This dichotomy neatly divides the gender roles according to agency: men do the looking and are active agents; women are there to be looked at and thus rendered agency-less objects. While this article treats still images and not film, as Mulvey's theory was designed to illuminate, the idea of the male gaze has frequently been applied to photography by contemporary scholars.
- 4 <https://connery.dk/image/box/221576/1440/10000.jpg?oversize=1>