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## Chapter 4

# Writing about Gender and Sexuality: Applying Feminist and Gender Criticism

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the theory of feminism.
2. Understand the theory of gender criticism, including queer theory and masculinity studies.
3. Apply a feminist and/or gender methodology to works of literature.
4. Engage in the writing process of a peer writer, including peer review.
5. Review and evaluate a variety of feminist and gender papers by peer writers.
6. Draft and revise a feminist or gender paper on a literary work.

## 4.1 Literary Snapshot: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Lewis Carroll, as we found out in previous chapters, is most famous for two books: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872). These books describe the adventures of seven-year-old Alice, who finds herself in a nonsensical world of the imagination after she tumbles down a rabbit hole (*Wonderland*) and enters a magic mirror (*Looking-Glass*). Here are the electronic versions of Carroll's texts again so can continue following Alice on her journeys:

<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/CarAlic.html>

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/CarGlas.html>

Let's observe the interaction between Alice and the Caterpillar, which comes from chapter 5 of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, "Advice from a Caterpillar":

The Caterpillar was the first to speak.

"What size do you want to be?" it asked.

"Oh, I'm not particular as to size," Alice hastily replied; "Only one doesn't like changing so often, you know."

"I *don't* know," said the Caterpillar.

Alice said nothing: she had never been so much contradicted in all her life before, and she felt that she was losing her temper.

"Are you content now?" said the Caterpillar.

"Well, I should like to be a *little* larger, sir, if you wouldn't mind," said Alice: "three inches is such a wretched height to be."

"It is a very good height indeed!" said the Caterpillar angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high).

“But I’m not used to it!” pleaded poor Alice in a piteous tone. And she thought to herself, “I wish the creatures wouldn’t be so easily offended!”

“You’ll get used to it in time,” said the Caterpillar; and it put the hookah into its mouth and began smoking again.

This time Alice waited patiently until it chose to speak again. In a minute or two the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth and yawned once or twice, and shook itself. Then it got down off the mushroom, and crawled away into the grass merely remarking as it went, “One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter.”

“One side of *what?* The other side of *what* thought Alice to herself.

“Of the mushroom,” said the Caterpillar, just if she had asked it aloud; and in another moment it was out of sight.

Alice remained looking thoughtfully at the mushroom room for a minute, trying to make out which were the two sides of it; and as it was perfectly round, she found this a very difficult question. However, at last she stretched her arms round it as far as they would go, and broke off a bit of the edge with each hand

“And now which is which?” she said to herself, and nibbled a little of the right-hand bit to try the effect; the next moment she felt a violent blow underneath her chin: it had struck her foot! She was a good deal frightened by this very sudden change, but she felt that there was no time to be lost, as she was shrinking rapidly; so she set to work at once to eat some of the other bit. Her chin was pressed so closely against her foot that there was hardly room to open her mouth; but she did it at last, and managed to swallow a morsel of the left-hand bit.

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“Come, my head’s free at last!” said Alice in a tone of delight, which changed into alarm in another moment, when she found that her shoulders were nowhere to be

found: all she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck, which seemed to rise like a stalk out of a sea of green leaves that lay far below her.

“What *can* all that green stuff be?” said Alice. “And where *have* my shoulders got to? And oh, my poor hands, how is it I can’t see you?” She was moving them about as she spoke, but no result seemed to follow, except a little shaking among the distant green leaves.

As there seemed to be no chance of getting her hands up to her head, she tried to get her head down to them, and was delighted to find that her neck would bend about easily in any direction, like a serpent. She had just succeeded in curving it down into a graceful zigzag, and was going to dive in among the leaves, which she found to be nothing but the tops of the trees under which she had been wandering, when a sharp hiss made her draw back in a hurry: a large pigeon had flown into her face, and was beating her violently with its wings.

“Serpent!” screamed the Pigeon.

“I’m *not* a serpent!” said Alice indignantly. “Let me alone!”

“Serpent, I say again!” repeated the Pigeon, but in a more subdued tone, and added with a kind of sob, “I’ve tried every way, and nothing seems to suit them!”

“I haven’t the least idea what you’re talking about,” said Alice.

“I’ve tried the roots of trees, and I’ve tried banks, and I’ve tried hedges,” the Pigeon went on, without attending to her; “but those serpents! There’s no pleasing them!”

Alice was more and more puzzled, but she thought there was no use saying anything more till the Pigeon had finished.

“As if it wasn’t trouble enough hatching the eggs,” said the Pigeon; “but I must be on the look out for serpents night and day! Why, I haven’t had a wink of sleep these three weeks!”



*Illustration by Sir John Tenniel for Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865).*

“I’m very sorry you’ve been annoyed,” said Alice, who was beginning to see its meaning.

“And just as I’d taken the highest tree in the wood,” continued the Pigeon, raising its voice to a shriek, “and just as I was thinking I should be free of them at last, they, must needs come wriggling down from the sky! Ugh, Serpent!”

“But I’m *not* a serpent, I tell you!” said Alice “I’m a—I’m a—”

“Well! *What* are you?” said the Pigeon. “I can see you’re trying to invent something!”

“I—I’m a little girl,” said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day.

“A likely story indeed!” said the Pigeon in tone of the deepest contempt. “I’ve seen a good many little girls in my time, but never *one* with such a neck as that! No, no! You’re a serpent; and there’s no use denying it. I suppose you’ll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!”

“I *have* tasted eggs, certainly,” said Alice, who was a very truthful child; “but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.”

“I don’t believe it,” said the Pigeon; “but if they do, why, then they’re a kind of serpent, that’s all I can say.”

This was such a new idea to Alice, that she was quite silent for a minute or two, which gave the pigeon the opportunity of adding, “You’re looking for eggs, I know *that* well enough; and what does matter to me whether you’re a little girl or a serpent?”

“It matters a good deal to *me*,” said Alice hastily; “but I’m not looking for eggs, as it happens; and if I was, I shouldn’t want *yours*: I don’t like them raw.”

“Well, be off then!” said the Pigeon in a sulky tone, as it settled down again into its nest. Alice crouched down among the trees as well as she could, for her neck kept getting entangled among the branches, and every now and then she had to stop and untwist it. After a while she remembered that she still held the pieces of mushroom in her hands, and she set to work very carefully, nibbling it at one and then at the

other, and growing sometimes taller and sometimes shorter, until she had succeeded in bringing herself down to her usual height. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. With Forty-Two Illustrations by John Tenniel* (New York: D. Appleton, 1927; University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1998), chap. 5, <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/CarAlic.html>.

A major theme that runs throughout Carroll's fantasies is that of identity—Alice wanders through Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land trying to find out who she is. In this excerpt she pinpoints a key element to her identity—she is a *girl*.

Gender defines who and what we are. If you were to finish the sentence “girls are...” or “boys are...,” you'll likely discover that we all have unconscious norms—that is, assumptions about girls and boys, about men and women, about husbands and wives. The list could go on. These assumptions, though, socialize or train us into accepting particular gender roles that may not be desirable. For example, the first demarcation we make is whether the baby is a girl or a boy, and then we often associate this biological sexual distinction with given gender distinctions: girls are often put in pink, while boys are in blue. Male and female infants are put in “gender-appropriate” clothing to highlight the sex of the baby. This quick example situates us in feminist and gender criticism, which are powerful theories that allow literary critics to examine sex and gender in various texts. Alice begins to do that for us in the excerpt we just read.

The excerpt also highlights some essential notions about feminist and gender criticism, which we learn more about a bit later in this chapter. As Alice contemplates who she is, the Pigeon dismisses her by saying that she's “trying to invent something.” That “something,” we find out, is Alice's gender—she's a *girl*. In other words, we'll learn that in feminist and gender criticism, sex and gender are different: sex is a set of the biological markers that define whether someone is female, male, or intersex (having biological characteristics that do not fit neatly into either category), while gender evokes the attitudes a society has toward each sex—that is, how we view a person according to his or her gender. We will also complicate this notion in the section on gender criticism, for the male-female heterosexual dynamic excludes gay and lesbian identity, as well as bisexual and transgendered selves. **LGBTQ**<sup>1</sup> (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) issues are at the heart of a category of gender criticism called queer theory.

In addition, though Alice claims that she is a girl, the Pigeon is adamant about her being a *serpent*, which cleverly calls to mind larger themes in feminist criticism that date back to biblical times. In chapter 3 of Genesis, Eve is tempted by the serpent and subsequently tempts Adam to taste the forbidden fruit, thus violating God's prohibition and forcing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Gen. 3:1–6 (King

1. Acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities.

James Version). In other words, the Fall of humans supposedly is a result of Eve's indiscretion. John Milton in *Paradise Lost* (1667), a central, canonical text in English literature, essentially argues that our fall is Eve's fault, a heavy burden to place on a woman. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667; University of Virginia Electronic Text Center, 1993), <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/MilPL67.html>. Such a burden is not lost on feminist critics, and a key early examination of female characters and writers in nineteenth-century literature is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), which argues that women are often depicted by authors as either pure, virginal creatures or madwomen-demons. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). Nina Auerbach's *Woman and the Demon* (1982) also plays with this dichotomy. Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

We should add one further dynamic to our discussion about Alice. When she claims that she is a *girl*, Alice also suggests that she is not a *boy*, highlighting the fact that the gender construction of men is important. Masculinity studies focuses on the social construction of maleness and how stereotypes of what is constituted as being male become a profound force on how men (and women) act in society.

Alice's gender issues have not been lost on those interpreting Carroll's books. Tim Burton's reimagining of Alice's story in the film *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) *Alice in Wonderland*, directed by Tim Burton (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD. situates Carroll's narrative as a Victorian matrimonial tale. The film begins with nineteen-year-old Alice (not the seven-year-old of the novel) being confronted with an unwanted marriage proposal; at nineteen, Alice is expected to marry, and to marry well. But Alice has no desire to be wed and escapes her predicament by following the white rabbit down the rabbit hole to the fantastical world, where she encounters a variety of strange creatures and adventures. At the end of the movie, she returns to the real Victorian world and stands up for her right not to wed. She succeeds, and the end of the movie finds her being an apprentice (which is typically reserved for men) in a shipping business where she will travel to China to open trade routes. Burton's film can be seen as a feminist interpretation of Carroll's books, yet it also draws attention to gender expectations of the Victorian age: Do we, for example, know that Alice's suitor really wants to marry her? Or is he, too, being subjected to the gender expectations of men? And what of all those odd characters that Alice meets? The Mad Hatter, for example, is certainly male, but his gender seems polymorphous—he doesn't fit the conventional view of what it means to be a man; in the same way, the Red Queen doesn't fit the conventional view of being a woman.

We've made this short excerpt from *Alice in Wonderland* do a lot of work to introduce the concepts of feminist and gender criticism. So let's follow the example of Humpty Dumpty, who tells Alice that when he makes a word mean multiple things, he always pays it extra: "They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what *I* say!"

We hope that our chapter on feminist and gender criticism uses words precisely so that these important theories are clear and penetrable.

#### CLASS PROCESS

1. Have each student in the class keep a "gender log" for one week. In that log have students write down their observations about the gender relationships they see on campus.
2. Do gender stereotypes hold true?
3. What happens when someone defies such stereotypes?

## 4.2 Feminist Theory: An Overview

Let's whet our appetite for literature in a different, maybe more peculiar way. Let's read a different text, this one from a local Wisconsin cookbook, the *Amberg Centennial 1890-1990 Cookbook*. American Legion Auxiliary #428, *Amberg Centennial 1890-1990 Cookbook* (n.p.: n.d.). The two recipes come from the section "Game."

### Duck with Wild Rice

2 ducks	1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
1 onion, chopped	1 ½ teaspoons salt
1 (5 ounce) package wild rice	1 (8 ounce) can mushrooms and liquid
½ cup butter	½ cup flour
1 ½ cups half and half	1 (4 ounce) package slivered almonds, toasted
2 ribs celery, chopped	salt and pepper to taste

Boil duck, onion, and celery until tender. Remove meat from bones. Set aside. Cook rice. Set aside. Melt butter and sauté onion. Stir in flour and half-and-half to make cream sauce. Add parsley and seasonings. Add cooked duck, rice, mushrooms, and almonds to cream sauce. Bake mixture in a casserole at 350° for 30-45 minutes. Serves 6-8.

—Mrs. Charles T. Dekuester (Doris Van Vleit)

### Bessie's Birds

12 birds (dove or quail)	1 cup beef consommé
1 cup uncooked rice	1 (10-3/4 ounce) can onion soup
¼ cup chopped bell pepper	½ cup flour
¼ cup chopped onion	salt and pepper
butter or bacon drippings	

Sauté salted and floured birds in small amount of butter or bacon drippings to brown well. Put rice in bottom of buttered oblong casserole dish. Place birds on top of rice. Sprinkle peppers and onion on top. Pour consommé and onion soup over

casserole. Cover casserole with aluminum foil and bake at 350° for 45 minutes. Serves 6.

Chicken may be substituted for the birds.

—Mrs. Hugh Guy (Viola Barette)

### CLASS PROCESS

1. Put students in groups of three or four.
2. Have them read the recipes carefully.
3. Have them interpret the recipes as they would examine a story or poem.
4. What “themes” can they find in the recipe text?
5. Generate class discussion, as you are guided by the discussion following the excerpt.

The recipes reflect a particular view of women and their role in the domestic space. In other words, the woman’s domain is in the house, her workspace the kitchen, where she will cook for her husband (and by extension the children). Notice that each recipe privileges the male name, with the woman’s maiden name—her original name and identity—put in parenthesis. Even the use of *Mrs.* denotes her married status, whereby *Mr.* does not tell us the married status of the male. We are in the realm of **patriarchy**<sup>2</sup>, the condition that demonstrates male domination over women. The recipes are even more interesting, for the section of this cookbook is “Game,” further suggesting particular gender roles: men, the sportsmen, go hunting for this game, while the women, remaining at home, cook up that game for the family. If we interpret these recipes as we might a piece of literature, we can identify particular themes that represent feminist criticism: women are inferior to men in patriarchy; women’s space is the private place of domesticity, the man’s space is public (in this case the rugged wild); the woman’s identity is determined by her husband’s identity (she, like Eve, is dependent on her husband’s rib, so to speak).

Now let’s look at a literary use of the kitchen as a domestic space. Here is the cast of characters and opening set description for Susan Glaspell’s one-act play, *Trifles* (1916). The play was first performed by the Provincetown Players in Massachusetts, with Glaspell playing the role of Mrs. Hale. A year later, Glaspell turned the play into a short story, “A Jury of Her Peers,” partly to reach a larger reading audience. The inspiration for the play came from a murder reported in the *Des Moines Register*. Articles on case: <http://www.midnightassassin.com/sgarticles.html>.

2. Ideology, or belief system of a society, of male domination over women that pervades the public and private spheres.

- GEORGE HENDERSON (County Attorney)
- HENRY PETERS (Sheriff)
- LEWIS HALE, A neighboring farmer
- MRS PETERS
- MRS HALE

SCENE: *The kitchen is the now abandoned farmhouse of JOHN WRIGHT, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table—other signs of incompleting work. At the rear the outer door opens and the SHERIFF comes in followed by the COUNTY ATTORNEY and HALE. The SHERIFF and HALE are men in middle life, the COUNTY ATTORNEY is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the SHERIFF’s wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. MRS HALE is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.* Susan Glaspell, *Trifles* (1916; Project Gutenberg, 2011), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10623/10623-h/10623-h.htm#TRIFLES>.

The following excerpt is the opening of the short story “A Jury of Her Peers”:

WHEN Martha Hale opened the storm-door and got a cut of the north wind, she ran back for her big woolen scarf. As she hurriedly wound that round her head her eye made a scandalized sweep of her kitchen. It was no ordinary thing that called her away—it was probably farther from ordinary than anything that had ever happened in Dickson County. But what her eye took in was that her kitchen was in no shape for leaving; her bread all ready for mixing, half the flour sifted and half unsifted.

She hated to see things half done; but she had been at that when the team from town stopped to get Mr. Hale, and then the sheriff came running in to say his wife wished Mrs. Hale would come too—adding, with a grin, that he guessed she was getting scarey and wanted another woman along. So she had dropped everything right where it was. Susan Glaspell, “A Jury of Her Peers,” in *The Best Short Stories of 1917*, ed. Edward J. O’Brien (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1918; University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1996), <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=GlaJury.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all>.

### CLASS PROCESS

1. Have the students read *Trifles*.
2. Ask the students to make a chart on a piece of paper: label the left side “men,” the right side “women.”
3. Students should then fill in the chart: what symbols are associated with the men and women?

When we turn to the *Trifles* example, we see how a writer uses this domestic space and its implications to create a symbolic statement about gender. The men all have first and last names and are given an occupation (attorney, sheriff, or farmer); the women are only known by their husband’s names—they are not even given first names. This naming becomes important in the play, for the suspected murderer Minnie Wright is referred to as Minnie Foster by Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, suggesting that she had lost her identity by marrying her husband, who was a cold and cruel man, even preventing her from singing in the choir or having a telephone in the house (see Gretchen Panzer’s sample paper on voice in *The Great Gatsby* later in the chapter).

Furthermore, the setting of the play is important—all the action on stage takes place in the kitchen, a kitchen that is in disarray. The men, of course, view the messy kitchen as a fault of Minnie’s: she just isn’t a very good housewife and housekeeper, for that is her primary role according to the men. To be a housewife, in addition, means that women are only concerned with “trifles,” insignificant things. Later in the play and the short story we find out that Minnie’s canning—her preserves—have been ruined because the jars have frozen and burst. Again, the men see this as sloppy housekeeping, while the women view the preserves as Minnie’s hard work to care for her family. The idea of “preserves” or “preservation” becomes a central theme in Glaspell’s work, for Minnie must preserve her dignity as a woman, even if it means that she must murder her husband. The great irony of the play and short story is that the women discover the evidence—the strangled bird—that would be enough to convict Minnie of murder, but they withhold this evidence, thus implying that Minnie will be set free. The women create their own justice system, becoming a jury of their peers: women.

**Feminism**<sup>3</sup> is a powerful literary theory that is dedicated to social and political change. “How to define feminism? Ah, that is the question,” a befuddled Hamlet might ask. A useful definition can be found in Michael Kimmel and Thomas Mosmiller’s *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776–1990: A Documentary History* (1992). They focus on four central points:

3. Movement that strives for societal change to make women equal to men in the public and private spheres.

1. There is evidence that women are treated differently and unequally.
2. Women are not treated equally in the private and public sphere.
3. If these points are true, then that's wrong and becomes a moral problem.
4. Thus feminism is a commitment to change. Michael Kimmel and Thomas Mosmiller, *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776–1990 a Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon, 1992).

### CLASS PROCESS

1. On the blackboard or whiteboard, have the students generate examples for points 1 and 2 of the list. This should lead to a spirited discussion.

Two other definitions will be useful to you: Barbara Smith argues that “feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, Jewish women, lesbians, old women—as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.” from *A History of U.S. Feminisms* by Kory Dicker (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), p. 7. Noted feminist author bell hooks adds, “Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as a commitment to reorganize society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires.” bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto, 2000).

Feminist literary criticism is also about this commitment to equality, to change, and it works its way by arguing that literature is a powerful cultural force that mirrors gender attitudes. Feminist literary criticism can be categorized into three stages: patriarchal criticism, gynocriticism, and feminine writing.

**Patriarchal criticism**<sup>4</sup> examines the prejudices against women by male writers. Such criticism analyzes the way that canonical authors—mostly men—create images of women. For example, Gretchen Panzer’s sample paper in this chapter explores how F. Scott Fitzgerald silences Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*, further reinforcing the notion that this great American novel depicts women in demeaning ways. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2003). This criticism is often focused on close textual study since it will examine how men and women are depicted in literary texts. Patriarchal criticism will be central to this chapter.

4. Literary method that examines how writers—particularly male writers—depict women in literature; this criticism often highlights the sexist stereotypes that privilege men over women.

**Gynocriticism**<sup>5</sup> is concerned with women writers, particularly in the ways that women writers have become included within the canon. In American literature, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are classic examples; Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 2nd ed., ed. Nancy A. Walker (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000); Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000). these texts, now part of the canon of American literature, have only been seen as such for the past twenty-five years or so. Another interesting example is the evolution of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, which reflects the insertion of women into the canon. The edition for 1968, M. H. Abrams, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968). which covers the Middle Ages, the seventeenth century, the Restoration and the eighteenth century, the Romantic period, the Victorian age, and the twentieth century, includes no women. That's right—not one single woman! The latest (eighth) edition of this anthology, Stephen Greenblatt and M. H. Abrams, eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996). published thirty-eight years later, includes the following women writers:

- *Middle Ages*: Marie De France and Margery Kempe
- *Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*: Queen Elizabeth, Mary (Sydney) Herbert, Aemilia Lanyer, Mary Wroth, Katherine Philips, and Margaret Cavendish
- *Restoration and eighteenth century*: Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and Frances Burney
- *Romantic period*: Anna Letitia Barbauld, Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Felicia Dorothea Hemans
- *Victorian age*: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Christina Rossetti
- *Twentieth century*: Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys, Nadine Gordimer, Alice Munro, and Anne Carson

What does it mean, consequently, when there are no representations of women? Historically, if women didn't exist in the canon, then we did not—we could not—study them. But with the rise of the field of women's studies in the 1960s, which introduced the idea of feminist literary criticism, we now value the study of women and their accomplishments, as well as thinking about how gender is constructed and perpetuated generally. This evolution about women and literature is mirrored in the evolving contents of the Norton anthology, which also reflects the evolving canon that is more inclusive, particularly to women writers.

5. Literary method that focuses on women writers and how they depict issues related to being a woman in a patriarchal culture.

6. Method that contemplates whether women write differently than men, creating a kind of "women's writing" that challenges the assumptions of men's writing.

**Feminine writing**<sup>6</sup> explores the notion that women may write differently than men, suggesting that there may be a "women's writing" that is an alternative to male writing. Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). traces

women's writing into three stages. The first stage is **Imitation** or **Feminine** (1840–80), where women imitated men. The classic examples of this are Charlotte and Emily Brontë (of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* fame, respectively), who took on male names—Currer Bell and Acton Bell. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Richard J. Dunn (New York: Norton, 2001); Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Richard J. Dunn (New York: Norton, 2003). To give another famous example, George Eliot, who wrote the Victorian classic *Middlemarch*, was actually Mary Ann Evans. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Bert G. Hornback (New York: Norton, 2000). The second stage of women's writing is **Protest** or **Feminist** (1880–1920), which sees women becoming much more political as writers, reacting directly to male domination in society and literature. Kate Chopin is an example of this stage, as is Virginia Woolf. Finally, the third stage, **Self-Discovery** or **Female** (1920–), becomes more radical as women turn inward toward the female, toward the body, creating works that mirror a writing particular to women.

As you can see, to narrowly define feminist literary criticism is difficult, for there are a myriad of approaches to take. Feminism is often referred to in the plural—feminisms—because there is such diversity within feminism about core terms and philosophies. A useful starting point is *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, edited by **Robyn R. Warhol** and **Diane Price Herndl**. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds., *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997). You can examine the table of contents at [http://www.amazon.com/Feminisms-Anthology-Literary-Theory-Criticism/dp/0813523893#reader\\_0813523893](http://www.amazon.com/Feminisms-Anthology-Literary-Theory-Criticism/dp/0813523893#reader_0813523893).

A look at this table of contents will show you the complexity of feminist literary criticism and provide you with some ideas to focus your feminist paper on.

### YOUR PROCESS

1. Choose a literary work to examine: either a male or female writer.
2. Look through the table of contents of *Feminisms* and choose three chapter areas that might lead to a focus for your paper.
3. Write down several possible working thesis ideas for your paper.
4. Remember, you may decide to focus your paper on gender criticism or masculinity studies, which are defined in the Key Terms.

### 4.3 Gender Criticism and Queer Theory

Gender criticism is an extension of feminist literary criticism, focusing not just on women but on the construction of gender and sexuality, especially LGBTQ issues, which gives rise to queer theory. Gender criticism suggests that power is not just top down or patriarchal—a man dominating a woman; it suggests that power is multifaceted and never just in one direction. For example, in the nineteenth century while many women argued for suffrage (or the right to vote), at the same time those very women who were white could be dominating or holding power over African Americans in the American slave system. In the nineteenth century, many white women were pictured as angelic, ideal, and the angel in the house who protected men from the cruel world of commerce (see Coventry Patmore’s poem *The Angel in the House* Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, The Victorian Web, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/patmore/angel>. at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/patmore/angel>). But that idealized view of women is incomplete given that we know from diaries and other historical evidence that white women could have sexual longing (shocking!), treat others barbarically, or even be sadistic and murderous. Thus identity is complicated and rich, involving much more than gender alone. It is the intersection of a variety of things—including geographical location, age, race, class, nationality, ability, and sexuality as well as gender—that make up our identities.

A key to gender criticism, consequently, is that gender is a socially constructed ideology that is reflected in our culture and political, social, economic, educational, and religious institutions and is coded in the very language we use. For example, the adjective *queer*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) tells us, originally meant something “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric,” the earliest use being from 1513. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “queer.” Not until 1894, partly a result of the sodomy trial of Oscar Wilde, where he was convicted of being a homosexual and sentenced to prison, “Famous World Trials: The Trials of Oscar Wilde, 1895,” University of Missouri–Kansas City, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/wilde/wilde.htm>. did the word *queer* (as an adjective or a noun) come to be associated with homosexuality, and then in a strictly derogatory sense.

7. Belief that sex and gender are biologically determined, or natural, thus suggesting an essential difference between men and women.

8. Belief that gender—and some would argue biological sex—are socially constructed and thus arbitrary markers to define one’s identity.

Like feminism, gender criticism examines how gender is caught between the notion of **essentialism**<sup>7</sup>—the belief that women are naturally and fundamentally different than men based on their biological sex, that nonheterosexual identities are deviant from the biological heteronormative distinction between male and female—and **constructionism**<sup>8</sup>—the belief that gender is not essentialist or based on biological nature but is constructed through culture. One of the most famous scenes from literature depicting this essentialism versus constructionism debate comes from

Mark Twain's classic *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. At the end of chapter 10, Jim and Huck determine that the best way to find information so that the two can avoid capture is to have Huck put on a disguise and go into the nearby town:

“Next morning I said it was getting slow and dull, and I wanted to get a stirring up some way. I said I reckoned I would slip over the river and find out what was going on. Jim liked that notion; but he said I must go in the dark and look sharp. Then he studied it over and said, couldn't I put on some of them old things and dress up like a girl? That was a good notion, too. So we shortened up one of the calico gowns, and I turned up my trouser-legs to my knees and got into it. Jim hitched it behind with the hooks, and it was a fair fit. I put on the sun-bonnet and tied it under my chin, and then for a body to look in and see my face was like looking down a joint of stove-pipe. Jim said nobody would know me, even in the daytime, hardly. I practiced around all day to get the hang of the things, and by and by I could do pretty well in them, only Jim said I didn't walk like a girl; and he said I must quit pulling up my gown to get at my britches-pocket. I took notice, and done better.”Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1912; University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1995), chap. 10, <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Twa2Huc.html>.

In the next chapter, Huck, dressed as a girl, meets Mrs. Judith Loftus. Huck tells her his name is Sarah Williams, and Mrs. Loftus asks Huck-Sarah to help her with a few tasks, such as throwing a piece of lead at a rat and helping with threading a needle. When she tosses an extra piece of lead to Huck-Sarah, his true identity as a boy is exposed. After Huck tells Mrs. Loftus that his name is George, she criticizes his attempt to fool her:

“Well, try to remember it, George. Don't forget and tell me it's Elexander before you go, and then get out by saying it's George Elexander when I catch you. And don't go about women in that old calico. You do a girl tolerable poor, but you might fool men, maybe. Bless you, child, when you set out to thread a needle don't hold the thread still and fetch the needle up to it; hold the needle still and poke the thread at it; that's the way a woman most always does, but a man always does t'other way. And when you throw at a rat or anything, hitch yourself up a tiptoe and fetch your hand up over your head as awkward as you can, and miss your rat about six or seven foot. Throw stiff-armed from the shoulder, like there was a pivot there for it to turn on, like a girl; not from the wrist and elbow, with your arm out to one side, like a boy. And, mind you, when a girl tries to catch anything in her lap she throws her knees apart; she don't clap them together, the way you did when you caught the lump of lead. Why, I spotted you for a boy when you was threading the needle; and I contrived the other things just to make certain. Now trot along to your uncle, Sarah Mary Williams George Elexander Peters, and if you get into trouble you send word to Mrs. Judith Loftus, which is me, and I'll do what I can to get you out of it.

Keep the river road all the way, and next time you tramp take shoes and socks with you. The river road's a rocky one, and your feet'll be in a condition when you get to Goshen, I reckon."Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1912; University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, 1995), chap. 11, <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Twa2Huc.html>.

Mrs. Judith Loftus views sexuality as essentialist—there are real, innate differences between a girl and boy, which perpetuate the stereotypes about gender. Another way to view her comments, however, is to acknowledge that gender is a performance, a role that we play or construct. If we read Judith's comments in this light, then *Huckleberry Finn* becomes a more enlightened text on gender than one might initially think.

Just as we think gender is constructed, queer theorists argue that sexuality is constructed and not just "natural" as well. Lady Gaga sings, "Baby I was born this way," but others, like Adrienne Rich, argue that sexuality exists on a continuum and is more fluid than a binary equation of straight or gay. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 227–54. Rich suggests that "**compulsory heterosexuality**"<sup>9</sup>, the drive to make everything heterosexual, shapes our sexual socialization to such an extent that the only choice is to be straight. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993). Building from Sigmund Freud's ideas on sexuality, sex researcher Alfred Kinsey created the Kinsey scale, which suggests that human sexuality exists on a 0–6 scale, with 0 being exclusively homosexual and 6 being exclusively heterosexual. In all his research, he discovered that most people were somewhere around a 3 (bisexual) and that few people were at either ends of the straight/gay spectrum. "Kinsey's Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale," Kinsey Institute, <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/research/ak-hhscale.html>.

9. Term coined by Adrienne Rich that suggests that people are forced into traditional heterosexual roles.

10. Act of making heterosexuality the cultural norm.

11. Term used by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to define the relationships between men that are not explicitly sexual because society prevents that desire by privileging heterosexual desire.

In addition, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a prominent queer theorist, suggests culture is so **heteronormative**<sup>10</sup> (making heterosexuality the norm) that gay characters—and, particularly, the affection between men in literature—is rendered invisible and must be routed through a character of the opposite gender to be acceptable. A classic example comes from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850); Hester becomes the target as Dimmesdale and Chillingworth work about their male desire by competing for Hester. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850; Project Gutenberg, 2005), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/33>. In her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Sedgwick coins the term "**homosocial desire**"<sup>11</sup> to refer to relationships between men that are not explicitly sexual, but could actually have erotic components if allowed to exist. Eve Kosofsky

Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Homosocial worlds include all-male contexts like boarding schools, the military, and sports. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). The recent idea of the “bromance” from films such as *I Love You, Man* (2009) is an example of homosocial expression. It is no accident that we often laugh when using the term “bromance” because it seems ludicrous, given the norms of masculinity in our culture, that men might love one another and express that love as women in female friendships often do. It would require heterosexual men to potentially break out of certain norms of how they are supposed to act. We’ll discuss this more in a minute when we talk about masculinity.

This idea that some expressions or identities are invisible and then visible once you have a particular lens to see them (theorists call this ideology) is as important to feminist literary criticism as it is to gender and sexuality criticism. What if we look at Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* anew in a way that focuses on how men might care for and love one another as they are sequestered on this famous, frightening ship, the *Pequod*. Chapter 94, “A Squeeze of the Hand,” finds the whalemens breaking up the spermaceti from a just-harvested sperm whale. Spermaceti is the wax or oil in the skull of the sperm whale, and this oil was valuable and used to make candles and various ointments. Suddenly, Melville’s description of the squeezing of the whale sperm takes on an erotic meaning perhaps previously unnoticed. This interpretation changes the way we may traditionally read the book:

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers’ hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say,—Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: Harper, 1851; Power *Moby-Dick*, 1998), <http://www.powermobydick.com/Moby094.html>.

After this paragraph, Ishmael states,

Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table,

the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: Harper, 1851; Power Moby-Dick, 1998), <http://www.powermobydick.com/Moby094.html>.

Melville's text flirts with homoerotic desire, but that desire is short-lived as the narrator suggests that men must "lower" their desire to other outlets—"but in the wife."

Ultimately, gender and sexuality theorists go back in history and look at who might have been left out. Where are there absences in the canon such that gay and lesbian authors and characters might be included? And when gay and lesbian characters are present, how are they perceived?

What about a supposedly "straight" text that appears to have a queer subtext previously unseen? For example, Julia Ward Howe was a nineteenth-century author who wrote the famous "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and founded Mother's Day. However, she also wrote a secret novel, *The Hermaphrodite*, which featured a male gender-bending protagonist who loves both sexes but particularly another man. Julia Ward Howe, *The Hermaphrodite*, ed. Gary Williams (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Once discovered, this book was a shocking addition to the profile people had created of Howe. Howe's text is considered a "recovered" text and has been brought back into circulation, a common phenomenon in the literature of marginalized groups where texts have disappeared only to be rediscovered and read.

#### YOUR PROCESS

1. Can you think of texts where a character is forced into certain roles, behaviors, and actions because of compulsory heterosexuality?
2. Is that character's sexuality more complex than you realized?
3. When you consider sexuality on a continuum, does it change how characters interact?
4. Could your observations lead to a focus for a literary analysis?

## 4.4 Gender Criticism: Masculinity Studies

Just as feminist literary criticism and gender and sexuality criticism consider how identity shapes us, so does **masculinity studies**<sup>12</sup> grow out of these fields and consider how men are often forced into what theorist Jackson Katz calls a “**man box**<sup>13</sup>,” or the very narrow box that defines what a “real man” is. Jackson Katz, *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity*, directed by Sut Jhally (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 1999), DVD. If you are a sports fan, you will see many “man-box” commercials during a football game, for example, and often the humorous ads are those when a man doesn’t act like a “man.” Compare the following two commercials:

[\(click to see video\)](#)

[\(click to see video\)](#)

The first commercial while objectifying women, also suggests that the core audience for the commercial is men, who naturally objectify women. The second commercial focuses on the importance of men to “man-up”—to act like a man.

In his recent book, *Dude, You’re a Fag* (2012), C. J. Pascoe looks at masculinity and sexuality in high school and examines all the ways that gay baiting (using gayness as a way to taunt someone about nongender- and nonsexuality-conforming behavior) is used to shore up young men’s sense of self. C. J. Pascoe, *Dude, You’re a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). For example, consider the difference of a girl being called a tomboy or a boy being called a sissy. Which is worse? Typically for a young man to be called a sissy is a kind of social death. Why? When a man is compared to someone who is perceived to have less power, in this instance a woman, then he is considered less manly and, therefore, by implication he must be gay, which creates pressure for men to conform to one idea of maleness. Media representations constantly assert what is proper masculinity, and it typically involves being a violent, hypersexual thug who is never dominated but only dominates.

How does this construction of masculinity affect maleness in literature? Consider Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner, 2003). The book is narrated by Jake Barnes and concerns the exploits of the Lost Generation after World War I. Jake loves the femme fatale Brett Ashley, but he has been wounded in the war and is impotent. He’s not fully a man. While much of Hemingway’s work is challenged by feminists for being antiwoman, or **misogynist**<sup>14</sup>, particularly in the depiction of Brett Ashley, a masculinity studies

12. A fairly recent movement, influenced by feminism and gender criticism, that examines how men are defined by their maleness.
13. Term used by Jackson Katz to demonstrate how men are controlled by society’s view of masculinity, thus forcing men to perform the stereotypes of what it means to be a man.
14. The hatred of men for women. Masculinity studies often points out how this supposed misogyny is created by accepted definitions of how men should act.

reading of the text depicts the unbearable struggle Jake encounters because he can't fulfill the societal expectations of being a man, which emphasize sexual potency. By reading Jake through a masculinity studies lens, we now have more compassion for Jake, and we may have a more complex view of Hemingway as a writer as we see him grappling with characters who can't fit neatly into the man box.

We can see more clearly through the lens of masculinity studies how gender norms are not exclusive to women but also affect men, which in turn affects the scope of a text.

### YOUR PROCESS

1. Read Robert Browning's "Porphyria's Lover," (<http://www.bartleby.com/101/720.html>). Robert Browning, "Porphyria's Lover," Bartleby.com, <http://www.bartleby.com/101/720.html>.
2. List the attributes of the man and the woman in lines 1-30.
3. Do those attributes for the male narrator change after line 30?
4. How might a reader's attitude evolve about the narrator using masculinity studies? Do you have more sympathy for the narrator, even though he is a murderer? Is he driven insane by his desire to fulfill his masculinity, whether as he sees himself, as Porphyria sees him, or as society might see him?

## 4.5 Feminist and Gender Criticism: A Process Approach

Feminist and gender criticism are powerful literary methods that you can use to analyze literature. Be guided by the following process as you write your feminist or gender criticism paper.

1. Carefully *read the work* you will analyze.
2. *Formulate a general question* after your initial reading that identifies a problem—a tension—that addresses a key issue relevant to feminist, queer theory, or masculinity studies.
3. *Reread the work*, paying particular attention to the question you posed. *Take notes*, which should be focused on your central question. *Write an exploratory journal entry or blog post* that allows you to play with ideas.
4. *Construct a working thesis* that makes a claim about the work and accounts for the following:
  1. What does the work mean?
  2. How does the work artistically demonstrate a theme?
  3. “So what” is significant about the work? That is, why is it important for you to write about this work? What will readers “learn” from reading your interpretation?
5. *Reread the text to gather textual evidence* for support. What literary devices are used to achieve the theme?
6. *Construct an informal outline* that demonstrates how you will support your interpretation.
7. *Write a first draft*.
8. *Receive feedback* from peers and your instructor via *peer review* and *conferencing* with your instructor (if possible).
9. *Revise the paper*, which will include revising your original thesis statement and restructuring your paper to best support the thesis. Note: You probably will revise many times, so it is important to receive feedback at every draft stage if possible.
10. *Edit and proofread* for correctness, clarity, and style.

We recommend that you follow this process for every paper that you write from this textbook. Of course, these steps can be modified to fit your writing process, but the plan does ensure that you will engage in a thorough reading of the text as you work through the writing process, which demands that you allow plenty of time for reading, reflecting, writing, reviewing, and revising.

## 4.6 Student Writer at Work: Gretchen Panzer's Feminist Response to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

*The Great Gatsby* may be the one novel that a majority of readers have read. It's taught in high school and college classrooms alike and it's read for pure enjoyment. In other words, *The Great Gatsby* is a cultural icon, at least for American readers.

Gretchen is a meticulous planner of her papers, as the focus on her process demonstrates. Originally, Gretchen wrote a journal entry exploring possible topics for her paper, particularly related to key symbols in the novel.

### GRETCHEN'S PROCESS

#### Exploratory Journal Entry

I definitely want to write about *Gatsby*, and my favorite scene is when he tosses the shirts about and Daisy starts crying. So I think I'm going to link the shirts scene to the scene with Owl Eyes and the books. Depending on what I find when I start researching, my thesis will be that the shirts and books are symbolic of *Gatsby* himself: real, but unopened. Like his possessions, *Gatsby* is authentic in some sense, or Nick wouldn't respect him. But his potential is diminished by the people around him; they know nothing of his past/innermost thoughts and therefore see only the shiny cover.

With this tentative focus in mind, Gretchen skims through the novel, copying quotes that relate to her original idea as well as other passages that catch her interest. Reading her list, she finds that she is more interested in exploring the genre of "love story" and the way the story is cast as a dream or fantasy of *Gatsby's*, who tries to "buy" Daisy's love with material objects. After revising her thesis, finding secondary sources on her topic, and creating a new outline, Gretchen is ready to start composing her essay. The following is her first draft, which she brought to class for a peer-review workshop.

## First Draft

Gretchen Panzer

John Pennington

Great American Novels

May 1, 20–

Before the tragic sequence of events begins to unfold in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the novel almost seems as if it could be a perfect love story—one that will end not with death and disillusionment but with the promise of “happily ever after” for Jay Gatsby and the girl of his dreams. However, it is precisely because Daisy Buchanan is the girl of his dreams that their relationship is destined to fail. By simultaneously turning his dream-Daisy into an impossible ideal of love and a cheap symbol of material wealth, he loses any connection he might have had with the real, flawed person she truly is. Gatsby's famous idealism should not be considered an admirable trait; it is, in fact, a product of his blatant sexism.

The way in which Gatsby constructs his dream world is made evident in Fitzgerald's symbolism. Material possessions become the physical embodiment of the perfect love Gatsby pursues. Since he believes he cannot win Daisy's affections unless he is a man of means, he devotes his life to accumulating objects, disregarding their value even as he hopes it will transfer to his person. Two types of objects are particularly obvious in their symbolic value: the books in Gatsby's library and the array of shirts he displays for Daisy's benefit. Both collections reveal Gatsby's obsessive need to show off his wealth and seemingly paradoxical indifference to the objects themselves. Though the books are, as Owl Eyes points out, “[a]bsolutely real—have pages and everything” (Fitzgerald 50), they have never been read. Gatsby feels no need to actually make use of his library, for all the “thoroughness ... [and] realism” he exhibits by purchasing actual books rather than those made from “a nice durable cardboard” (Fitzgerald 50). Clearly, Gatsby is more concerned with appearances than reality when it comes to his library—as long as his guests are impressed by its grandeur, the specific titles on its shelves are of no consequence.

As is the case with the books, Gatsby purchases vast quantities of clothing in order to impress Daisy. As part of the tour he gives Daisy, Gatsby tosses his expensive shirts in the air—a colorful display reminiscent of a peacock flashing bright feathers at a potential mate. Gatsby cannot take credit for their fashionable colors, however. He is not interested in personally selecting his own clothing, but delegates his shopping to an unnamed man in England (Fitzgerald 97). Mundane details such as color, cut, or fabric are immaterial to Gatsby, just as title and author make no difference in his selection of books. It is instead the books' and shirts' contribution to the general splendor of his home, and therefore their part in his scheme to win Daisy, that gives them value. As Barbara Will asserts, “[w]hat motivates Gatsby is not the desire for material betterment ... but the evanescent and the intangible” (Will 131). That material betterment can be used to achieve the evanescent, intangible ideal of love is the aspect which interests Gatsby.

Using material objects, Gatsby builds his dream of being with Daisy. Each book, each shirt symbolizes a step he is taking to realize his dream, as evidenced by Fitzgerald's use of a brick motif. The shirts are “piled like bricks in stacks a dozen high” (Fitzgerald 97)—tangible building blocks of an intangible dream. Despite their abundance, the dream-bricks create an unsteady edifice, as Nick learns when Owl Eyes hastily places the book they have been examining back on its shelf, insisting that “if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse” (Fitzgerald 50). Because Gatsby constructs his life using dreams and meaningless material objects, it is structurally unsound, too fragile to reach the lofty heights he wants to attain. Ignoring this, he takes his idealism to such an extreme that he is unable to cope with the impossibility of his dream being realized—any forced confrontation with reality topples his tower of dream-bricks.

Yet confrontation with reality is inevitable. The dream-Daisy transcends all human limitations; Daisy could never live up to Gatsby's expectations, if only because she *lives* in the first place. To be human is to be flawed, to be dynamic rather than static—a concept Gatsby does not seem to grasp. He spends years waiting to be reunited with the girl he remembers, only to be disappointed when she does not measure up to the memory he has stretched and distorted into an impossible ideal. This phenomenon is explained as Nick observes the lovers' reunion:

There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of

his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart. (Fitzgerald 101)

By continuously embellishing his memory of Daisy with his own creative touches, Gatsby unintentionally ensures that the memory, or more accurately the dream, will surpass the reality and leave him disappointed and confused. The confusion sets in when Gatsby encounters the green light for the first time after he is reunited with Daisy:

the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. (Fitzgerald 98)

The green light, which in Gatsby's eyes signifies the dream-Daisy he is separated from, becomes another inconsequential material item. Like the books and shirts, it is a tangible object valued by Gatsby not for its own worth, but for the deeper meaning it holds. Yet the green light is inescapably linked to money itself—the green paper currency that enables Gatsby to present himself to Daisy.

Fitzgerald's use of the color green to symbolize both Daisy and material wealth recurs throughout the novel, perhaps most interestingly when Daisy says to Nick, "If you want to kiss me any time during the evening, Nick, just let me know and I'll be glad to arrange it for you. Just mention my name. Or present a green card. I'm giving out green—" (Fitzgerald 111). With this statement, the connection between Daisy and material wealth loses its innocence. Money is no longer just a means for Gatsby to attain the loftier, more beautiful dream of love; it has an allure of its own. The "green card" Daisy mentions as a joke buys only kisses, but Gatsby's cash (as he supposes) can be used to purchase Daisy herself. Though she is the inspiration for Gatsby's dream, she becomes another brick in his architecture, one of the objects he uses to chase after his dream-Daisy. Gatsby's collection of "enchanted objects" has decreased not by one, but two—the green light and the real Daisy.

Demoted to the status of “object,” Daisy becomes a symbol of the very substance Gatsby uses to win her over: money. Her vibrant charm, the source of which Nick could never discern, is falsely linked to material wealth. Nick, enthralled by Gatsby’s idealistic vision, eventually agrees with his abrupt conclusion that “[h]er voice is full of money ... that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals’ song of it” (Fitzgerald 127).

No longer awestruck by her mysterious charm, “Nick and Gatsby progressively devitalize Daisy’s symbolic meaning until she exists as a vulgar emblem of the money values which dominate their world” (Person 255).

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As Gretchen writes her paper in light of the feedback she’s received from her peer-review partner and her professor, she discovers that the focus on “blatant sexism” seems overly obvious—and as she delves into the evidence, she keeps repeating the same idea about sexism. She realizes, after immersing herself in some feminist literary criticism, that a key concept is that of “voice”—that is, how women are often denied their voice in fiction, particularly in works written by men. Consequently, Gretchen takes what she has already written on Daisy’s voice and rethinks her paper.

We told you that Gretchen was a meticulous planner, so she went through the novel again and constructed a detailed outline of evidence that will guide her as she revises her paper with the new focus. Here is the final draft of Gretchen’s paper.

Note that the opening of the paper is two paragraphs, and it will be useful to compare her introduction in the final version to the original introductory paragraph. Gretchen's process demonstrates how papers develop: initial ideas are modified, first drafts become exploratory drafts where writers discover ideas while writing, and revisions highlight the intellectual development of a paper.

## Final Draft

Gretchen Panzer

John Pennington

Great American Novels

May 1, 20–

A Lost Voice: Sexism in *The Great Gatsby*

A typical reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* focuses on Jay Gatsby's supposedly universal appeal. He is considered an "everyman," representative of all determined, idealistic young Americans seeking the elusive American dream. Though this interpretation has some merit, its flaw lies in the assumption that Gatsby's famous idealism is indeed admirable. While Gatsby may truly be an "everyman," his quest for romantic idealism has disastrous effects upon the women in the novel. Gatsby seeks a "happily ever after" ending with the girl of his dreams, Daisy Buchanan. He worships this dream-Daisy as an impossible ideal of love and devotes himself to achieving wealth and status in order to win her affection. Ironically, his idealism prevents him from achieving his goal. By simultaneously distorting Daisy into an ideal of love and a cheap symbol of material wealth, he loses any connection he might have had with the real, flawed person she truly is. Gatsby's idealism should not be considered an admirable trait; it is nothing more than ill-disguised sexism.

As the novel progresses, Daisy loses her voice—literally and metaphorically—when it is overwhelmed by the incessant clamor of the more forceful males. Initially revered as a romantic ideal, Daisy's beautiful, captivating voice is increasingly stifled by the competing voices of the two men in her love triangle: her husband and Gatsby. Reduced to a symbol, and then to a sham of a symbol, Daisy is devalued by men even as they claim to love her. Fitzgerald's dialogue and vivid descriptions of the characters' voices make it abundantly clear that Gatsby's "everyman" dream of winning a woman's heart is rooted in the notion of male superiority.

From the beginning of the novel, Daisy's voice is established as an instrument of self-expression. Nick's first description of his cousin focuses on the beautiful, but disturbing, quality of her voice. He remarks that, "I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean in toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming." (Fitzgerald 13). The irony of this statement is subtle but very present; as Judith Fetterley points out in *The Resisting Reader*, "the criticism is not irrelevant or Nick wouldn't mention it, and indeed it does make Daisy less charming for it implies that the quality of her voice is simply something put on in order to gain an advantage over others" (84). Even as Nick admits that Daisy's voice is beautiful, he is driven by masculine insecurity to negate its power. By assuming that she is manipulative, he devalues her "charming" manner of speaking and defines vocal expression as a method of obtaining power over others. While Nick is certainly justified in recognizing the power of a voice, the idea that Daisy, of all people, desires control over others is laughable. She is not attempting to lure hapless men into a deathtrap with her siren-song—she only wants to preserve what remains of her own voice, and ultimately is unable to even accomplish that. Her voice is indeed a weapon, but she does not use it as such; instead, it is used against her by Gatsby, Tom, and Nick.

Gatsby's assault against Daisy's voice begins innocently enough. They are long-lost lovers, reunited after years of separation, and he positively worships her. But Gatsby's admiration for Daisy is unhealthy; she is no longer a real person to him, but an impossible ideal. Even Gatsby cannot ignore his own impracticality, as his reunion with Daisy illustrates:

There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart. (Fitzgerald 101)

By continuously embellishing his memory of Daisy, Gatsby unintentionally ensures that the memory—or more accurately, the dream—will surpass any possible reality and disappoint him. Yet something about Daisy's voice calls him back. As Nick watches:

His hand took hold of hers and as she said something low in his ear he turned toward her with a rush of emotion. I think that voice held him most with its fluctuating, feverish warmth because it couldn't be over-dreamed—that voice was a deathless song. (Fitzgerald 101)

A human voice cannot be immortal, but Gatsby's overactive imagination persists in viewing Daisy as superhuman: flawless, timeless, and "deathless." As Barbara Will points out in "*The Great Gatsby and the Obscene Word*," he does not concern himself with reality, but with "the evanescent and the intangible" (131). Because he is obsessed with the intangible, the ideal, Gatsby attributes the appeal of Daisy's voice to the wrong source. There is nothing magical or mythic about it—its "fluctuating, feverish warmth," a very human characteristic, is the true source of its power. For all his professions of love, Gatsby fails to comprehend the emotive power of the human voice. He does not notice how Daisy's irrepressible emotions draw him in, how "a stirring warmth flowed from her as if her heart was trying to come out to you concealed in one of those breathless, thrilling words" (Fitzgerald 19). When Daisy sings, she tips into the air her "warm human magic" (115), not the cold, implacable power of a goddess. By clinging to the impossible ideal he has created, Gatsby fails to recognize the true source of Daisy's charm: her real, human emotions.

These emotions are essential to one particularly telling scene: when Gatsby tosses his shirts into the air to show off his wealth. As the pile grows, Daisy is struck by the force of her emotions: "Suddenly with a strained sound Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily. 'They're such beautiful shirts,' she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. 'It makes me sad because I've never seen such—such beautiful shirts before' (98). While part of this emotional outburst may be attributed to "her unexpected joy" at being reunited with Gatsby (94), her grief cannot be ignored. As Leland S. Person argues in "'Herstory' and Daisy Buchanan," "[t]he important point to recognize is that Gatsby is as much an ideal to Daisy as she is to him" (253). As Gatsby flaunts his material wealth in front of her eyes, Daisy begins to understand his motives, and subsequently feels the loss of her ideal lover. The beautiful shirts upset her because she realizes that they are representative of herself: desirable, but material. Gatsby believes that he wants to be with Daisy, but he actually wants to *have* Daisy—a very different goal. That Daisy's voice is "muffled in the thick folds" of Gatsby's shirts shows that already his voice is beginning to smother her own, and her dream of Gatsby as a perfect lover is an illusion. Gatsby is oblivious to Daisy's despair, misinterpreting what she tries to express.

As the novel progresses, Gatsby's misinterpretation of Daisy's voice becomes less accurate and more destructive. Eventually, like Nick and Tom, he views her as nothing more than a material object—a symbol of power, but herself powerless. Before Tom and Gatsby do verbal battle over Daisy, she desperately tries to calm them, using her beautiful voice. “Her voice struggled on through the heat, beating against it, moulding its senselessness into forms” (Fitzgerald 125), but instead of preventing the argument, it acts as a catalyst. Tom is incensed when Daisy's voice betrays what her words do not. When she tells Gatsby, “[y]ou always look so cool,” everyone in the room is aware that “[s]he had told him that she loved him” (125).

At this moment, both Tom and Gatsby realize that neither can feel secure in his relationship with Daisy without seizing total control over her voice. Both men find it nearly impossible to speak after Daisy's lapse. Tom does not answer when his wife addresses him directly, and Gatsby “started to speak, [but] changed his mind,” only speaking “with an effort” when Tom forces him to (126). It is not the tension between the two men that makes it hard for them to converse, but their helplessness in the face of Daisy's power. Gatsby tells Nick, “I can't say anything in his house, old sport”—yet it was Daisy, not Gatsby, who gave away their secret. Nick recognizes this, commenting on Daisy's “indiscreet voice” (127). To restore his sense of control, Gatsby joins this attack on Daisy's voice, and the two conclude that “[i]t was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl” (127).

With this, as Person notes, “Nick and Gatsby progressively devitalize Daisy's symbolic meaning until she exists as a vulgar emblem of the money values which dominate their world” (255). First painted as a portrait of perfection, Daisy is now reduced to a crude symbol of power in its most vulgar form: money. As Person argues, she “is victimized by a male tendency to project a[n] ... ultimately dehumanizing image on woman” (Person 257). Her beautiful voice is no longer a human quality, or even a superhuman quality. Instead, it is a mere object: something to be bought, sold, and fought over. By objectifying Daisy, the men can fight for control; whoever suppresses her voice most completely will be the winner.

Though the confrontation between Tom and Gatsby affects Daisy most of all, she cannot participate. The men take it upon themselves to speak for her, leaving her powerless. Whichever man she chooses—and choosing neither is never suggested as a possibility—will overpower her voice with his own.

Fetterley is correct in noting that “Daisy’s choices amount in reality to no more than the choice of which form she wishes her oppression to take” (100). Both men speak for her without once asking how she feels. At one point, Gatsby answers when Tom addresses Daisy directly (Fitzgerald 138). Daisy’s only contribution to the conversation is to “helplessly” (137) interrupt them with pleas to stop and to reluctantly say whatever they want to hear. The erasure of her voice is complete when Gatsby launches into a lengthy defense of his good name:

with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly, toward that lost voice across the room. The voice begged again to go. (142)

Not only must Gatsby face the death of his dream, but also Daisy. She, too, had hoped that their love would be perfect, and now she must face Gatsby’s imperfection. As he struggles to control her by smothering her voice with his own, he destroys the very quality he has always found most alluring in Daisy. Her voice—her identity as a human being—is “lost” forever. Fitzgerald does not write that “Daisy begged again to go”; the plea is made by “*the voice*,” a disembodied, dehumanized entity. With this, Gatsby’s part in the annihilation of Daisy’s voice is complete. Even after he has lost her, Gatsby still insists that Daisy never loved Tom, that “she hardly knew what she was saying” when she made her final decision (Fitzgerald 159). He refuses to believe that she might be capable of knowing—and speaking—her own mind. And he is right in that respect: after all he and Tom have done to stifle her voice, how could she speak for herself?

The last time we see Daisy, she is both literally and metaphorically mute:

[Tom] was talking intently across the table at her and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement. (152)

She does not utilize her beautiful voice but communicates nonverbally, and then only to agree with Tom’s words. Once revered as a perfect being, the ideal of love, Daisy is ultimately reduced to a “dead dream.” In forcing Daisy to possess the symbolic value he desires, Gatsby *de*-values her. She is no longer a

captivating woman with a beautiful voice; Gatsby, aided by Nick and Tom, has destroyed that voice forever. Gatsby will never achieve his “happily ever after”—not because he loses Daisy to Tom, but because he ensures that Daisy is lost to herself. She cannot give of herself when her voice, her identity, is stolen and destroyed by male tyranny. Perhaps it is this unjust, sexist ending that makes Fitzgerald’s novel a story of the American “everyman.” Though Gatsby’s treatment of Daisy is not admirable, it is certainly typical of American gender relations.

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## 4.7 Student Sample Paper: Carrie Oby's "Homoerotic Impulses in Willa Cather's 'Paul's Case'"

Carrie's paper is guided by queer theory, which challenges the heteronormative way that readers often respond to a text. Carrie was interested in a queer reading of Willa Cather's "Paul's Case," Willa Cather, *The Troll Garden and Selected Stories* (Project Gutenberg, 2009), [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/346/346-h/346-h.htm#2H\\_4\\_0013](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/346/346-h/346-h.htm#2H_4_0013). which you can read at Project Gutenberg ([http://www.gutenberg.org/files/346/346-h/346-h.htm#2H\\_4\\_0013](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/346/346-h/346-h.htm#2H_4_0013)).

Carrie was intrigued by discovering that Cather's biographer, Sharon O'Brien, had labeled Cather a "lesbian writer" who focuses on gay and lesbian issues. Queer readings of texts often challenge the accepted interpretations of texts and open up the literary work to new critical debate. Carrie's paper certainly does do that, as she explores how Paul is forced into compulsory heterosexuality when his desires are anything but that.

Carrie Obry

Professor Pennington

Literature and Writing

April 17, 20–

Homoerotic Impulses in Willa Cather’s “Paul’s Case”

In Victorian culture, discussing sex was inappropriate, so literature from the period could not use sexually explicit language or ideas; if it did, it would risk not being well-received, or even published. During this time, “proper women were supposed to blush at the slightest allusion to sexuality; references to sex in literature were commonly bowdlerized” (Dynes 1344). Although Willa Cather is a modernist in literary terms, her writing emerges in an age that Victorian morality shaped, a time when sexuality was a thing not discussed. Larry Rubin claims that “Paul’s Case,” Cather’s “minor masterpiece,” appeared in 1905 “at the height of the period of Victorian repressiveness,” so we almost expect that Cather “found it necessary to avoid altogether a direct confrontation with the question of her protagonist’s sexual nature” (127). Consequently, Rubin says, many scholars have either “overlooked” or “ignored” it. Only after the 1970s did certain circles begin to recognize the homoerotic undertones of “Paul’s Case,” which had previously and consistently been labeled merely a contrast between a passionate and bourgeois lifestyle.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims that as a result of overlooking or ignoring the sexual temperament of authors and their characters, readers condemn literature to remain in the field of power that misinterpreted it. Her “Epistemology of the Closet” presents the idea that virtually every important epistemological core of 20th-century Western thought has been marked by issues of modern male homosexual and heterosexual definition. The very texts that “mobilized and promulgated the most potent images and categories for the canon of homophobic mastery” (182) simultaneously act as the lesser-known foundational texts of modern gay culture. She claims that landmark texts such as *Dorian Gray* and *Billy Budd* enact this double sexual identity. Although they both depict same-sex, erotic love, traditional interpretations veil the texts with a pretense of heterosexuality and integrate them into the literary canon as

such. Contemporary thought, especially Sedgwick's field of gender studies, develops a more sensitive approach to understanding homoerotic issues; many scholars attempt to reorder past political inequities by reconsidering those who were previously excluded.

Larry Rubin interprets "Paul's Case" in this enlightening manner. He notes how the lifting of "social taboos" in the discussion of sex leads to highly evocative reinterpretations of literature. "Particularly in homosexuality," he says, "this newly unfettered approach to the libidinous urges of various literary characters" has helped to reinterpret "certain dark and previously unmentionable aspects of the psychological motivation of those characters and even the overall vision of authors involved" (127). Willa Cather is one such author; the protagonist in "Paul's Case," the story that established Cather's artistic maturity, is one such character. Both Cather's artistic style and life vision have become involved, even entangled, in the web of identity-politics, largely due to her non-traditional and often elusive sexual identity.

Since Cather was very particular about transmitting her personal information and writing into the public sphere, retrieving particular insight leads to an array of conflicting images. James Woodress, who has written a significant amount about Cather, argues that "documentary evidence does not exist to dispose of the question in one way or another ... [so] whether she was [a lesbian] or not will have to remain moot" (86). Yet Karla Jay, in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, depicts Cather as a radical lesbian by citing biographical pictures of "Willie the cross-dresser" trying to "come out" to a society that was unwilling to notice. Moreover, contemporary aspects of literature include Cather as an essential author within gay and lesbian anthologies. The certainty by which many interpretations claim Cather as a lesbian rely on her long-standing, intense female relationships and her avoidance of marriage proposals from various men. Cather famously befriended Isabelle McClung and Edith Lewis, who helped form Cather's personality, and perhaps her lesbianism. In view of this fact, and of Cather's avoidance of marriage, Woodress claims: "It seems perfectly clear that she had no need for heterosexual relationships" (86).

Considering these conflicting ideas, scholars have more successfully shifted from speculation of sexual preference to examining the social implications of her adoption of a masculine persona. From age 14 through her first two years at the University of Nebraska, Cather cropped her hair short, wore the clothes of a young man, and called herself William, Willie, or Will (Begley 2). Evidently,

creating a “female self” in the late Victorian era proved difficult. Sharon O’Brien states that Cather’s attempt “to fashion a female self that could be compatible with the artist’s role” may have been futile because there were “no acceptable models for identity and vocation in the late-Victorian culture” (qtd. in Thomas 8). “Paul’s Case” emerges as a literary manifestation of Cather’s non-conformity and her assuming of a male identity. Yet Cather is not sexually explicit; she imbues the story with innuendo that signals, perhaps unmistakably, a homosexual identity of the narrator, and also a homophobia inherent in the passionless life of Cordelia Street, both of which are to blame in Paul’s impending suicide.

Before analyzing the story, understanding the innuendo of “Paul’s Case” is paramount. Primarily, the sexual implicitness of the story demonstrates reticence in two important ways. It shows the difficulty of writing about homosexuality in 1905. As Claude Sumner states, “1905 discourse on homosexuality was couched almost exclusively in terms of criminality and psychopathology” (109). Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* concentrates on the idea that we produce modern sexuality from past historically distinctive discourse; hence modern thought arises from these dogmas. Foucault locates the genesis of “homosexual” definition and discourse around 1905, a time when “nineteenth-century psychiatrists entomologized ... all those minor perverts” by giving them strange names such as “sexoesthetic introverts” (43). He formulates the history of homosexuality as follows:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood ... [His sexuality] was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away ... [T]he psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on “contrary sexual sensations” can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility ... the homosexual was now a species. (43)

At this point in history, homosexuality was no longer act-specific; it became a type of personality, rather than perverse recreation. At the turn of the 19th century, homosexuality was realized, so people were just beginning to struggle with the new idea of “homosexual identity.”

The implicitness of “Paul’s Case” also shows Cather’s penchant for insinuation in her literature. A passage from her exploratory essay “The Novel Démueblé” demonstrates Cather’s tacit approach to writing and particularly illuminates, along with Foucault, an exploration of “Paul’s Case”:

Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself. (Cather 41–42)

From the inception of “Paul’s Case,” the reader begins to comprehend from the page what Cather has not “specifically named there.” Paul consistently suppresses a truth from his teachers, his father, and perhaps from himself and the San Francisco boy he meets while sojourning in New York. What is Paul lying about? It is not his contempt for his teachers “which he seemingly made not the least effort to conceal” (Cather 260). It is his homosexuality, subdued not only in literary discursive forces and in Cather’s life, but also at the most rudimentary level, in the psychology of an author’s creation.

Cather mysteriously introduces Paul by referring to his “various misdemeanors” and to his father’s own “perplexity” about him. His teachers are also perplexed. They say: “Paul’s was not a usual case. It was scarcely possible to put into words the real cause of trouble” (260). Paul detects the apprehension people have of him; he “was always smiling, always glancing about him, seeming to feel that people might be watching him and trying to detect something” (260). He feels his homosexuality in Foucault’s terms: “everywhere present in him ... [and] written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away.”

Although Paul cannot address his homosexuality in a direct, verbal way, he demonstrates it through his disposition: “There was something of the dandy about him, and he wore an opal pin in his neatly knotted black four-in-hand” and a “scandalous red carnation” in his buttonhole (259). Besides his choice in clothing, Paul’s eyes contribute a great deal to his personality. “His eyes were remarkable for a certain hysterical brilliancy” which he “continually used ... in a conscious, theatrical sort of way, peculiarly offensive in a boy” (259). Cather associates the “glassy glitter” of his eye with a “belladonna,” giving Paul a distinct effeminate quality.

Paul's adornments and flashy countenance render him an especially flamboyant boy. He dresses in the fashion of "dandyism" reflective of Oscar Wilde and the late 19th-century aesthetes, who above everything attempted to dress elegantly and fashionably. As Richard Dellamora states, "dandyism also reflects a loss of balance between the dual imperatives of leisure and work incumbent upon Victorian gentlemen. The dandy is too relaxed, too visible, and consumes to excess while producing little or nothing" (199). Here occurs a divide between the middle-class gentleman and the Wildean dandy, a dualism Cather enacts by repeatedly contrasting "boy" with "man." She contrasts the relaxed Paul, who produces little or nothing, and the structured, "successful" men of Cordelia street. Paul is a "mere boy"; while his disposition is "the defiant manner of the boy's" and "his boyish mirthfulness." A "man," however, is quite a different person. On the street "where all the houses were exactly alike ... business men begot and reared large families of children ... all of whom were exactly like their homes, and of a piece with the monotony in which they lived" (263). The "young man" of Cordelia Street whom the neighborhood likens Paul to mirror "was of a ruddy complexion, with a compressed, red mouth, and faded, nearsighted eyes" (265): an unpleasant sounding gentleman. Yet, Cordelia street imagines him, unlike Paul, "a young man with a future" who works for a "chief" in the iron and railroad industry. Paul wants none of the capitalistic success of "the iron kings." Rather, he wants to hear their "legends," their "stories of palaces in Venice, [and] yachts on the Mediterranean" (265). He could care less about the kings; Paul "was interested in the triumphs of cash-boys who had become famous" (265).

The "boy" Paul has the same contempt for "men" of the classroom: "the prosy men who never wore frock coats, or violets in their buttonholes" (267). They never adorn their austere image with violets, while Paul splashes violet water on his body. Finally, the only acquaintance of any importance to Paul is the "wild San Francisco boy" who offers to show Paul the night life of New York City. The two click intensely: "the two boys went off together after dinner, not returning to the hotel until seven o'clock the next morning" (271). Paul traverses New York City, taking in the energy that only people like himself, the "cash-boys" and the "San Francisco boys" desire. Hence, Paul defies the strict societal codes for "masculinity" by not only his fashion sense but also by his passionate leisure life.

The "verbal mood" and "emotional aura" (in Cather's terms) of "Paul's Case" also have an undeniable sexual essence. Besides Paul's disposition, the passionate glitter in his eye "that drug does not produce," the language Cather

uses to describe his surroundings is clearly delineated. “Paul never went up Cordelia Street without a shudder of loathing” (263). This “every-day existence” is “but a sleep and a forgetting” for Paul. Cather uses *hopeless, sinking, defeat, ugliness, commonness, physical depression, odours, repulsion, colourless mass, and morbid* to describe Paul’s monotonous home. While Cather confines the description of this bourgeois mundanity to Cordelia Street, aspects of the passionate and theatrical world Paul yearns to enter, akin to the famous triumphs of the cash-boys, are scattered throughout the story. Cather uses *gay* four times; also, *airy, exhilarated, flourishes, suppression, charming, exotic, glistening, perverted, tempt, corrupt, thronged, fag, and fagged* charge the story with energy. Moreover, Paul, when in New York, “burnt like a fagot in a tempest” (270), which seems to describe the pinnacle of Paul’s secret world where he can play out his true sexual identity.

Although Cather’s language never directly describes sexuality, it creates a mood that signals the homosexuality of Paul. She writes, “In Paul’s world, the natural nearly always wore the guise of ugliness” (266). Paul’s world is Pittsburgh, a city of steel-like reality where his natural identity, if revealed, would wear the guise of ugliness. Paul cannot “come out” to a society unable or unwilling to accept his sexuality. Hence, both the rigidity of Cordelia street and Paul’s secrecy of his sexuality are at fault when we analyze his suicide. His passion should be able to transform his cut-out, “proper” relationships and insensitive surroundings in more just and loving directions. Instead, he gives in, hurtling himself in front of a moving train. Paul’s sexuality overcomes him. He “dropped back into the immense design of things” (274).

Of writing, Cather said: “Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present we must select the eternal material of art” (41). She evokes the sentiment that the present is gleaming and streaming; it stops for no one and yields no second consideration. But art is eternal material; it can capture an issue or idea and allow present critics to return to a given historical point to reconsider previous discrimination, like bias against homosexuality. Although Cather did not explicitly argue issues of gender equality, her implicit response is equally as forceful.

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## 4.8 Student Sample Paper: Duncan Raunio's "The Tragedy of Performing Gender in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*"

Duncan's paper is a gender analysis that uses feminist and masculinity studies as a way to explore the dynamic between Edna and Robert, the "secret" lovers in *The Awakening*. Duncan explores how Edna and Robert are trapped into performing heterosexual behaviors defined by a heteronormative society, when they might have homoerotic desires that doom their relationship from the start.

Duncan Raunio

Professor Karlyn Crowley

Literature and Writing

May 5, 20–

The Tragedy of Performing Gender in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

While there are many possible interpretations of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, perhaps the most common is that Edna commits suicide in the end due to her unrequited love for Robert Lebrun. This is of no surprise, as Edna tells Robert that "I love you ... only you; no one but you" (Chopin 132) at the peak of what would seem to be their secret affair. Edna seems to be completely enthralled with Robert, and her freedom through a life of sensuality can only be obtained by being with he who awakened her, so it seems natural, at least on the surface, that she is devastated when he decides to leave her in the end. With nothing to do but to go crawling back to her husband and demanding children, Edna is defeated. Unable to go on, she throws herself into the sea to die.

While this is a valid way of seeing *The Awakening*, it is perhaps overly narrow and superficial. By saying that Edna can only achieve her freedom through a romantic attachment to Robert Lebrun, one is implying that a woman can only achieve her freedom through attachment to a man and not by herself. Trying to get past the traditional view that a woman needs a man is where looking at *The Awakening* from a gender criticism approach can prove to be particularly helpful. In his essay "Gender Criticism and *The Awakening*," Ross C. Murfin states that one of the goals of gender criticism is to "criticize gender as we commonly conceive of it, to expose its insufficiency and inadequacy as a category" (224). He explains that many gender critics see gender as merely a construct of society, and that we are born into pre-existing notions of what "males" and "females" are supposed to be. By applying the ideas of gender criticism to *The Awakening*, the motives of some of the characters, most importantly Edna and Robert, become much deeper, as do the possible intentions Chopin had for her work. When one starts to examine what the "traditional" gender roles are for male and female, it becomes apparent that Robert and Edna exhibit behavior that is atypical, bordering on the homoerotic.

Indeed, Edna can be seen as a “metaphorical lesbian.” Robert, in turn, often displays homosexual tendencies. If one considers the possibility of Edna and Robert having homosexual tendencies, then their coming together seems less of a romantic passion than it is a confused search for understanding—understanding of sexual identity. While on the surface they are drawn together sexually because society tells them that they should be, on a deeper level they connect because they know the truth about each other’s struggle. By having them separate in the end, Chopin is saying that society is not ready for homosexual love to be accepted as normal behavior, much less as a “gender.”

Elizabeth LeBlanc explores the notion of Edna Pontellier as a “metaphorical lesbian” in her essay “The Metaphorical Lesbian: Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*.” What she means by this is not that Edna is a “tragically closeted dyke who dies because she cannot accept her orientation or because she has not ‘found the right woman’”, but rather she explores “the presence of lesbian motifs and manifestations” which allows one to “examine the strategies and tactics by which Edna attempts to establish a subjective identity” (237). Edna finds herself isolated from the group of “mother women” on Grand Isle, especially from Madame Ratignolle, who, when seen from the male perspective, is the ideal woman. Karen Simon explains how Edna finds Madame Ratignolle “incomprehensible” in some ways, especially when she does things like flirt with Edna’s father. Yet Edna still remains connected to her female contemporaries; she in fact shares a strong bond with them, but only as individuals. Edna seeks to break away from the traditional notion of femininity, but she also makes sure to not isolate herself from the women around her. It is through her associations with other women that she feels the most alive and inspired, such as the sensuous beach scene with Madame Ratignolle, or the many times that Madame Reisz plays piano for her. These interactions help Edna to define herself, and while she does not have any sexual encounters with any of the women, they lead her to the conclusion that a romantic life with a man will not satisfy the cravings inside of her.

If Edna can be seen as a metaphorical lesbian, then perhaps it follows that other characters can be seen in a homosexual light. In particular, Chopin’s depiction of Robert Lebrun raises many questions as to what his real motivations are. Perhaps he too can be seen as a homosexual character. Suzanne Disheroon-Green in “Mr. Pontellier’s Cigar, Robert’s Cigarettes: Opening the Closet of Homosexuality and Phallic Power in *The Awakening*” explores this often overlooked possibility in detail. She does so by comparing Robert, the

“homosexual male, who is figuratively emasculated by his heterosexual acquaintances” with Mr. Pontellier, the “overbearing, yet emotionally absent, traditional husband” (184). In her analysis, Disheroon-Green explains that Chopin makes the distinction between the heterosexual male and the homosexual through the “manipulation of phallic images” (184). As the traditional heterosexual male, Mr. Pontellier must show that he has control over his wife. He often “exerts his masculine supremacy over his wife ... while smoking a cigar,” which “serves as a phallic symbol, illuminating his patriarchal attitudes toward his wife” (184). This is in stark contrast to the more gentle personality of Robert Lebrun. The cigar can now be seen as an “emasculated image” when it is in association with Robert, the “single male figure in the novel who does not expect to be treated as a superior creature simply because of his masculinity” (184). Indeed, Robert is much more tender compared to Mr. Pontellier, and he is “effeminate and more comfortable in the beautiful world of women than in the smoke-filled clubs of men” (184).

This association with women is key to what makes him seen as a homosexual character. In *The Awakening*, we are told that “each summer at Grand Isle [Robert] had constituted himself the devoted attendant of some fair dame or damsel” (31). But what is important to note is that the type of women that he associates with were “married women, older widows, or girls too young to be considering marriage, but never women of the age to be seeking a husband” (Disheroon-Green 187), or, in other words, safe women. As a homosexual, he cannot identify with his fellow heterosexual male counterparts, so he creates friendships with the more sensually inclined women that he encounters on the island. Yet he is careful to choose whom he associates with, as he would not want his attachments to be mistaken as having a sexual agenda.

Mr. Pontellier seems to be on to Robert’s deviance from the heterosexual norm, and he often treats Robert as an inferior man. In the scene where Edna and Robert are returning from the beach, Mr. Pontellier treats Edna as a “valuable piece of personal property” (Chopin 24), and, doing so in front of Robert, he seems to be saying that Robert is “not enough of a man to look after her properly” (Disheroon-Green 186). Also, there is only one instance in which Mr. Pontellier addresses Robert as anything but “Robert,” again “indicating Mr. Pontellier’s superiority” (187). Lastly, Disheroon-Green points out that in “contrast to Mr. Pontellier, Robert smokes cigarettes, ostensibly because he cannot afford cigars; the effeminate male smokes the smaller, more frail counterpart of the cigar” (188).

If one then considers both Edna and Robert to be characters with homosexual tendencies, or perhaps characters who rebel against other aspects of heteronormative femininity and masculinity, the reason for their closeness is not a sexual one at all. It may be that they are actually seeing this struggle against gender norms in each other, wishing to become closer because they both understand what the other is experiencing. However, society demands that they be involved with each other sexually, and they seemingly submit to this at first. While they symbolically seem to be converging on some new form of sexuality, the fact they are still “male” and “female” separates them indefinitely, and they do not wish to be together in the way that society says they should be. This is why Chopin has them separate in the end; her society was not ready for this sort of deviation from the gender norms. By having Edna and Robert stay together, they would eventually have had to admit their true sexual preferences to each other. While she seems to be hinting at this in *The Awakening*, she could not have explicitly stated it without her book causing a scandal.

A concept that Murfin brings up in his summary of gender criticism is the notion that “it is also possible ... for women to read as men, men as women” (Murfin 227), and also that there can be gender to one’s writing as well. If one can indeed read or write from a gender perspective, could one then perhaps love someone else from the perspective of a specific gender? Could a man love a woman the way a woman would love a woman, and vice versa? Chopin may have been hinting at this by having Edna and Robert seemingly converging on one gender to become, at least, symbolic lovers. This becomes more clear in the light of the recent developments of gender criticism, and also now that we as a society are able to be more accepting of homosexuality in the dawn of more liberal times. While a deviant sexual lifestyle was not acceptable in Chopin’s time, it is much more “normal” today. Yet there is still much to find out about why and how we love each other.

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## 4.9 End-of-Chapter Assessment

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

In this chapter, we examined in depth the strategies for writing a paper on literature using feminist and/or gender criticism, which includes masculinity studies. The basic tenets of feminist and gender criticism, we learned, are the following:

- Feminist criticism focuses on the construction of what it means to be female—a girl, a woman. Such criticism can focus on the ways women are depicted in literature (primarily by male writers), how women writers develop female characters, and how women’s writing may differ in structure from men’s writing.
- Gender criticism, including queer theory, follows feminism’s lead by adopting the belief that gender is a social construction. Thus gender criticism examines what it means to be a man or a woman, while queer theory expands this by looking at LGBTQ issues in more depth.
- Masculinity studies embraces the notion of social constructionism of gender and focuses on the ways society defines what it means to be a man, which often forces a man to perform a particular masculine role that might be at odds with his identity.
- You were given the opportunity to see the feminist and gender methodologies practiced in these student papers, demonstrating the rich complexity of feminist and gender criticism.
- You learned about the importance of the writing process, including peer review and the strategies for conducting peer review. Many of you also participated in peer review for your paper.
- You wrote a feminist or gender analysis of a work of literature.

## WRITING EXERCISES

1. Freewriting exercise. Read “Sonnet 130” by William Shakespeare:

My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;

Coral is far more red, than her lips red:

If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;

If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

I have seen roses damasked, red and white,

But no such roses see I in her cheeks;

And in some perfumes is there more delight

Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know

That music hath a far more pleasing sound:

I grant I never saw a goddess go,

My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:

And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,

As any she belied with false compare. William Shakespeare,  
“CXXX,” in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (1609; Project Gutenberg, 2010),  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1041>.

2. Read through the poem several times. As you read the poem, jot down the stereotypes that Shakespeare uses to depict women, particularly woman as an object of beauty.

3. The poem is obviously ironic, painting a negative picture of his love to highlight her essential beauty. Even so, write down your attitudes toward Shakespeare's depiction of the woman. Does he embrace the very objectification of women that he satirizes?
4. Does the poem reflect a particular notion of masculinity? Define the poem's attitude toward masculinity. Does the very notion of a love poem force the poet to perform an accepted gender role?
5. How might a queer theorist approach this poem? Does this approach complement the feminist and masculinity interpretations? Or does a queer reading challenge conventional interpretations of the poem?
6. If you were to write a paper on the poem, what approach do you think would be most helpful to you—feminist, gender, or masculinity focus? Explain.

#### INSTRUCTOR SUPPLEMENT: CLASS EXERCISES

1. Have the students read Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants." The story is a popular one, so you will find it reprinted in many literature anthologies. Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants," in *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 211–13.
2. Once the students have read the story, have a general discussion about their interpretation of the story. Many students will miss the point that the male is trying to convince the female to have an abortion, so part of the class discussion might examine how the text guides us to this interpretation (if you are using the reader-response chapter in this book, you can bring in the idea of gap filling).
3. Ask the students to write down their opinions of each character: Do they like the characters? Do they sympathize with one character over the other?
4. Then ask the students to write down their opinion of Hemingway from reading this story.
5. Finally, ask the students to read Paige's paper that follows. This feminist paper is a more nuanced reading of the story—she critiques Hemingway's perceived negative attitudes toward the women, yet Paige finds in the story a redemptive quality. Do your students agree with Paige's assessment?

Paige Caulum

Professor Karlyn Crowley

Introduction to Literature

March 23, 20–

Understanding the Complexity of the Feminine Identity Through the Use of Ambiguity:

Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants"

Ambiguity plays an important role in Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants." Not only does Hemingway make the subject of the American couple's discussion unclear, but he also leaves readers uncertain about the girl's final decision. While it is widely accepted knowledge that the American couple is discussing the option of abortion, critics and readers continue to disagree over the girl's final decision. From a feminist perspective, the girl's indecision whether or not to have an abortion is representative of the struggle for women to determine a sense of female identity that is not based on biological or social structures that value males. Although many readers assume the girl submits to the American man's wishes and goes through with the abortion, a careful reading of the text reveals the significance of the girl's indecisiveness and Hemingway's use of ambiguity to understanding the girl's development. From a feminist perspective, the answer of the girl's final decision is important not only to the understanding of the plot but also to the comprehension of the female experience and perspective in a patriarchal society. The girl's decision is complicated by the tension Hemingway establishes between the roles of motherhood and patriarchy in the oppression of women. As a result, Hemingway compels the reader to not only determine whether or not the girl has the abortion, but also whether the decision makes her an empowered or an oppressed woman. The paradox Hemingway establishes between the potential oppressive consequences of both accepting or rejecting motherhood and the relation to masculine influence demonstrates the uniqueness of women's struggle to establish an empowered, self-defined feminine identity in a patriarchal society.

Initially, the girl does not perceive the ways in which men oppress the feminine identity. However, the girl realizes that the issue of her pregnancy is too important for her to simply comply with the American's requests to have an abortion. As the American man attempts to take control over the girl's reproductive capacities, the girl begins to recognize the oppression women experience from males. From a biological perspective, the existence of gender differences, in which "[t]he male body is distinguished by the penis and the female body by reproductive capacity" (Hird 7), acts as a way to oppress females. The biological importance of gender roles, in which "procreation is produced through an 'active' male and 'passive' female" (Hird 9) results in a passive feminine identity, as "women's role in reproduction comes to be considered the basis of feminine gender identity" (DiQuinzio 4). The girl's apprehension to have an abortion illustrates the impact of biologically determined gender roles. The girl recognizes the implications of having an abortion as she states, "And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible" (276), revealing that she acknowledges that "reproduction is part of a women's natural constitution" (Hird 9) and fears the consequences of rejecting this constitution in deciding to have an abortion. Biological theory of gender development "emphasizes the salience of the sexual aim to reproduce" (Hird 9). From this perspective, then, a "girl's only option for 'normal' social development is that she accept her allotted state by transferring her object desire to a man with which she will procreate" (Hird 9). As a result, the girl fears that having an abortion and remaining a childless woman would deem her as "socially undesirable, mal-adjusted, less nurturing, socially distant, and materialistic" (Hird 9). The girl's recognition of her impending exclusion from the feminine identity if she has the abortion is apparent as she claims, "once they take it away, you never get it back" (276). Furthermore, the girl begins to express her resentment that the American does not have to worry about the importance of motherhood for the female identity, as she states, "Doesn't it mean anything to you?" (277). The American's response of "I don't care anything about it" (277) illustrates how the feminine identity is based on the ability to reproduce, while the masculine identity is based on power and control. As a result, the girl recognizes the oppressive nature of the biological definition of femininity and realizes the need to escape this definition to form her own empowered identity.

As the girl struggles with the biological identification of women as passive, she begins to recognize the social oppression women experience as well. Initially, Hemingway's characterization of the girl seems to follow the social norms of the patriarchal society which the girl and the American man are a part of. According to feminist theory, "the social construction of gender has historically

resulted not only in difference but in inequality as well ... masculinity and femininity are not only different but also differently valued” (DiQuinzio 2). At the beginning of Hemingway’s story, the girl relies on this social construction of femininity to determine her role in society as she recognizes that “it is the demands of civilized society that constrain individual identification” (Hird 11). As the American man brings up the topic of the girl’s pregnancy, the girl is passive to the man’s wishes, “not even knowing her own mind, accustomed to following a masterful male for her direction in life” (Renner 28). The girl remains silent as the American makes his argument by claiming “It’s really an awfully simple operation ... I know you wouldn’t mind it, Jig” (275). In addition, the girl relies on the American to evaluate the consequences of the decision, as she asks, “And you think then we’ll be all right and happy” (275) if she has the abortion. The idea that women are considered as less than men in society is underscored by Hemingway’s characterization of the American as “the expert even on abortion, a uniquely female issue” (Renner 29). The American’s ability to make demands on an issue that is deeply connected to society’s definition of the female identity causes her to realize the oppression created by social determination of gender roles.

Hemingway’s use of ambiguity at the end of the story makes the reader determine the girl’s final decision and the consequences of that decision. Depending upon how a reader understands the biological and social construction of the female identity and the girl’s development throughout the story, the girl can be considered either an empowered or an oppressed female. Both theories of gender development result in an understanding of femininity as “less than fully human” (DiQuinzio 3). Despite the girl’s desire to escape the social and biological oppressive definitions of female identity, these definitions have conditioned her to react passively to male’s demands and, consequently, she “does not know her own mind and ... cannot articulate it to her male leader” (Renner 29). On one hand, the girl could be understood as an empowered woman that comes to reject this passive role and assert her own values. From this perspective, readers could ascertain that the girl determines to keep the child. Throughout the story, the girl begins to indirectly express her feelings towards the abortion and assert herself. As a result of the man’s pressure and the girl’s habit of complying with male demands, she states, “Then I’ll do it. Because I don’t care about me” (275). However, the heavy sarcasm in this statement reveals that the girl resents the oppression of the female identity by males. In addition, the girl gets up from the table they are sitting at and moves to the other side of the room, escaping the pressure from the American and “remaining in a position to maintain her own viewpoint” (Renner 32–33). For the girl, the American’s constant pleading to have the

abortion hinders her ability to reject the determined biological and social feminine roles and construct an aggressive female identity. Eventually, the girl asserts herself openly, saying, “Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?” (277). Through demanding that the American stop talking, the girl not only asserts “that she does not want to have an abortion and will listen to no more of his self-serving pleading for her to do so” (Renner 34), but she also effectively rids herself of his ability to keep her in her biological and social role as a passive female. In a final act of assertiveness, the girl does not allow the American to make her feel guilty about her decision to keep the child. After the girl has implicitly articulated her desire to have the child, the American “turns her sarcasm back on her ... as [he] says, ‘Do you feel better?’” (Renner 37). However, the girl triumphantly replies, “I feel fine.... There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine” (278). Through denying the American the ability to make her feel guilty about her rejection of biological and social norms of feminine identity, the girl is fully able to define herself and emerge as an aggressive female character. An understanding of the girl’s character development from a feminist perspective reveals the importance of the girl’s refusal of the American’s power over her in her process of creating a self-confident feminine identity.

Hemingway’s use of ambiguity, however, makes it difficult to determine not only the girl’s decision but also the consequences of her decision. While readers may interpret the girl’s refusal of the American’s demands as empowering in the sense that she rejects the social oppression of women by males, her acceptance of motherhood could be viewed in terms of the biological and social oppressions of motherhood. In order to create a feminine identity not based on traditional biological and social views of femininity, the girl has to reject male superiority. The girl’s rejection of male dominance is only possible through her refusal of the American’s demands to have the abortion. However, most feminist theories agree that female oppression is connected to mothering both biologically and socially. In a biological sense, the experience of motherhood is “grounded in the female body, unmediated by culture or language, and directly accessible to women” (DiQuinzio 10). However, a feminist understanding of this theory argues, “women’s role in reproduction comes to be considered the basis of feminine gender identity” (DiQuinzio 4). Social definitions of the role of motherhood also lends itself to the oppression of women, as “being a mother means possessing and exercising those attributes of personality or character and/or engaging in those activities or practices most closely associated with femininity” (DiQuinzio 10) in a society in which femininity is less valued than masculinity. In this sense, the girl’s decision to refuse abortion and accept

motherhood could be interpreted as her acceptance of the oppression of the biological and social constructions of female identity based on motherhood.

On the other hand, readers could interpret the girl's overall lack of assertiveness of her own values as her decision to comply with the American's demands and have the abortion. Hemingway's use of ambiguity is most apparent in his characterization of the girl, making it difficult to discern her own feelings towards the abortion. Throughout the story, the girl acts as the "classic portrait of the deferential female, without a strong identity, an accessory to the male, to whom she has been accustomed to look ... for support and direction" (Renner 28). Although the girl's plea for the American to "please ... stop talking" (277) is a moment of assertiveness, she is still unable to articulate clearly her values and attitudes towards having an abortion. As a result of the girl's inability to state her feelings to the American, many readers determine that she will "have the abortion in order to please and thus keep her lover" (Renner 27). From a feminist perspective, the girl's decision to comply to the American's demands and have the abortion, despite her own divided mind on the issue, renders her as a female oppressed by the masculine identity.

Despite Hemingway's reputation for treating female characters unsympathetically, "Hills Like White Elephants" focuses on the complexity of the female experience in a patriarchal society. Although Hemingway's use of ambiguity makes it impossible to determine whether or not the girl has the abortion or the consequences of her decision, the ambiguity actually allows for a unique understanding of the oppression of women in society and the feminine quest for an identity not based on social or biological oppression. Readers should recognize the importance of acknowledging and rejecting biological and social oppression of women in order for women to take control over the formation of their own identities. Hemingway's ambiguous ending causes readers to examine the complexity of establishing an empowered feminine identity within a male-dominated society.

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## INSTRUCTOR SUPPLEMENT: CLASS PEER REVIEW

1. Have students conduct peer review on one of the sample papers using the organizational peer-review guide found in [Chapter 10 "Appendix A: Peer Review Sheets"](#), [Section 10.3 "Chapter 4: Feminist and Gender"](#):
  - a. Place students in groups of three to four and have them reread the paper for peer review and fill out the guide sheet.
  - b. Have students discuss their feedback responses to the sample paper.
  - c. Have students list the major feedback they discussed.
  - d. Put the major issues on the blackboard or whiteboard.
  - e. Discuss these responses. Make certain that you let students know that any paper can be improved.
  
2. Plan to have your students conduct peer review on the drafts of their papers that they are writing in your class. Use the peer-review guide from [Chapter 10 "Appendix A: Peer Review Sheets"](#), [Section 10.3 "Chapter 4: Feminist and Gender"](#) and have them work in groups of three and do the following:
  - a. Bring two hard copies of their paper so that each member can read the paper, OR work in a computer lab where students can share their papers online. You may want to use the educational software that your campus supports—for example, Blackboard or Moodle—or you can have students use Google Drive to set up their peer-review groups.
  - b. Have two students focus on the first paper in the group. While these students are reading, have the other student read the other two student papers.
  - c. The two students should quickly fill out the peer-review sheet and then have a brief conversation about the strengths of the paper and ways the paper could be improved.
  - d. Move to the next student and follow the same process. Depending on the length of your class, you may have to reduce the peer-review groups to two students.
  - e. If time permits, ask the students to provide general comments—or ask questions—about the specific papers or the assignment overall.

- f. You may want to use peer review for each paper in your class.

## 4.10 Suggestions for Further Reading

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