GENDERING MEN :

THEORIZING MASCULINITIES IN AMERICAN CULTURE AND

LITERATURE

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Part II

Themes

CHAPTER 3. BIG BOYS DON'T CRY? MASCULINITY AND THE POLITICS OF EMOTION IN AMERICAN CULTURE

> As men in the 'Men's Movement' we recognise that we have to retrace our steps and rediscover in ourselves those traits which have been called 'feminine'…passivity, warmth, intuition, tenderness, love, EMOTION. We have to discover in ourselves that which has lain dormant for hundreds of years, that society has obscured and hidden until we act as robots -stiffly, automatically, coldly.
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> —South London Men Against Sexism (1974)

Traditionally, the world of emotions has been associated with women and femininity. Since masculinity has traditionally been defined as the opposite of femininity (Segal New xxiii), men and masculinities have been usually defined as rational and unemotional. Thus, a large number of masculinity scholars associate masculinity with emotional control. It is often claimed that men are actually *victims* as well of patriarchal masculinity, because it inhibits expression of men's inner emotional selves and thus makes them prone to multiple psychological and even physical problems. Indeed, much

contemporary research on men's emotions seems to have been directly influenced by the men's studies literature of the seventies, which, in line with feminist arguments, insisted that men also needed liberating emotionally. As Joseph Pleck and Jack Sawyer put it, "some of us are searching for new ways to work that will more fully express ourselves rather than our learned desire for masculinity" (95).

Many studies of literary masculinities, as Shamir and Travis (Introduction 1-2) elaborate, have provided similar arguments, claiming that American (literary) men prefer "freedom" and individuality to women, sexuality, and emotional attachments. Scholars like Nina Baym and Leslie A. Fiedler have read American culture and literature, especially through the nineteenth century, as illustrating men's flight from the sphere of sentiment. In twentieth-century studies of modernism, the code hero[116] has also been described as the strong, aggressive, and emotionally stifled prototypical "Real Man," while more recently scholars, as Shamir and Travis (Introduction 1-2) insist, have begun to refer to "American Cool," the

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[116] The term *code hero*, as Boker (307) reminds us, was originally coined by Hemingway's critics. Initially, it was employed by New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren to describe a person's (particularly a sportsman's) ability to display "grace under pressure." It has since been described as a moral code that involves courage, dignity, and honor when faced with athletic or military challenges requiring physical aptitudes.

contemporary male representative of the code of emotional restraint and disengagement.

While masculinity and emotions have thus been usually defined as intrinsically opposed, the present chapter sets out to demonstrate how the exclusive equation of emotions with femininity is a cultural and historical construction. This has two main implications. First, masculinity and sentimentality have not always been mutually exclusive. Second, what was culturally and historically constructed can also be deconstructed from socio-cultural and historicist analytical perspectives. Thus, the chapter analyzes the close, though often neglected, relationship between masculinity and emotion in American culture and history and, even more importantly, explores the political potential of emotions to transform existing socio-cultural relations and structures. More specifically, attention will be paid to the political potential of profeminist men's emotions to transform masculinities and gender relations. It is true that some men's studies and groups have focused almost exclusively on helping men explore and express their emotional inner selves, thus neglecting other socio-political aspects of masculinity. Little wonder, then, that a number of masculinity scholars (see, for example, Segal *Slow*; Robinson) have defined emotions as opposed to

social change in masculinities and gender relations. Drawing on the innovative work of several writers, however, I will attempt to challenge this binarism, defining emotions not as *preceding* political practice but *as* political practice, not *against* the social but *as* social. In order to illustrate this socio-political redefinition of emotion, I will analyze the political potential of profeminist men's emotions as part of the feminist struggle for social and gender equality. The chapter as a whole should also serve, therefore, to illustrate one of the main theoretical arguments put forward in chapter 2- namely, that (white heterosexual) masculinity is far from stable or monolithic. While it is undeniable that patriarchal structures keep oppressing women -as well as some (homosexual) men-, the fact that some (white heterosexual) men are actively and emotionally involved in feminism does indeed seem to challenge monolithic views of (white heterosexual) masculinity as being synonymous with patriarchy.

3. 1. The feminization of sentiment in American culture

Despite the pervasive and radical separation between masculinity and emotion in contemporary (Euro-American) culture, emotion has not always

been considered feminine. In her seminal text *XY: On Masculine Identity* (1992), Elisabeth Badinter (10-3) refers, for example, to the rise of male sentimentality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France and England. Badinter explains that the crudeness of the men of Henri IV's court and the men of the Fronde (1648-1653), both of whom diminished women and feminine values, was soon contested by the French *précieuses*, ladies "refined" in sentiment and language. French preciosity reached its height between 1650 and 1660 and became the first expression of feminism in both France and England. The *précieuse* was an emancipated woman who advocated feminist values. She defended, for example, a new model of womanhood which took into consideration the possibility of her social ascension and her right to dignity. She demanded the right to education and attacked marriage as the very cause of the institution of patriarchy. Challenging the authority of both father and husband, the *précieuses* rejected not only marriage but also maternity. As Badinter comments, "they advocated trial marriage and the severance of such marriage after the birth of an heir, who would be entrusted to his father's care" (10-1). The *précieuses* claimed their right to both freedom and love, and so they advocated a tender and platonic sentiment between men and women.

Challenging the patriarchal bonds between men and women, who married each other without love, the *précieuses* saw love as, first and foremost, the love of a man for a woman, rather than the opposite. As Badinter herself concludes in this respect, "by demanding of a man in love a limitless submission which bordered on masochism, they reversed the dominant model of masculinity, that of the brutal and demanding man, or the vulgar husband who believed everything was permitted to him" (13). Thus, the *précieuses* seemed to reverse traditional gender norms. A few men, the *précieux*, accepted the new rules. Although their number was small, their influence was remarkable. As Badinter (11) explains, they adopted a feminine and refined style -long wigs, extravagant feathers, band collars, chin tufts, perfume, rouge- which was copied by other (lower-class) men. Men who wanted to be distinguished now made it a rule to appear civilized, courteous, and delicate. Traditionally feminine values began to progress in the seventeenth century to the point of appearing dominant in the following century.[117]

The debate over masculine identity was even more explicit in England than in France (Badinter 12-3). In addition to their freedom, English

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[117] Although the *précieux* were originally aristocratic men, their influence extended to lower-class men over the eighteenth century (Badinter 11).

feminists demanded sexual equality, that is, the right to sexual pleasure and the right not to be abandoned when they became pregnant. England seemed to experience a significant crisis of masculinity between 1688 and 1714 (the period of the English Restoration), which entailed questioning the roles of men and women in marriage, the family, and sexuality. The meaning of gender and masculinity became the subject of a much heated debate. English feminists did not only ask for the equality of desires and rights, but they also asked men to be gentler, more feminine. Thus, the Enlightenment, in both England and France, brought about the "feminization of customs and of men" (Badinter 12).[118] As Badinter (12-3) elaborates, the Enlightenment represents a first rupture in the history of virility, and was the most feminist period of European history before the present day. On the one hand, manly values were being challenged, or at least not attracting much attention. War no longer had the importance and the status it once had and hunting had become an amusement. Young noblemen spent more time in salons or in

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[118] It is true, however, that the *précieux* were differently received in England and in France. As Badinter (12) explains, the image of the "feminized" man who adopted feminine behaviors aroused in England a fear of homosexuality that we do not see in France among those who despised the *précieux*. The "new man" of the English Restoration is portrayed as a pervert, as vain, petty, and bewitching as a woman. Women were pitied for having been abandoned by men and manly refinement was attacked. The English saw men's feminization as a direct effect of French fashion on English customs. "Certain pamphlets," as Badinter (12) concludes, "very soon saw a connection between the feminization of masculinity and betrayal, between traditional masculinity and patriotism."

ladies' boudoirs than training for war. On the other hand, feminine values were becoming central to the world of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. As Badinter herself concludes, "delicacy of speech and attitudes were gaining more importance than the traditional characteristics of virility…in the dominant classes, unisexism was winning out over the oppositional dualism that usually characterized the patriarchy" (12-3).[119]

The feminization of French and English culture would, in turn, give rise to the eighteenth-century sentimental movement in Europe. As conventional notions of masculinity and virility were being challenged, men began to adopt traditional feminine values, such as delicacy of speech, good manners, gentle behaviors -and emotional expressivity. This contributed, at least in part, to the emergence of the European sentimental movement, which stressed the importance of the individual's emotional state, encouraging men to explore -and express- their inner feelings. The movement, as Brian Vickers (ix) has noted, postulated, and therefore encouraged, an ideal sensitivity to -and spontaneous display of- virtuous

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[119] However, the 1789 French Revolution put an end to this development (Badinter 13). When women publicly demanded the right to vote, the Convention refused them this. The deputies, who had not known the delights of the *Ancien Régime*, reaffirmed the separation of spheres and sexual dualism. Women were asked not to mingle with men and their business. As Badinter explains, "reinforced by the Napoleonic Code and ratified by the ideology of the nineteenth century, oppositional dualism" became the hegemonic ideology for a long time to come (13).

feelings, particularly those of pity, sympathy, benevolence of the open heart as opposed to the prudent, rational mind. A number of philosophers and thinkers highlighted the relevance of men's sensations and feelings, which they saw as inseparable from true manly virtue. For example, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith emphasized the close relationship between man's morality and his emotional life, which he defined as "the sentiment or affection of the heart from which any action proceeds" (18). More specifically, Smith stressed the role emotions play in promoting moral sentiments like pity or compassion. In his view, emotions play a fundamental part in promoting "sympathy," which he describes as the emotion which men feel for the misery of others (*Theory* 9). Smith contends that we have no immediate experience of what another man may feel in any given situation. As he himself puts it, "though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers" (*Theory* 9). Clearly, our senses never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own self. Thus, it is by the imagination and our emotions only that we can form a conception of what another man feels. In Smith's view, our emotions -which he defines as "the impressions of our own senses" (*Theory* 9)- allow us to put ourselves in another man's shoes.

Thus, we come to conceive ourselves undergoing all the same sufferings, we enter as it were into his body and mind, and become to some extent the same person with him. In this way, we can finally form some idea of his feelings and sensations, "and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them" (Smith *Theory* 9).

In Smith's view, then, emotions are the primary source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, and hence of moral virtue itself. By our emotions, we come either to conceive or to be affected by what another man feels. Very often, emotions seem to be transferred from one man to another, almost instantaneously. Indeed, Smith contends that emotions are a central component of masculinity. Not even the strongest, most masculine man seems to be totally bereft of emotional empathy. In his own words, "men of the most robust make, observe that in looking upon sore eyes they often feel a very sensible soreness in their own, which proceeds from the same reason; that organ being in the strongest man more delicate, than any other part of the body is in the weakest" (*Theory* 10). Insisting further, Smith explains that man regards emotional empathy as "the greatest applause" and he is often hurt when he finds he cannot connect with another man emotionally. Men like to share their feelings with each other, and dislike emotional

coldness and distance from other men. They are often anxious to communicate to their friends both their "disagreeable" and "agreeable" passions. As Smith himself concludes, men "derive still more satisfaction from their sympathy with the former than from that with the latter, and…are still more shocked by the want of it" (*Theory* 15).

Influenced by these philosophical ideas, eighteenth-century literature embraced as well the main tenets of the sentimental movement. While it is far beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a detailed account of the form and content of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel,[120] it may be relevant to note here some of its main characteristics (Vickers xviii-xxiv). Usually, the sentimental novel focuses on the opposition between emotions and reason -and, hence, on other parallel dichotomies such as generosity vs. prudence and the belief in the pleasure of doing good vs. innocence exploited by unscrupulous power. Typically, the protagonist of the sentimental novel sympathizes with the sufferings and total disasters undergone by the other human beings he encounters. In describing an intrinsically benevolent and sympathetic protagonist, then, the sentimental writer also aims to move the readers, especially by providing them with the

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[120] In this respect, see, for example, Tompkins; Douglas; Vickers (xi); and Brown.

"sweet emotion of pity." So, the writer, hero, and reader of sentimental fiction often become the same generic "Man of Feeling" (Vickers xi, xiv).

Crucially, then, the sentimental novel often concerns itself with a "man of feeling," which seems to lend further support to the idea that sentiment and masculinity have not always been mutually exclusive. Even though the eighteenth-century sentimental novel counts some heroines, perhaps most famously Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, many of the major sentimental writers of the time relied on men as heroes and protagonists for their works. Though the recurrent association of masculinity with emotion might come as a surprise to contemporary readers, one should never lose sight of the fact that the philosophical bases of the sentimental movement, which would in turn inspire the sentimental novel, were founded by (male) philosophers such as David Hume or Adam Smith, whose works concern themselves -on occasions implicitly, and often explicitly- with *men's* emotions. Written at a time when women were still regarded as inferior human beings, these philosophical works paid little attention to women's specific emotions and needs, which were generally considered unworthy of discussion. Given the patriarchal biases of eighteenth-century philosophy, as well as its influence on the culture and literature of the time, it is little

wonder, then, that the eighteenth-century sentimental novel often focused on male characters and their emotions. That is, for example, the case of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), which is replete with sentimental male characters. In chapter XIV, for example, Harley, the protagonist of the novel, is deeply moved by the story of the poor mad woman, giving to her story the "tribute of some tears" (Mackenzie 151). Though Harley, the "man of feeling," is the source of most tears, all the sympathetic (male) characters in the novel, as Vickers (xxii) reminds us, are granted them. For example, the narrator yields "one cordial drop" to the memory of a good friend; the servant weeps at the parting; the father of the abandoned maid can only "burst into tears;" and an Old Edwards, half way through his sad story, "paused a moment to take breath. He eyed Harley's face; it was bathed in tears: the story was grown familiar to himself; he dropped one tear and no more" (Mackenzie 136, 138, 154).

While the eighteenth-century sentimental novel recurrently linked masculinity to emotion, the nineteenth century brought about a progressive feminization of sentiment. Most scholars seem to agree that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, American sentimentality was seen as exclusively feminine. Indeed, work on sentimentality, as Chapman and Hendler

(Introduction 15-6) have pointed out, seems divided both geographically and chronologically into studies of eighteenth-century English "sensibility," which recognize the centrality of the "man of feeling" and the relevance of male writers and philosophers to the cult of sensibility, and studies of nineteenth-century American sentimentality, which tend to gender sentiment as female.[121] Many scholars have identified the Industrial Revolution as one of the main reasons for the gradual feminization of sentiment in nineteenth-century American culture. In his seminal work *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (1996), sociologist Michael Kimmel (52-9) explains that the Industrial Revolution in America brought about a radical separation of spheres between the two sexes. There had always existed, admittedly, a division of labor between the sexes, from hunting to agricultural to these early industrial societies, on both sides of the Atlantic. However, what was new -and specifically American- were "the strictness and the degree to which women and men were now seen as having a separate sphere" (Kimmel *Manhood* 52). In the early part of the nineteenth century, American men performed some work around the home, such as grain

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[121] One of the few critics who has shown the links between British sensibility and American sentimentality is Philip Fisher, although few scholars, as Chapman and Hendler (Introduction 15-6) note, seem to have taken up his point that "Sensibility...cannot be easily differentiated from what I am calling Sentimentality," or his comparison between the affective patterns of Richardson, Sterne, and Rousseau's texts and that of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (94).

processing, leather work, gathering fuel, etc. However, virtually all these male household occupations were eliminated by the technological and economic changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution. Gradually, men left their small-scale, home-based jobs for the large-scale, industrial work of the factory. Thus, the casual conviviality of the workplace began to disappear in the new impersonal world of the factory system and mass production. As men became mere appendages to the machine, the workplace became increasingly crowded and dehumanized. Time and work discipline began to dominate. Increasingly, men had to deal with homosocial competition and peer pressure. As Thomas Drew explained, outside the home was the "turmoil and bustle of an active, selfish world," where a man has to "encounter innumerable difficulties, hardships, and labors" (qtd. in Kimmel *Manhood* 53).

As the workplace became harder, the home became softer. As men began to perform their work outside the home in the public sphere, the domestic sphere became entirely the domain of mothers and wives. Men ceded both responsibility and authority over household management. Gradually, women became responsible for childcare and the shaping of emotion and morality, acting as a "shrine for upholding and exemplifying all

the softer virtues -love, generosity, tenderness, altruism, harmony, repose"
(Drew qtd. in Kimmel *Manhood* 53). So, the workplace was progressively
masculinized, while the home became increasingly feminized. The home
became a balm to soothe men from the hardships of the working day. Men
thus began to increasingly rely on women to meet all their emotional needs.
While in the past men had relied on each other for friendship and emotional
support, same-sex tenderness and affection were now tainted by fears of
dependency. By the end of the century, those fears would be translated into
homophobia (Kimmel *Manhood* 56).

As the separation of spheres began to dominate in the early nineteenth
century, women and the domestic world thus came to be regarded as "the
institution of feeling" (Chapman and Hendler Introduction 2-8). Gradually,
then, the culture of sentiment became related to women's moral and
nurturing role in the private sphere of the bourgeois family. To justify this
spatial and emotional segregation, advice manuals for these newly
domesticated women invented the "Cult of True Womanhood" (Kimmel
Manhood 54). These manuals set out to describe women's moral and
nurturing roles as wives and mothers in the domestic sphere as the best -and,
in fact, only- way to true womanhood and femininity. In traditional

nineteenth-century formulations of domestic ideology, by both male and female authors, the home came to be seen as a feminine realm, where a woman reigned over the feelings of her children and husband. Written in New England between 1830 and 1840, popular texts such as *The Mother at Home*, *The Mother's Book*, or *The Young Mother*, to name but a few, all encouraged women to provide their husbands and sons with moral and emotional support at home.[122] For the man, then, the home became a "haven in a heartless world" (Lasch), where he could look for comfort after a hard day in the marketplace. The public sphere became a correspondingly masculine realm, a place of economic activity characterized by competition rather than sentiment or morality. In this way, then, the culture of sentiment became increasingly dissociated from masculinity and the public sphere.

The feminization of sentiment in nineteenth-century American society seems to have been reflected as well in nineteenth-century American culture and literature.[123] In *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), Ann Douglas has digressed at length and in depth on nineteenth-century

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[122] For a detailed list of works encouraging women to play a moral and nurturing role in the domestic sphere, see Cott (63).

[123] The issue of nineteenth-century sentimental and domestic literature is well-documented. A detailed analysis of the subject is far beyond the scope of this chapter, which is simply focused on analyzing (and rethinking) the traditional view of sentimental culture and literature as an exclusively feminine phenomenon. For a deeper analysis of nineteenth-century (American) sentimental fiction, see, for example, Fiedler (23-125); Hartman; Tompkins (122-46); Leverenz (135-204).

sentimental culture and literature, which she sees as clearly feminine. Douglas establishes an opposition between, on the one hand, canonical male writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, Cooper or Thoreau and, on the other hand, sentimental writers, mainly women, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Hale or Mary Lyon, to name but a few. The former Douglas defines as "serious non-commercial writers [who] wrote principally about men…engaged in economically and ecologically significant activities [and who] attempted to re-educate, defy, and ignore a public addicted to the absorption of sentimental fare." In Douglas' view, these male writers used styles and subjects -such as the forest, the sea, and the city- that differed from those of many of their contemporaries and, in so doing, focused on "values and scenes that operated as alternatives to cultural norms" (5). On the other hand, the latter group were, in Douglas' opinion, mainly women who concentrated on the conservative, anti-intellectual, domestically oriented "lighter productions of the press" (6, 10, 8). Written by and for women, sentimental fiction tended to focus on "feminine" themes such as female purity, morals, good manners, the home, the education of children, and the sanctity of the childish heart. From Douglas' viewpoint, then, sentimental culture and literature was, by and large, a feminine

phenomenon. Although Douglas sees both women and (clergy)men as the

main producers and consumers of sentimental literature, she is particularly

concerned with demonstrating the "feminizing" force of sentimental fiction.

In her view, sentimental literature, though practiced and read by women and

Protestant clergymen alike, was centrally engaged with representing, and

promoting, traditional nineteenth-century "feminine" values, such as

sentimentality, nurture, gentleness, Christian morality, feminine purity, and

motherhood and childcare (Douglas 13).

While Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs* (1985) contests many of

Ann Douglas' opinions on nineteenth-century sentimental fiction,

particularly Douglas' view of the sentimental novel as a minor and

conservative literary genre,[124] Tompkins, like Douglas, sees sentimental

fiction as exclusively feminine. Indeed, Tompkins argues that the fact that

sentimental fiction is female-authored helps account for the genre's

exclusion from literary history. In Tompkins's view, a long academic

tradition has developed that recurrently contrasts light "feminine" novels vs.

thoughtful intellectual works; domestic "chattiness" vs. "serious" thinking;

and, to sum up, what Hawthorne described as a "damned mob of scribbling

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[124] The controversy between Douglas and Tompkins over the political ideology of sentimental fiction will be explored in more detail in section 3.4.

women" vs. a few male canonical writers, unappreciated and misunderstood in their own time, competing against an army of second-rate sentimental women writers (125). Given that many women remain excluded from the literary canon even in our days, it is little wonder that important sentimental women writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe or Sarah Hale have long been dismissed as secondary novelists. In Tompkins's own words, the (patriarchal) "tradition of Perry Miller, F. O. Matthiessen, Harry Levin, Richard Chase, R. W. B. Lewis, Yvor Winters, and Henry Nash Smith has prevented even committed feminists from recognizing and asserting the *value* of a powerful and specifically female novelistic tradition" (123). Insisting further, Tompkins contends that the reasons for which sentimental fiction has been dismissed by its detractors, reasons which have come to seem unquestionable judgments, were put forward in an effort to eliminate the tradition of evangelical piety and moral values embodied by these novelists. In contrast to their worldview, twentieth-century scholars have thus equated "popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality, and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority" (Tompkins 123). Little wonder, then, that sentimental novels written by women in the nineteenth century

have been found responsible for many different cultural evils. Unlike Thoreau, Whitman, and Melville, who are celebrated as models of intellectual honesty and subversion, these women have been accused of whitewashing reality, of being unable/unwilling to represent the harsh facts of a competitive society, and of perpetuating an ideal -and thus unreal- world.[125] Questioning all these opinions, however, Tompkins goes on to argue that the popular domestic novel of the nineteenth century is a valuable intellectual document that represents women's specific perspectives on the nineteenth-century world. In her own words, the sentimental novel is "remarkable for its intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness" and remains "a monumental effort to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view" (124).[126] In Tompkins' view, then, sentimental fiction is

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[125] For example, in *The Sentimental Novel in America* (1940), Herbert Ross Brown complained about the "unmistakably feminine treble which dominated the opening chorus of American fiction" (322). More specifically, Brown accused sentimental fiction of evading, idealizing and/or whitewashing reality. Brown reminds us that America was founded on a "great national drama," which includes slavery and the violent "conquest of the continent." Instead of focusing on "the realities of this raucous period in which were being fashioned the sinews of a new nation," sentimental writers, Brown believes, kept evading reality and thus failed to "enlighten their readers as to the real nature of their civilization." Above all else, Brown denounces that "the most conspicuous failure of the sentimentalists was their inability to solve the irrepressible problem of slavery" (358-9, 367-8).

[126] In a similar vein, Susan Harris has set out to re-evaluate sentimental novels written by American women between 1840 and 1870. While sentimental American women's fiction has often been diminished and considered an inferior literary genre, Harris (59), like Tompkins, re-evaluates it, arguing that sentimental literature often served as a vehicle for women's rights and demands. While sentimental texts have often been interpreted as promoting female conformity to the traditional roles of mother and wife within patriarchy, Harris contends that it is possible to re-read them as encouraging a feminist vision, which was often strategically hidden. In her view, one must, therefore, pay careful attention to the "rhetorical" level of sentimental literature, examining "narrator/narratee contracts and the ways in which the text may play with

written by, for, and about women. It thus focuses on nineteenth-century America's religion of domesticity, and concerns itself, above all else, with "the story of salvation through motherly love." As Tompkins herself concludes, the sentimental novelists created a myth out of the ideologies at their disposal that gave women the central position of power in the culture (125).[127]

The view of emotions as intrinsically feminine can be found in studies of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century American culture and literature. Influential critical texts such as R. W. B. Lewis' *The American Adam* (1955) and Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) view both nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature as centrally engaged with self-sufficient, individualistic, male characters and protagonists. It is true that Leslie Fiedler, unlike R. W. B. Lewis, establishes

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cultural significances" (59). In so doing, we may come up with subversive feminist meanings of sentimental texts. As Harris herself concludes:

> Even the most genteel women's texts often feature vernacular and/or working-class characters whose voices implicitly (and occasionally explicitly) counter the dominant, essentialist definitions of female nature held by the middle-class protagonists and narrators. (60)

[127] Following Tompkins's opinions, much scholarship on nineteenth-century culture and literature has since gendered sentiment as female. Sentimental texts are assumed to be focused on an identification with a suffering female protagonist. For example, Shirley Samuels' edition of *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th Century America* (1992) claims to reread nineteenth-century American sentimentality as a national project, "in particular, a project about imagining the nation's bodies and the national body" (Samuels Introduction 3). However, except for Ann Fabian's essay on an antebellum gambling man, the collection, as Chapman and Hendler (Introduction 7) have noted, focuses on the influence of sentimentality exclusively on women.

some connection between masculinity and emotions in American culture.

For example, Fiedler acknowledges Samuel Richardson as a paradigm of the

sentimental novelist and admits the influence of the sentimental tradition on

Cooper, as well as Melville and Hawthorne. However, Fiedler, as Chapman

and Hendler (Introduction 2-8) remind us, points out that the homoerotic

male bond underlying most classic American literature is a defense against

the feminization and sentimentality of American culture. Moreover, he

agrees with Lewis that American literature is centrally concerned with

representing a lonely, individualistic hero who seeks independent

masculinity on the frontier, thus evading familial responsibilities and

emotional attachments.[128] Therefore, both Fiedler and Lewis end up

establishing a radical separation between American manhood and the

"feminine" sphere of emotions.

Similarly, in *The American Adam* (1955), Lewis argues that American

literature is centrally concerned with an anti-domestic "Adam," who tries to

evade familial and emotional attachments by escaping to the frontier.

According to Lewis, the American Adam is himself the direct product of

America's separation from Europe. As America became independent by

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[128] Fiedler's opinions in this respect will be analyzed in greater detail in chapter 4 (section 4.1).

breaking its historic bonds with Mother England, a new American hero was born who embodied the specifically American ideological values of independence, autonomy, individualism, and self-sufficiency. Elaborating on that, Lewis contends that the American Adam, who was born in the 1820s, may be defined as an innocent man living in a new world and dissociating himself from his historic past. The New Adam seems central to American culture and letters. As Lewis explains, the Adamic theme recurs in the fiction of classic American writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James and continues in the works of Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Ellison, J. D. Salinger, and Saul Bellow, to name but a few. So, the new customs and habits to be engendered on the American scene seemed to have been exemplified by the image of a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure, who is characterized as a stoic, individualistic, self-sufficient -and unemotional- male character. In Lewis's own words, the American hero is

> an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources…the new hero

> (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall. (5)

Influenced by these critical opinions, most contemporary scholars seem to keep dissociating American masculinity from the world of emotions. While the links between women and American sentimentality have been analyzed at length and in depth, the position of the sentimental man thus remains largely unexplored. Few scholars seem to have taken up the project of questioning the traditional association of reason and the mind with masculinity, and emotions and the body with women and femininity. Moreover, in constructing an alternative canon of women's texts, feminist criticism has also tended to ignore the use of sentimentality by canonical male writers. Feminist critics tend to forget that much of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), for example, focuses on the tragic relationship between a single mother and her daughter, and that such an overt representation of feminine emotions, particularly motherhood, has traditionally been regarded as a central feature of sentimentalism. By focusing on the construction of an alternative canon of sentimental women writers, feminist critics have thus tended to diminish the importance of male sentimentality in American literature. Paradoxically, then, feminist critics

have reinforced, rather than challenged, the gender binary. Thus, the origins of American sentimentality in the "man of feeling," as well as his influence on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American culture and literature, have been all but lost (Chapman and Hendler Introduction 7).

3. 2. Boys don't cry? Rethinking traditional (mis)conceptions of masculinity as unemotional

Although most scholars keep associating emotion with women, the division of emotion along gender lines proves to be an oversimplification. In this sense, one should stress that emotions cannot be considered exclusively feminine, although such a statement seems to run counter to several popular works in the field of masculinity and gender studies, which keep describing emotional men as "feminine" or androgynous. Pamela A. Boker, for example, has re-read the fiction of Melville, Twain, and Hemingway as illustrating their common struggle with androgyny and their repression of the "feminine." In her own words:

> Using the lives and fiction of Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Ernest Hemingway as examples, I will demonstrate that,

despite the apparently successful efforts of American male culture to control and displace female power, our male authors continue to struggle internally with the maternal/feminine in the form of their conflicting desires for separation from, and fusion with, the intrapsychic and symbolically depicted image of the mother. (3)[129]

However, most apologies of androgyny fail to recognize that emotions are never clearly gendered. While some masculinity scholars and groups urge men to recover their deep *masculine* instincts and drives,[130] other scholars (Spilka; Boker) have explored men's adoption of what they describe as *feminine* traits. Both seem to commit the same mistake: to believe that certain sexual attributes -such as aggressiveness, which has been usually considered specifically masculine, or compassion, which has been traditionally regarded as exclusively feminine- belong to one sex alone. For example, aggressiveness belongs to box sexes. It is also synonymous with survival, action, and creation. Its total antithesis is passivity and death. Its absolute absence, as Badinter (152-3) elaborates, can entail the loss of

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[129] Similarly, Mark Spilka in his influential work *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny* (1990) has analyzed what he sees as Ernest Hemingway's progressive adoption of androgyny as a central tenet of both his life and works, insisting that Hemingway's later fiction reveals the writer's "relaxation into *feminine* strands of feeling" (10; emphasis added).

[130] During their (therapeutic) sessions, several men's groups, for example, encourage their members to shout and/or cry to release their aggressivity, which is treated as an essential(ist) masculine emotion. See Segal (*Slow* 283).

human freedom and dignity. In effect, men can be caring and compassionate, just as women can sometimes be violent and aggressive. Even though love, nurturing, and tenderness have been culturally defined as *feminine*, men do not need to express the affect of the other sex in order to have access to what are indeed *human* emotions. Clearly, men and women are gendered beings. However, we need to learn to de-gender traits and behaviors, without de-gendering people. As masculinity scholar Michael Kimmel has concluded in this respect, "being a man, everything I do [including expressing my emotions] expresses my masculinity" (*Gendered* 266).

Challenging the traditionally exclusive association of emotions with women and femininity, a number of scholars have thus set out to analyze the relationship between masculinity and emotions in American culture. For example, in the introduction to their seminal edition of *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (1999), Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler explain that although sentimentality has often been relegated to the feminine domestic sphere, it is possible to "revise and complicate any understanding of sentimentality that occludes the meaning of…masculine affect" (Chapman and Hendler Introduction 2). Despite the

traditional cultural association between emotions and the feminine private sphere, Chapman and Hendler illustrate how there is space in American public life for sentimental men. They show how male involvement in the public sphere, traditionally characterized as the site of competition rather than feeling and compassion, often reveals some of the emotion and intimacy scholars usually restrict to the home. Moreover, the essays in the section entitled "Domestic Men" identify several historical links between masculinity and domesticity, showing how men have often participated in what has been described as the sentimental, domestic sphere. The essays in *Sentimental Men* thus demonstrate that men have always taken part in sentimental culture. By recognizing and analyzing the relevance of masculine sentimentality in American cultural history, then, the collection questions any simplistic gendering of sentiment as feminine, showing how the division between the public/unemotional/masculine and the private/emotional/feminine has long been problematized by contested discourses of race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (Chapman and Hendler Introduction 8). However, the aim of this collection is not simply to demonstrate how "big boys do cry," but also analyze the political significance of masculine sentimentality. In so doing, the book extends and

expands on the work done by feminist scholars on the politics of sentiment by examining the parallels, as well as the differences, between male and female sentimental discourses (Chapman and Hendler Introduction 8). In this sense, the book explores, for example, whether a privileged man can identify with an object of suffering in the same way that white women are said to have identified with racial Others, and whether that identification has the same political force -and limitations- as white women's politics of emotional empathy.

Challenging the critical master narratives proposed by influential scholars like Lewis or Fiedler, the collection attempts as well to complicate understandings of the American (white, middle-class, heterosexual) man as self-reliant and unemotional frontiersman by including men who do not conform to this hegemonic model of masculinity. The book thus analyzes the masculine emotional lives of African-Americans and Native Americans, working-class men and downwardly mobile men, businessmen and poets, gay men and family men from the past and the present. In so doing, it traces historical changes and continuities in the topic at hand. The collection is also concerned with "spatializing" male sentiment, locating it as easily at the

Seaside as at the Fireside, as readily in the halls of commerce as in the parlor. As Chapman and Hendler themselves conclude in this respect:

> Rather than see American "men of feeling" as oxymorons - exceptions to the hard and fast gender rules of sentimental culture- we consider them exemplary of the competing definitions of masculinity available in the…United States. (Introduction 8-9)

Moreover, the essays in the volume analyze sentimentality not just as a literary genre or rhetorical form, but as a practical consciousness that includes many cultural forms, including begging letters, temperance testimonials, portraits and photographs, philanthropy, and advice manuals. They also re-read the literary canon by showing how canonical male writers such as Emerson, Melville, or Norris can be read as "sentimental men."[131] Many of the essays do indeed illustrate how many of the cultural conventions associated with female sentimentality recur as well in the male cult of sentiment: the dying child; the destruction of families by death, slavery, poverty; and the unnecessary suffering of marginalized people. So, the articles seem to "supplement the feminist work done on sentimentality by treating men as producers and consumers of sentimental culture," rather

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[131] As Rodrigo Andrés (p.c.) has noted, Herman Melville, for example, wrote *Pierre* (1852), an (over)sentimental novel.

than merely exemplars of an unemotional code of masculinity. Thus, *Sentimental Men* is focused on the realization that masculinity and emotions are mutually constitutive discursive practices, which changes our understanding of both, as well as of concepts such as domesticity, the public sphere, and canonicity (Chapman and Hendler Introduction 9).

Following in the steps of Chapman and Hendler, other scholars have started to explore the links between masculinity and emotion in American culture and literature. For example, in the introduction to their recent edition of *Boys Don't Cry? Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.* (2002), Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis argue that we tend to stick to some of the most traditional notions of masculinity: "that it connotes total control of emotions, that it mandates emotional inexpressivity, that it entraps in emotional isolation, that boys, in short, don't cry" (1). According to Shamir and Travis (Introduction 2), feminist and gender studies have tended to divide cultural products into two traditions along the line of emotional expressivity: a feminine mode marked by effusion of sentiment and its representational conventions, and a masculine code, where affect is described negatively, "in terms of disavowal and repression or -in such instances where men 'betray' emotions- in terms of parody or

'feminization.'" Challenging most of these (mis)conceptions of masculinity as unemotional, Shamir and Travis's collection attempts to demonstrate how the division of sentiment along gender lines -or what Cathy Davidson has defined as the "affective geography of gender" (444)- proves to be an oversimplification. In this sense, the book analyzes the alignment of masculinity with emotion in numerous literary narratives, offering re-readings of canonical texts by Crevecoeur, Thoreau, Lowell, and Du Bois. It also re-maps the cartography of twentieth-century affect by exploring emotions in other kinds of narrative, including political theory, legal history, film melodramas, popular men's studies texts, academic discourse, and oral interviews. As Shamir and Travis themselves explain, their work thus attempts to contribute to the "emotional history of American masculinity" (Introduction 3). In conclusion, then, this recent study attempts to challenge the dominant view of masculinity as unemotional, a view that recurs in American literary, cultural, and gender studies. In its editors' own words, the collection tries to analyze "what happens when boys, indeed, do cry" (Shamir and Travis Introduction 19).

3. 3. The "soft male" as social phenomenon

Much of the recent theoretical work on men's emotions has resulted from what Elisabeth Badinter has described as the social phenomenon of the "soft male" (142-3). So as to be liked by (feminist) women, who began to question the *macho* role in the 1960s, some men have since started to reject their virility and adopt traditional feminine values and behaviors. As Badinter (142-3) elaborates, the "soft male" is one who of his own accord renounces male privileges, abandons all virility, has few -if any- male friends, and exploits his *feminine* side. The soft male was born in the Nordic countries in the 1970s, although he has subsequently appeared in many other countries. He has come to exert a special influence in those countries where his opponent, the "tough guy," has flourished the most, and thus where feminism has been the most militant: in the United States, Germany, and the Anglo-Saxon countries, much more than in France (Badinter 142-3).

In the last two decades, the soft male has become an increasingly popular social phenomenon, both in the United States and in several European countries. In 1977, the American journal *Psychology Today* conducted a survey on masculinity among 28.000 readers. Most of the men

who were interviewed answered that they wanted to be more expressive, sweeter, more lovely, and that they hated violence, competition, and sexual "conquests." In France, a questionnaire addressed to men about the qualities they deemed more important in a man got the following answers from them: honesty (66%), determination (40%), and tenderness (37%); after these, men valued intelligence, good manners, seduction, and, finally, virility, which only got 8% of the votes. As Badinter concludes from all this, "the dream of equality dismantled traditional masculinity. This was expressed by a rejection of masculine values and an idealization of feminine values" (144).

Since the late 1970s, then, many profeminist men, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, have begun to enroll on "men's groups," where they hope to learn new, gentler, more sensitive ways of being men. Men in men's groups, as Lynne Segal (*Slow* 282-4) explains, recurrently describe their happiness and satisfaction as they learn to be more open to, and expressive about, their emotions, closer to their families and closer to their friends as they look for new ways of loving, caring, and sharing. Above all else, these men, like many women describing their experiences in the early days of the feminist movement, seem glad to be more in touch with, and supportive of, each other. As a member of a British men's group explains, "I can

remember there being a whole period when there was a big high getting to know one another, sharing all these things" (qtd. in Segal *Slow* 283).

From trying to "feminize" themselves, express their feelings, and become more caring and loving with women and each other, many men, as Segal (*Slow* 283) elaborates, have moved on into therapy groups and co-counseling. Many psychotherapists assume that emotional energies can accumulate to dangerous levels and, therefore, need bodily release in the form of crying, angry physical activity, trembling, or even laughter. Thus, men in therapy groups are often encouraged to do most of these things.[132] Many of them go on therapy to try to explore their own "feminine" nature. They like displaying and developing what they see as "the gentler parts of ourselves, our spiritual and nurturing capacities, our ability to love" (qtd. in Segal *Slow* 283). Men in men's groups describe their own sense of gender oppression and, above all else, denounce the ways in which masculinity inhibits their emotional "feminine" side. As a member of the South London Men Against Sexism group explained:

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[132] Although these catharsis theories focus on a significant area of emotional function neglected by much mainstream theorizing, there are several problems with them (Middleton *Inward* 182-3). First of all, there is rarely some clear inner feeling waiting for release. The process of healing is a long unraveling of memories, thoughts, and emotions in which catharsis plays a role, which is partly why psychoanalysis acknowledges catharsis only as an incidental aspect of the working through of factors in the transference. Moreover, catharsis theories neglect the potential that emotions have for rationality, communication, and sociality.

> It's not all roses being dominant, taking the initiative, being the breadwinner, having to be a wage slave for forty years…[And] it's lonely because the other half of the conditioning is to separate us not only from women but also from men…As men in the 'Men's Movement' we recognise that we have to retrace our steps and rediscover in ourselves those traits which have been called 'feminine'…passivity, warmth, intuition, tenderness, love, EMOTION. We have to discover in ourselves that which has lain dormant for hundreds of years, that society has obscured and hidden until we act as robots -stiffly, automatically, coldly. (qtd. in Segal *Slow* 282)

Men seem to have been increasingly attracted to men's groups, where they can express their emotions openly and without shame. In Britain, for example, there were between twenty and thirty groups of profeminist men in 1975, who were predominantly heterosexual and involved in relationships with feminists. Ten years later, as Lynne Segal (*Slow* 284) explains, almost all towns in Britain, and even rural areas, had some men's group, with towns like Bradford and Leeds counting three or four such groups. Today, most Western cities have (at least) one men's group.[133] Despite their growing number, and despite their key role in promoting masculine emotional expressivity, men's groups seem to remain problematic in several ways.

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[133] In Spain, for example, most cities -Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Granada, Jerez de la Frontera, etc.- have (at least) one men's group. For a full list of Spanish men's groups, see www.hombresigualdad.com as well as www.heterodoxia.net

Recurrently, feminist women have denounced their apolitical nature.[134]

Many men in men's groups focus on exploring their emotional psyches and

their "feminine" side. Thus, these groups tend to remain personal and

individual, neglecting the need for political change. In this sense, Keith

Motherson, a prominent anti-sexist man, complained in 1979 that his men's

group was "too much of a men's club," promoted more male bonding, and

was not doing enough to "hassle [other] men to change" (qtd. in Segal *Slow*

287). It would appear, then, that changing men and masculinities is a

complex process which requires much more than men trying to get in touch

with other men and their emotional or "feminine" side. After all,

"feminizing" men may be contradictory in itself, for, as Segal elaborates, it

> may be seen as primarily a way of modernising certain types of
> contemporary masculinity, allowing men to experience some of
> the pleasures more traditionally connected to women's lives
> and 'feminine' pursuits, while nevertheless retaining privileges
> and power over women more generally, even if undesired.
> (*Slow* 290)[135]

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[134] Predominantly heterosexual, these anti-sexist men have also been confronted at their national Men Against Sexism conferences by gay men accusing them of being heterosexist and of doing little to fight gay oppression (Segal *Slow* 286).

[135] Similarly, Christopher Newfield argues that "hegemonic patriarchy can survive without male assertion" and thrives with male "feminization," also in the form of demands for masculine emotional exploration (66).

In trying to build caring and loving relationships with women and each other, then, men should avoid separating the public and private worlds. Despite the allure of the "New Man" ─a softer, more emotional, self-conscious sex object himself─, anti-sexist men need to ponder the social changes which are taking place in the commercial face of hegemonic masculinity, since the "New Man" may retain, however ambiguously, his hegemony over women and other subordinated groups of men (Segal *Slow* 294).[136] Redefining the power relations between men and women and questioning hegemonic masculinity entails both personal and social strategies. Though essential, personal change cannot alone serve to overthrow patriarchal gender relations. As Lynne Segal elaborates, challenging patriarchal masculinity

> cannot…simply be a process of men individually expressing their doubts and hesitations over, and their refusals to conform to, what they see as masculine ideals in favour of developing their 'feminine' side. Personal change is important. But beneath and beyond the possibilities for personal change lies the whole web of interconnecting social, economic and political practices,

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[136] Clearly, the "feminization" of men has an economic and commercial component. For example, the fact that men are increasingly encouraged to take care of themselves (by buying clothes and male cosmetics, going to the gym, etc.) is (at least partly) the result of late capitalism trying to widen its markets and number of consumers. By becoming not only producers but consumers themselves, men contribute to widening the scope of the late capitalist market, which has traditionally associated men with production and women with consumption. However, the fact of men becoming consumers does not guarantee, of course, greater gender equality.

> public policies, welfare resources and understandings of sexuality which actually confer power upon men. (*Slow* 294)

Despite their joyful descriptions of change, then, men in men's groups, again like some early feminist women, often reduce politics to individual struggles for personal life. With their personal/therapeutic focus, men's groups do not always pay enough attention to the public side of masculinity. Yet masculinity is so much a social as a psychological and individual reality. Masculinity, as Lynne Segal (*Slow* 284) elaborates, gains its force and appeal not only from internalized psychological aspects or roles, but from all the wider social networks which simply take for granted men's authority and privileges in relation to women.

While it is a fact that men's groups tend to focus on the emotional and individual side of masculinity, often neglecting its larger social and political aspects, scholars like Lynne Segal seem to set emotions and politics in an irreducible binary opposition, which Shamir and Travis (Introduction 6-7) have identified as one of the major fallacies of much scholarship on the politics of masculinity and emotions. This fallacy is described by Catharine Lutz as the "essentializing" approach to emotion, that is, the assumption that emotions are internal psychic or psychobiological energies, radically

separated from society and language. In their landmark work *Inventing the Psychological* (1997), Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog have analyzed some of the main problems of this approach, showing how seemingly "internal" emotions are, in fact, constructed and naturalized by the mechanisms of power that seem to be "external" or alien to them. Moving beyond the traditional schism between emotions and society/politics, the next sections will thus attempt to demonstrate how emotions and socio-political change may -and should- be seen as complementary, rather than opposed. After all, the personal, as feminism has shown, is also political. Thus, I will be arguing that profeminist men's personal/emotional experiences might also enhance the political transformation of masculinities and gender relations.

3. 4. Emotion *versus/as* social change: introducing the debate

The view of emotions as socially and politically transformative has been the subject of a long -and ongoing- debate. Several scholars appear to be deeply suspicious of associating emotion with socio-political transformation. Many have indeed called into question the political use of emotions as resistance, claiming that emotions often promote conservatism and containment, rather

than subvert the hegemonic social order. According to several scholars, then, the view of emotions as leading to social transformation and political change remains (at least) open to questioning. For example, Lauren Berlant's influential work on pain and political identity has problematized, as Shamir and Travis (Introduction 9) remind us, the political use of emotion as a challenge to prevalent social structures. Berlant has explored the emergence in the United States of a politics rooted in universalized pain and suffering, used to promote identification through empathy. In Berlant's view, such a sentimental politics restricts examples of social disempowerment to a supposedly pre-ideological realm of feeling, assuming that the pre-ideological can challenge existing institutions. Indeed, sentimental politics thwarts its own political goals since the emphasis on universal, pre-ideological feeling allows a "civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy" to substitute for the "ethical imperative toward social transformation," and the privatized narrative of suffering, pain, and survival -or *ressentiment*, to borrow from Nietzsche's terminology- comes to replace public action and policies toward social freedom (641). As Shamir and Travis conclude from all this, Berlant is "concerned that a politics based on the recovery and articulation of feeling can fortify rather than dissolve

distinction and result in stasis rather than promote social transformation"
(Introduction 9).

Literary criticism has also called into question a direct
correspondence between emotional release and socio-political change.
While acknowledging the links between sentimentality and the politics of
antebellum reform, Saidiya V. Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) has
revealed, for example, how emotions and sentiments often promoted fear
and subjection, rather than social transformation. In her own words, "rather
than bespeaking the mutuality of social relations or the expressive and
affective capacity of the subject, sentiment…facilitated subjection,
domination, and terror precisely by preying upon the flesh, the heart, and the
soul" (5). In a similar vein, Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American
Culture* (1977) has shown how the nineteenth-century feminine influence of
sentimental culture and literature helped to perpetuate several forms of male
hegemony it supposedly criticized. In Douglas's view, nineteenth-century
American women were clearly oppressed. More often than not, women's
roles in nineteenth-century America were confined to those of mother, wife,
and daughter within a male-dominated culture. However, she insists that the
influence women exerted in turn on their society was not always positive.

Women themselves often proved oppressive in several respects. In Douglas'
own words, "the cruelest aspect of the process of oppression is the logic by
which it forces its objects to be oppressive in turn, to do the dirty work of
their society in several senses" (11).

Insisting further, Douglas comments that to look at the victims of
oppression simply as martyrs or heroes, however heroic and martyred as
they often were, oversimplifies the complex phenomenon of sentimental
culture and literature and helps perpetuate "the sentimental heresy" (11). By
the "sentimental heresy," Douglas means the worst aspects of sentimental
culture, such as its manipulation of nostalgia, conservatism, and dishonesty,
among others (12). Sentimentalism is a complex, and often contradictory,
phenomenon that asserts that the values a society's activity denies are
indeed the ones it cherishes. In dealing with the phenomenon of "cultural
bifurcation," then, sentimentalism, as Douglas elaborates, often resorts to
the manipulation of nostalgia. Sentimentalism provides a way to contest a
power to which one has already in part capitulated, "it is a way of dragging
one's heels" (12). So, it usually proves dishonest. For example, many
nineteenth-century Americans in the Northeast welcomed and celebrated
economic expansion, urbanization, and industrialization, which they saw as

the greatest good. Sentimentalists did often acknowledge that the pursuit of these "masculine" goals meant damaging or losing another good, one they increasingly associated with the "feminine" ideal. However, their regret was designed not to interfere with the advancement of capitalism. The minister and the lady, whom Douglas describes as the two main representatives of nineteenth-century sentimental culture and literature, were appointed by their society as the defenders of sensibility and adopted the position of "contestants in a fixed fight." As Douglas herself concludes, "they had agreed to put on a convincing show, and to lose. The fakery involved was finally crippling for all concerned" (12).

So, Douglas concludes that sentimentalism did not challenge the hegemonic social order, but contributed to its perpetuation. The sentimentalization of theological and secular culture was a direct product of the "self-evasion" of a society both focused on capitalist expansion and troubled by its consequences. The need for "self-rationalization" was enormous in a country transformed so rapidly into industrial capitalism with so little cultural context to control or question its course. In this context, sentimentalism offered the "inevitable rationalization of the economic order" (Douglas 12). America, centered on huge economic and social

changes, became a secular country at the same time as its European counterparts. However, America lacked the means they possessed to create substitutes. American culture, younger and less developed than that of any European country, had not yet formed sufficiently rich and varied secular traditions to serve as channels of its ongoing cultural and intellectual life. America lost its male-dominated theological foundations without immediately gaining a feminist ideology -or a properly modernized religious culture. In Douglas's view, then, the tragedy of nineteenth-century northeastern society is not the downfall of Calvinist patriarchal structures, but rather the failure of a feasible, sexually diversified culture to replace them. "Feminization" promoted not only the loss of the finest values contained in Calvinism, but the perpetuation of male hegemony in different ways. The triumph of the "feminizing," sentimental forces thus limited the possibilities for change in American culture. As Douglas herself concludes, "sentimentalism, with its tendency to obfuscate the visible dynamics of development, heralded the cultural sprawl that has increasingly characterized post-Victorian life" (13).

Even though the direct correspondence between sentimental culture and socio-political change thus seems open to questioning, Douglas's views

have not gone completely unchallenged. Much scholarship has since questioned her association of nineteenth-century sentimental culture and literature with social and political conservatism, showing how sentimentalism was often used to subvert the hegemonic social order. In her landmark text *Sensational Designs* (1985), Jane Tompkins, for example, has argued that although many scholars have accused sentimental novelists of evading their socio-political reality, sentimental works offer a "devastating" critique of American society (124). In Tompkins's view, the work of the sentimental writer becomes a political tool that both represents and attempts to influence the social values of its time. Focusing on the famous episode of the death of little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-2), which is often cited as the epitome of Victorian sentimentalism, Tompkins challenges the widespread view that little Eva's death, like every other sentimental tale, is full of emotion but has no social or political effects.

Traditionally, the death of little Eva, who clearly voices Stowe's own defense of abolitionism, has been read as the death of abolitionism itself. Nevertheless, Tompkins contends that the death of little Eva has a strong social and political component. Like the story of Christ's death, the episode of little Eva's death represents a philosophy, as much religious as political,

in which the pure and the powerless die to save the powerful and corrupt and, in so doing, "show themselves more powerful than those they save" (Tompkins 127-8). In Tompkins's opinion, Stowe's novel establishes a set of parallels between different realms -such as the social and spiritual, public and private, theological and political- and, through the emotional impact of its representations, attempts to move the whole American nation toward the abolitionist vision it defends. The language of tears and the death of little Eva may seem useless because both the tears and the redemption that they represent belong to a conception of the world that is now usually considered old-fashioned. Since most modern readers regard political and economic facts as primary, it is difficult for them to understand a novel that emphasizes religious conversion as the necessary precondition for social change in race relations. However, Tompkins (132) contends that, in Stowe's view of what such change entails, it is the modern perspective that is naïve. The political strategies that constitute effective social action for us, she regards as secondary, mere appendages to the larger global policies that led to the slave system in the first place. So, Stowe believes that the downfall of the slave system does not (only) require political and economic arrangements, but rather a whole "change of heart" (Tompkins 132).

Reality, in Stowe's worldview, cannot be changed by manipulating the physical or socio-political environment; it can only be transformed by changing the spirit because "it is the spirit alone that is ultimately real" (Tompkins 132). For Stowe, then, the end of slavery requires a fundamental transformation of individual hearts and moralities, to which the sad episode of little Eva's death attempts to contribute. Though apparently apolitical, then, Stowe's novel, as Tompkins (146) has concluded, is social, political, and global.[137]

Tompkins is not alone in defending the political component of sentimentality. Several other feminist and queer thinkers have similarly emphasized the potential of emotions for socio-political action and community-building. For example, American feminist scholar Miranda Fricker has stressed the importance of feelings in the women's movement, insisting that feminism is centrally concerned with recovering women's emotions and subjective experiences, which had long been silenced by patriarchy. Fricker has also argued how anger is a highly political emotion which contributed to the emergence and consolidation of the feminist

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[137] It is true, as Tompkins herself admits, that history did not always take the course these writers suggested. Nevertheless, it was not, as some scholars have suggested, because they were not political, but simply because they were not always persuasive enough (Tompkins 141).

struggle against patriarchal oppression in the United States. In Fricker's view, then, emotions "are not only an expression of the world, but also active participants in how the world is shaped" (18). Similarly to the efforts of thinkers like Fricker to include emotion in the feminist political agenda, American queer scholars such as Jose Esteban Muñoz or Carolyn Dinshaw, among many others, have underlined the centrality of emotion to queer histories, as well as its potential for socio-political action and community-building. For example, in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (1999), Dinshaw has posited the existence of trans-historical emotions linking, in part, pre- and post-modern queer communities. While Dinshaw admits that it is impossible to establish a direct correspondence between past and present queer communities,[138] she argues that it is possible to talk about *partial connections* between medieval and postmodern queer groups ─namely, "queer relations between incommensurate lives and phenomena -relations that collapse the critical and theoretical oppositions between transhistorical and alteritist accounts, between truth and pleasure, between past and present, between self and

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[138] After all, concepts such as *queer* and *community* are themselves multifaceted and indeterminate, as they have always been culture-specific and context-bound. In Dinshaw's own words, "these terms that queer theory has highlighted all point to the alterity within mimesis itself, the never-perfect aspect of identification" (35).

other" (*Getting* 35). In Dinshaw's view, such *partial connections* between past and present-day queer communities are formed thanks to shared emotions and affects. Old and new queer communities are thus linked by the transhistorical aspects of same-sex desire and affect. As she herself concludes, "queer histories…are constituted by such affective relations across time" (*Getting* 2). For example, Dinshaw analyzes ringing accusations of sodomy among heretics as well as among orthodox Christians, the possibly quite wily deposition of a male transvestite prostitute, and the homoerotic attachments between some of Chaucer's pilgrims, all in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, alongside obscure archival work of Michel Foucault, the gay and queer movements in the late twentieth century in the United States, and homosexuality in the 1994 blockbuster movie *Pulp Fiction*. Despite significant historical changes in the meanings surrounding homosexuality, Dinshaw argues how, very often, the emotional conflicts affecting homosexuals in medieval England turn out to be strikingly similar to those of twentieth-century American homosexuals. For example, twentieth-century gay groups, like their medieval counterparts, seem to be subject to contradictory feelings of pride and guilt, self-affirmation and self-hatred, visibility and invisibility. Above all else,

contemporary homosexuals, again like medieval sodomites, seem to be attracted to community-building. By sharing their feelings and experiences with each other, contemporary homosexuals strive for self-acceptance, as well as mutual emotional supportiveness. And the latter is, of course, a central component of political coalitions, "those postmodern communities gathered in the United States today around specific causes" (Dinshaw 54). In conclusion, then, Dinshaw sees emotions as a central aspect of both pre- and post-modern communities and political coalitions, particularly those formed by homosexual men and women.

Like Dinshaw, Audre Lorde, who describes herself as a black lesbian feminist woman writer (and, recently, as a victim of cancer), has always defended the political potential of emotions, especially to fight sexism, racism, homophobia, and other types of social oppression. For example, in *Sister Outsider* (1984), Lorde has defended the view of anger as a highly political emotion.[139] Distinguishing between different types of emotions, Lorde claims that hatred is the fury of those who oppose progress and change and its object is death and destruction; anger, on the other hand, is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change. In her own

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[139] I remain indebted to David L. Eng (Carabí and Armengol *Debating*) for this realization.

words, hatred is "an emotional habit or attitude of mind in which aversion is coupled with ill will," while anger is best described as "a passion of displeasure that may be excessive or misplaced but not necessarily harmful" (152).[140] While the former has a negative level (it destroys), the latter, used, does not destroy but shows how individuals are brought together as a group. Because anger has to do with the ways in which emotion is brought to the question of power abuse and injustice, anger has a political component.[141] In Lorde's own words, "my response to racism is anger…women responding to racism means women responding to anger…I have used learning to express anger for my growth. But for corrective surgery, not guilt" (124). Insisting further, Lorde explains that every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against all those forms of oppression, personal and social, which brought that anger into being. Used with precision, anger can

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[140] In the same chapter, Lorde distinguishes between other emotions, such as *suffering* and *pain*. The former she defines as "the nightmare reliving of unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain" (171), while the latter she describes as "an event, an experience that must be recognized, named, and then used in some way in order for the experience to change, to be transformed into something else, strength or knowledge or action" (171). While suffering is a seemingly inescapable cycle, pain has a political potential, since it has the "power to fuel some movement beyond it" (172).

[141] Kant also argues that at least one form of anger, the "desire for vengeance," is similar to "appetite for justice" (137). Similarly, Carol Tavris insists on the reciprocal relationship between emotion and reason, claiming that rage is crucial to launch new political movements, since it urges people to unite and begin to understand how change might be possible. As Middleton (*Inward* 205) explains, she emphasizes the political component of anger because she fears that, in a culture where therapy replaces politics, anger may become an end in itself, given the common therapeutic (mis)conception that inner feelings are one's authentic and individual inner being and need full expression, no matter the social relation in which one is involved.

thus become a powerful source of energy for progress and change. Anger is replete with information and energy. When expressed and translated into action in the service of our hopes and our future, anger is "a liberating and strengthening act of clarification" (Lorde 127). As Audre Lorde herself concludes:

> The angers of women can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth…My anger has meant pain to me but it has also meant survival. (131-2)

It would appear, therefore, that emotions have a significant political potential. Little wonder, then, that Raymond Williams (*Marxism*) has described "structures of feeling" *as* sites of social change. In other words, Williams, as Peter Middleton (*Inward* 205) has noted, defines feeling not *against* thought but *as* thought, not as *preceding* the social but *as* social. Williams uses the term "structure of feeling" to describe what happens when a new group emerges to question the existing social order. The group comes together thanks to "the deep community that makes communication possible," and its structure of feeling is formed by that deep community, even if it is not aware of itself, because it "is actually what is being lived,

and not only what is thought is being lived." Williams's "structure of feeling" is thus a state of unfinished and open social relations still incapable of reflexive self-comprehension and self-assessment. It is "a structural formation at the very edge of semantic availability" due to its difference from the "official or received thought of a time" (Williams *Marxism* 134). So, the structure of feeling becomes the area of incomplete articulation, and a form of mediation between experience/subjectivity and language. In his own words, "the peculiar location of a structure of feeling is the endless comparison that must occur in the process of consciousness between the articulated and the lived." The zone consists of "what is not fully articulated, all that comes through a disturbance, tension, blockage, emotional trouble" (Williams *Marxism* 167, 168). Williams insists that emotion occupies a temporal present, an emergent moment before the processes of classification and definition of cultural products become dominant and are fixed. So, Williams is particularly interested in feeling's "embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange," a phase in which it is still a process and thus able to show change. However, emotion needs not be unspeakable or private -it can slowly emerge from the "zone of incomplete articulation" through the construction of new social movements and their

initial phases of self-comprehension and self-assessment in new artistic movements.

Williams has thus shown how we live in social structures of emotion. Emotion is far more than sensitivity or the visible display of bodily affect. Williams's structures of feeling are below the level of self-conscious reflection, but we nonetheless learn and invest in them. Emotion does not depend for its existence on self-awareness, although it has far-reaching social and political consequences. Commenting on all these ideas, Middleton has concluded that, for Williams, "the moment-by-moment consequences of interdependence are registered by emotion. We negotiate them through the reflexive activities of language in many ways" (*Inward* 211).[142] Williams's concept of "structures" of feeling, then, suggests that emotion is an inter-subjective feeling that transcends individuals. For him,

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[142] Of course, Raymond Williams's theory, despite its innovative views, has not gone completely unchallenged. For example, Middleton (*Inward* 206-7) argues -and I would agree- that Williams does not clarify if emotion is simply pre-reflective consciousness or some type of inter-subjective bond, and if it is, how it works. Moreover, Williams's use of the term "structure of feeling" remains ambiguous and this ambiguity is exploited in its widespread current usage to mean anything social that is not specifically recognizable as a social structure, like a company or a political party. As Middleton elaborates:

> It implies both an aggregative structure resulting from the multiple contributions of many individual feelings and, more significantly, the organization by this general structure of certain relevant feelings experienced by individuals into socially active processes. One process is bottom up, the other top down, so they seem mutually exclusive, but it is likely that both poles of this opposition were meant to be included in Williams's concept. (*Inward* 207)

social and political change is "changes in structures of feeling" (Williams *Marxism* 128-35).

3. 5. The political potential of profeminist men's emotions to transform masculinities and gender relations

After exploring the different views on the (in)ability of emotions to transform social relations, it should come as no surprise that the socio-political potential of emotions to transform masculinity and gender relations has as well become the subject of a much heated debate. While some insist that emotions can promote a radical social change in the traditional understanding of masculinity, others are deeply suspicious of their capacity to change men's lives and gender relations in any significant ways. In this latter respect, much contemporary scholarship (see, for example, Shamir and Travis Introduction 5-7; Robinson 1-15) has warned against the widespread belief that every oppositional position is necessarily a liberating one, that every "liberation" of masculine emotion would produce the desired political effect. In this sense, one should bear in mind that many conservative texts on masculinities ask men to acknowledge and get in touch with their

emotions. From Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man* (1974) to Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1990), many masculinity scholars advocate the release of men's emotional experiences, whether by asking men to embrace the "feminine" side of their selves, as Farrell advises, or by creating a space for sharing feelings with other men, as in Bly's mythopoetic movement. Very often, then, the narrative of masculinity as emotional control functions as a way to recover the threatened position of hegemonic masculinity through self-proclaimed victimization. That is, indeed, the view held by both David Savran and Sally Robinson, who have shown how for some American white, heterosexual, middle-class men, a metaphorical emotional wound has come to represent the "loss" of social privilege. Thus, American masculinity can once again be described as threatened and beset.[143]

It seems, then, that the direct equation of masculine emotional release with greater gender equality is anything but unproblematic. Since the 1970s, a U.S. movement for "male liberation," indirectly inspired by feminism, has gained momentum among white, heterosexual, middle-class men. Influenced by texts such as Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man* (1974) or Herb Goldberg's *The Hazards of Being Male* (1976), this movement

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[143] This argument has already been presented in more detail in chapter 2 (section 2.6).

represents men as victims, not of women or feminism, but of their power, and of patriarchy itself. Central to this self-proclaimed male victimization is the idea that men are denied emotional expressiveness. Men are, therefore, encouraged to release their painfully blocked emotions. However, the therapeutic value of male release, as Sally Robinson (1-15) indicates, aims at promoting individual growth, and is not usually translated into the social and the political spheres. In other words, the "unblocking" of tears and men's emotions tends to result in the psychological-therapeutic "standing in for" political change. Thus, the release of emotions leaves an empty and ultimately de-politicized "liberated man," who finally blocks the pursuit of social equality between men and women (Robinson).[144] Instead of bringing about social change, then, masculine emotional release often ends up promoting conservatism and social stagnation. By focusing on the exploration and expression of their emotional inner selves, men can forget about larger/exterior/social issues, including gender inequality. Obsessed with their intra-psychic emotional lives, men can thus avoid hearing women's needs and pressing demands for greater social equality.

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[144] Although in the United States "male liberation" remains a powerful social movement, the emotional "soft" male has proved a failure in many countries. Several Nordic feminists, such as Merete Gerlach-Nielsen, have already voiced their deep dissatisfaction with what they see as a passive and fragmented male. As Badinter explains, "even the most responsive to gentleness on the part of men want nothing more to do with these men, who are ersatz traditional women" (152).

While critics of sentimentality like Robinson thus continue to take it to task for not fulfilling its social and political responsibility, several profeminist scholars, perhaps most notably Peter Middleton (*Inward*) and Victor J. Seidler (*Unreasonable*), have emphasized the relevance of profeminist men's emotional release to socio-political change in masculinity and existing gender relations. It has been argued that men hide their feelings of dependence and vulnerability as a strategy to withhold information which might pose a threat to their power. For example, expressing their feelings of vulnerability, men might give some advantage to a potential competitor in the marketplace. As Middleton explains, "to know yourself as a man is to know that other men may enslave or destroy you. Masculinity does need to deny emotion. Otherwise it would have to confront the fear it wants to forget" (*Inward* 215). By releasing their emotions, then, profeminist men might undermine one of the main rules of patriarchal masculinity, which associates manhood with power and rationality and inhibits men's expression of their inner feelings of dependence and vulnerability.

Male emotional release might contribute not only to challenging patriarchal masculinity but also traditional gender relations. In this sense, one should bear in mind that men's presumably unemotional/rational

masculinity has often proved oppressive of women. For example, women were repeatedly denied fundamental rights such as the vote or the access to university education because of their supposedly emotional/irrational nature. Since rationality, associated with masculinity, has traditionally been considered superior to emotions, related to women and femininity, women have long been considered emotional, irrational and, as a result, inferior beings (Seidler *Unreasonable*). Questioning the gendered stereotype of women as intrinsically emotional and of men as unemotional might thus help challenge the old sexist view of the two sexes as "complementary." Such a view has a detrimental effect on both sexes, as it keeps estranging men from the "feminine" world of emotions and the domestic sphere, and precluding women's access to the "masculine" world of rationality and the public sphere of power (Schmitt 95; Kimmel *Gendered* 211).

Acknowledging the emotional component of masculinity might thus contribute to gender equality. Moreover, the available evidence seems to suggest that emotional repression and lack of empathy can be a precondition for male violence. Men's estrangement from the sphere of emotions often diminishes their capacity for empathy. As a result, men tend to be violent

more frequently.[145] In an article about the work of a men's group dealing with male violence in Bristol, Steve Mason insists that men need to recover the lost language of feelings, since emotion might help them discover a new facet of themselves and diminish their violent instincts. In his own words:

> As men we are very out of touch with our feelings -we have had the language of feeling beaten out of us, often literally, during childhood. Those feelings we are left with have acquired connotations which make us shun or misapply them. So -love and warmth imply shame; joy and delight imply immaturity; anger and frustration imply physical violence. We need to reclaim our feelings and shed the connotations -to learn that feeling is good for us. Our dissociation from feeling allows us to be violent more easily, as it dissociates us from consequences. Anger and violence need not be synonymous and learning to feel more deeply will help us find a path away from violence. (qtd. in Middleton *Inward* 119-20)

It would appear, then, that profeminist men's emotions might contribute to questioning male violence and patriarchal oppression. Indeed, many profeminist men have become involved in anti-sexist initiatives after getting emotional about gender inequality. As Michael Kaufman has suggested, emotion becomes one of the main reasons for men's engagement in feminist political practices. A man's personal experience of feelings such

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[145] For a more detailed analysis of the issue of male violence, see chapter 5.

as anger, oppression, and guilt have often played a fundamental role in his decision to embrace feminism. As Kaufman himself explains:

> It [the reason for a man's involvement in feminism] might be *outrage* at inequality;…it might be his own *sense of injustice* at the hands of other men; it might be a *sense of shared oppression*, say because of his sexual orientation; it might be his own *guilt* about the privileges he enjoys as a man; it might be *horror* at men's violence. (153; emphasis added)

It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that a man's feelings of *empathy* with women's oppression (his "outrage at inequality," his "own guilt about the privileges he enjoys as a man," his "horror at men's violence," etc.) could lead him to embrace feminist political practices. That is also the view held by masculinity scholar Harry Brod ("To"), who emphasizes the relevance of men's emotional empathy to their involvement in anti-sexist initiatives. Brod's date rape prevention education workshops, for example, are centrally concerned with trying to make men imagine and *feel* the constrictions on women's lives that come from living in a rape culture. In his view, men will only become really conscious of the need to stop rape if they learn a new type of sensitivity. After his workshops, several men, as Brod himself ("To" 203) elaborates, have acknowledged to be

emotionally unsettled, expressing their interest and sympathy for anti-sexist men's activities and campaigns. As Brod himself comments:

> I started to tell them much of what I've learned from women about the fears they live with…I went on at some length in this vein, and then asked for their responses. "I never knew," said one. "I *feel* like I've been hit in the face with a brick," said another. I think positive changes happened that night. They began to learn a new [feminist] kind of accountability and *sensitivity*. ("To" 203-4; emphasis added)

If, as it seems, a man's feelings of empathy with women's oppression might contribute to his involvement in feminism, male feminism could also be enhanced by making men realize the (emotionally) oppressive influence of masculinity on their own lives. After all, men often come to feel the burden of emotional repression, which not only prevents them from exploring their emotional inner selves but also keeps separating them from women, children, and each other. Men's realization of the emotional restrictions imposed by patriarchy on their own lives could thus contribute as well to their increasing involvement in the feminist struggle against patriarchal gender relations. As Harry Brod has argued, it is the ability to explore the pain men suffer that provides "the surest foundation for the ability to oppose the pain men inflict" ("To" 205). In conclusion, then, dis-

covering men's emotions would not only enrich their own personal lives but might also enhance feminism. Exploring their emotions, profeminist men could, ultimately, help undermine the conventional patriarchal opposition between rationality (masculinity) and emotions (femininity), which has traditionally prevented men from entering the private sphere as emotionally committed fathers and carers, and which has also precluded women's access to the male world of "rationality" and the public sphere of power.

While men have long remained estranged from the traditionally "feminine" sphere of childcare, much masculinity scholarship (see, for example, Chodorow *Reproduction*; Kimmel *Gendered* 149; Badinter 217) has shown how (profeminist) men's increasingly active involvement in the personal/emotional experience of fatherhood could also lead to important social/political changes in masculinities and gender relations. Men's entry into the domestic sphere as nurturing fathers and carers (along with the increasing access of women to the paid labor force) might indeed contribute to questioning the traditional division of spheres, thus enhancing sexual equality. The development of capitalism and industrialization in the early nineteenth century brought about a radical separation between the public (masculine) and private (feminine) spheres. As a result, women were

relegated to the domestic sphere and became increasingly responsible for childcare. Today, women have massively entered the paid labor force, but they often continue to do most of the parenting in the family. This has two main implications. First, women, unlike most men, work both outside and inside the home, which causes sexual inequality and asymmetrical heterosexual relationships. Second, men tend to be less involved in interpersonal, affective, emotional relationships (with their sons) than women. In what follows, I will try to demonstrate that both implications are indissolubly linked, arguing that (profeminist) men's gradual involvement in the personal/affective experience of fatherhood could help not only to enrich men's emotional lives, but also, and above all, to reduce sexual inequality on a social/political level.

This thesis does indeed seem to be substantiated by feminist sociologist and psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow (*Reproduction*),[146] who sees paternal absence from early childcare as leading to women's oppression. Chodorow claims that the father's dissociation from childrearing leads to the creation and perpetuation of male dominance and binary "masculine" and

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[146] Nancy Chodorow's work, whose full title is *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender,* attests to her interdisciplinary knowledge of both sociology and psychoanalytic theory.

"feminine" identities. In her view, the infant's early psychic development consists mainly in the construction of a social and emotional relationship with the mother. The child, being totally dependent on the mother, establishes with her a symbiotic unity, a unity reaching its height during the fourth or fifth month, and spanning roughly the infant's first year. During this period, the child remains psychologically fused with its mother.

While girls can become women and still keep this feeling of oneness with the mother, boys define masculinity in terms of separating from her. By retaining their preoedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls tend to remain continuous with others, and their subjectivity tends to be more flexible and porous. On the other hand, the boy -internalizing traditional sociocultural ideas about gender that identify masculinity with autonomy, individualism, and independence- develops his "masculine" identity through the repression of his early identification with the mother. For him, the mother symbolizes emotional and physical dependence, overwhelming love and attachment, and fear of merging. Thus, the boy rejects everything he sees as "feminine," including nurture, care, and interpersonal affect. As a result, men tend to remain "*emotionally* secondary." Elaborating on that, Chodorow herself comments:

> Denial of sense of connectedness and isolation of affect may be more characteristic of masculine development and may produce a more rigid and punitive superego, whereas feminine development, in which internal and external object-relations and affects connected to these are not so repressed, may lead to a superego more open to persuasion and the judgments of others, that is, not so independent of its emotional origins. (*Reproduction* 169)

Exclusive mothering by women, then, seems to produce differences in the relational experiences of girls and boys as they grow up. Moreover, the common absence of fathers from childcare leads to negative and hierarchical definitions of masculinity. Although fathers are not usually as available as mothers in daily life, children tend to idealize their fathers and give them ideological primacy and superior authority, "precisely because of their absence and seeming inaccessibility" (Chodorow *Reproduction* 181). Thus, children in absent-father or remote-father households often end up idealizing masculinity as superior to women and femininity.

Nevertheless, this situation can, and is beginning to, change. In response to, among other reasons, their sense of alienation and impersonality in the paid workforce, many men seem to begin to regret their lack of continued connection with children. They feel that they are missing one of the deepest (and few) emotional, (inter-)personal experiences in our

society. By becoming fathers, these men are thus showing how "mothering" qualities are not really instinctual or biological, but could also be learned and embodied by men, if men and women parented equally. In displaying all their capacity for love and nurture, then, these fathers seem to be determined to recover the lost language of (male) emotions.

Even more important is the fact that the affective experience of fatherhood could contribute as well to promoting gender equality. In line with Nancy Chodorow's arguments, I will in effect be arguing that men's (increasingly active) involvement in early parenting could, over time, undermine the oppressive nature of "masculinity" and the denial of "femininity," thus challenging male dominance. As has been pointed out, the traditional sexual division of labor and women's total responsibility for childcare usually cause patriarchal domination. While psychologists have shown how the absence of fathers from childcare often triggers male dominance and the need to be superior to women, anthropologists have argued that women's childcare duties demanded that the earliest men hunt, giving them, and not women, access to the power of the extra-domestic sphere. If, as it seems, the traditional social organization of parenting has long produced sexual inequality, shared parenting should be considered one

of the main priorities of the feminist struggle for gender equality. As Chodorow herself elaborates, we need to assist a "fundamental reorganization of parenting, so that primary parenting is shared between men and women" (*Reproduction* 215).

The available evidence suggests that men's growing involvement in the affective, interpersonal, traditionally "feminine" sphere of nurture and childcare could indeed help break down the polarity between "masculine" and "feminine" whereby all that is nurturing, tender, and gentle is diminished by men as not "masculine." As has been argued, boys need to break their primary identification with the mother to achieve their masculine identity, which often proves a traumatic experience. Nevertheless, this symbiotic identification would not be created in the first place if men took primary caring responsibilities. Children would be dependent from the beginning on people of both sexes and establish their individual identity in relation to both. In this way, masculinity would not be synonymous with the denial or rejection of women. This would, in turn, diminish men's needs to protect their masculinity and their patriarchal structures, and would also be positive to women's sense of independence. Emotional connection with both parents would not diminish the child's primary sense of gendered self and

would allow a person to choose the activities that she or he preferred, without feeling that such choices threatened their gender identity. Since unequal parenting forms a basis for the radical division of the social world into completely different (and unequally valued) domestic and public spheres, shared parenting would be a crucial social advance. As Chodorow herself elaborates:

> Anyone who has good primary relationships has the foundation for nurturance and love, and women would retain these even as men would gain them. Men would be able to retain the autonomy which comes from differentiation without that differentiation being rigid and reactive, and women would have more opportunity to gain it. (*Reproduction* 219)

It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that men's active involvement in the domestic sphere as nurturing and affectionate fathers should become a central component of the profeminist men's struggle for gender equality. To stop the patriarchal reproduction of mothering, we need to assist a new feminist future for fathering. Anthropological research has shown, for example, how women's economic and political status is highest in those cultures where men do domestic work and act as responsible, nurturing, and emotionally committed fathers. It has also been proved that those fathers

who are positively involved with children when the children are young are more likely to become invested in their communities when they reach midlife. Moreover, a society where men and women also share parenting, as Michael Kimmel (*Gendered* 149) elaborates, will be a society where they are also equally active in the labor force. Relying on love and emotion as fundamental educational tools, (profeminist) fathers thus seem to have the potential not only to transform emotional and nurturing styles in the domestic sphere, but also existing social and gender relations in the public sphere. As Kimmel himself concludes, "a change in the private sphere will bring about dramatic changes in the public sphere" (*Gendered* 149).

It is true that, through fatherhood, many men seek personal or emotional enrichment, not the overthrow of patriarchy. However, it is equally true that shared parenting is still likely to be good for women and children as well. Besides helping women enter the paid workforce, and besides reducing their amount of domestic work, shared parenting may help children (and so future men and prospective fathers) to move away from negative definitions of masculinity as the rejection of women and femininity. Hopefully, then, the example set by profeminist fathers will inspire other men to recover the lost language of emotion, which might

contribute to diminishing the patriarchal oppression of women. After all, men fear emotions because emotions have long been defined as feminine, and masculinity has been traditionally defined as the opposite of femininity. Thus, men's fear and hatred of emotions is nothing but the result of their fear and hatred of femininity. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that men's investment in personal and affective spheres like fatherhood and childcare may help reduce their fear and hatred of femininity, which has been usually stereotyped as the sole recipient of emotion. Profeminist men should thus be particularly active in encouraging equal parenting, for such social advances are now historically feasible, but far from inevitable. As Chodorow has argued, "they depend on the conscious organization and activity of all women *and men* who recognize that their interests lie in transforming the social organization of gender and eliminating sexual inequality" (*Reproduction* 219; emphasis added).

From what has been suggested, it would appear, then, that (profeminist) men's emotional experiences, for example as nurturing fathers, might contribute as well to the feminist struggle for gender equality, thereby promoting social and political change. It is true, as has been seen, that men's focus on their emotional inner selves has often led to

conservatism, preventing them from engaging in larger social and political issues, including gender equality. Since politics is itself a plural and contradictory practice, emotions, as political artifacts, may inevitably produce both conservative and progressive results. While acknowledging, then, the conservative component of emotions, this chapter has tried to demonstrate and emphasize the political potential of emotions for transforming patriarchal masculinities and gender relations. Like feminist women, profeminist can get really emotional about gender inequality, as their increasing -though still insufficient- participation in housework and childcare as well as their numerous campaigns against domestic violence are showing. Ultimately, then, chapter 3 seems to confirm and illustrate as well the main argument put forward in chapter 2- namely, that (white heterosexual) masculinity is far from uniform. The fact that some (white heterosexual) men are actively and emotionally involved in feminism does indeed appear to question the reductive conception of masculinity as the unproblematized embodiment of patriarchy.

CHAPTER 4. STUDIES OF AMERICAN LITERARY MASCULINITIES: AN INTRODUCTION

> Re-vision -the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction- is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival…We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.
>
> —Adrienne Rich "When the Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1975)

As has been pointed out in the general introduction to this study, the last two chapters of this thesis will go on to incorporate literature and literary theory into the discussion of men and masculinities in American culture. In order to gain a deeper insight into the functioning of (white heterosexual) masculinity in American culture and society, it might indeed prove particularly helpful to analyze the representations of masculinities in American literature. Admittedly, a number of critics, perhaps most notably Harold Bloom, have insisted on the distinction between the "literary" and the "non-literary," or the division between literature and society whereby

literature and aesthetic values are separated from society and/or considered to be beyond it. In Bloom's view, the aesthetic is an individual rather than social concern. In his own words, "cultural criticism is another dismal social science, but literary criticism, as an art, always was and will always be an elitist phenomenon. It was a mistake to believe that literary criticism could become a basis for democratic education or for societal improvement" (16).

Nevertheless, renowned Marxist scholars such as Terry Eagleton, Pierre Macherey (*Theory*; *Object*), and Fredric Jameson, among many others, have radically questioned the traditional distinction between literature, on the one hand, and society and politics, on the other. Terry Eagleton, for example, has argued how "there is, in fact, no need to drag politics into literary theory…it has been there from the beginning" (194). Culture and literature have always been centrally concerned with managing the conflicts and contradictions of politics and society. Since ideology and politics, as Michel Foucault has shown, are inseparable from discourse, literature, as a discursive practice, becomes itself a privileged site of ideological struggle and contestation.[147]

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[147] See also Collin, who has argued that "no puede haber transformación de las relaciones sociales sin una transformación del orden simbólico" ("Poética" 63).

The close relationship between society and literature becomes particularly apparent in masculinity and gender studies.[148] After all, it is widely recognized that "gender is (a) representation" and that "the representation of gender *is* its construction" (De Lauretis 3). It follows, therefore, that studies of cultural representations of (the masculine) gender are particularly relevant to the analysis of the social, institutional, and/or personal constructions of masculinity. Little wonder, then, that there has recently been a dramatic increase in the number of studies of (American) literary masculinities.[149] In this respect, Michael Kimmel has suggested that while the first masculinity studies in the 1970s and 1980s usually came from the fields of psychology and sociology, since the 1990s masculinity scholarship seems to be paying special attention to cultural and literary representations of masculinity (Carabí and Armengol *Debating*).[150]

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[148] Judith Halberstam also notes that queer theory needs to cross the divide between the "truth" of sexual behavior and the "fiction" of textual analysis. While scholars like Cindy Patton have complained about the dominance of textually based forms of queer theory, Halberstam wonders if there is a form of queer theory or sexual theory that is not textually based. "Isn't the sexual ethnographer studying texts? And doesn't a social historian collate evidence from texts? …Conversely, readings of texts also require historical contexts and some relation to the lived experience of subjects" (Halberstam 12).

[149] See, for example, Michael Flood's bibliographical section on "Masculinities in culture and representation," as well as his subsection on "Literature and literary theory" (*The Men's*).

[150] No wonder, then, that one of the latest issues of the influential American journal *Men and Masculinities*, directed by Michael Kimmel, has been devoted to the analysis of literary masculinities (Lea and Schoene).

Trying to deepen into the growing field of study of fictional representations of masculinity, then, the present chapter begins by providing a general overview of studies of American literary masculinities, analyzing their origins as well as their development and latest findings. The chapter then goes on to analyze the new and numerous critical possibilities generated by a men's studies rereading of American literature. Chapter 4 also explores, and defends, men's participation in feminist literary criticism, which, like the issue of men in feminism discussed in chapter 1, has been subject to much controversy. Equally controversial has been the (ir)relevance of the sex of the author to textual criticism, the focus of the next section in chapter 4. Given that the literary texts discussed in chapter 5 are all male-authored, the question of the sex of the author proves particularly relevant to this study. While this thesis reads (white) male authors as representing a particularized gender (and racialized), rather than abstract or universal, perspective, I will also contend that (white) male fiction is far from monolithic. Since white male identity is plural, complex, and often contradictory (see chapter 2), it seems logical to assume that the fiction produced by white male authors may also be so. Thus, I will be arguing that white male fiction can produce both traditional and innovative

representations of masculinity, as the literary examples discussed in chapter 5 will also try to illustrate.

In conclusion, then, this chapter attempts to introduce and explore the subject of masculinity studies in/as American literary criticism. By applying masculinity studies to the analysis of both social constructions and literary representations of American masculinities, then, this thesis attempts to interconnect different disciplines -such as sociology and psychology, on the one hand, and cultural and literary studies, on the other- and critical theories -such as masculinity studies and literary critical theories-, and to question as well the traditional divisions between society and culture, political practice and literature, the social con-text and the literary text.

4. 1. Origins and development

Much of the recent work on representations of masculinity in American literature remains indebted to three main texts. One is D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923); another is Leslie Fiedler's seminal text *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). Together with David Leverenz's more recent work *Manhood and the American*

Renaissance (1989), Lawrence and Fiedler's works remain, arguably, the most influential texts to date on American literary representations of masculinity.[151] Although each of these three texts has made decisive contributions to American masculinity scholarship, each seems (at least partly) flawed for different reasons.

For instance, D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* contributed to masculinity studies in a significant number of ways. He showed, for example, how the American hero is, by definition, "hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never yet melted" (62). In James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Novels* (1823-41), for example, Deerslayer seems to be a sensual and spiritual male. Like most American

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[151] As more and more studies are being published on literary representations of masculinity, it seems necessary to acknowledge the field's indebtedness to a number of sources. One is feminist literary criticism, which has long explored literary representations of femininity. The representation of women in literature has been the subject of books written by numerous feminist scholars. Of course, the list is far too lengthy to achieve here. However, it may be worth acknowledging the path-breaking work of feminist writers such as Virginia Woolf; Simone de Beauvoir; Mary Ellmann; Ellen Moers; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*Madwoman*), or Maggie Humm, to name but a few. Besides feminist literary criticism, much current work on literary masculinities is also indebted to gay literary criticism. Though masculinity scholars are indebted to several gay literary critics, James Levin and David Bergman seem to have played a key role in shaping much recent work on literary representations of masculinity. Levin's text is as much a social history of homosexuality as it is a work of literary criticism. On the other hand, Bergman posits the view of homosexuality as a literary construction. As he explains, gay men "learned to speak about their sexuality in a rhetoric of despair and degradation" (6-7). Finally, another primary gay source of much contemporary work on literary masculinities is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (*Between*). Although the book covers a relatively short fragment of English literature, from the mid-eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth-century novel, Sedgwick made a highly innovative contribution to masculinity scholarship by drawing "the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic" (Sedgwick *Between* 1).

(literary) heroes, however, Deerslayer is irremediably attracted to earthly violence and death. In Lawrence's own words:

> He [Deerslayer] gets his deepest thrill of gratification, perhaps, when he puts a bullet through the heart of a beautiful buck, as it stoops to drink at the lake. Or when he brings the invisible bird fluttering down in death, out of the high blue…he lives by death, by killing the wild things of the air and earth. (62)

Thus, the American hero is often represented as hard, violent, rough, and stoic. Nevertheless, such a representation is a myth. Moving ahead of his time, Lawrence insisted that the traditional view of masculinity as eternally powerful and stoic is a fictional construction which bears little or no relation at all to its actual reality. As Lawrence himself explains, the American hero "often breaks down into disintegration," although "what true myth concerns itself with is not the disintegration product." True myth, as Lawrence elaborates, focuses on "the onward adventure of the integral soul. And this, for America, is Deerslayer…An isolate, almost selfless, stoic, enduring man, who lives by death, by killing, but who is pure white" (62-3).

While it is true that Cooper's heroes are invariably represented as rough, untamed, tough guys, it should also be remembered that Cooper was himself a refined and well-educated gentleman who wrote the majority of

his novels while he was staying in Paris, away from the American prairie. As Lawrence explains, Natty and Fenimore are an odd couple: "You can see Fenimore: blue coat, silver buttons, silver-and-diamond buckle shoes, ruffles. You see Natty Bumppo: a grizzled, uncouth old renegade, with gaps in his old teeth and a drop on the end of his nose" (49). Probably, Natty was Fenimore's representation of his own ideal of masculinity. What he could not become in actual reality, he could at least recreate in the realm of fiction and ideality. Thus, the Natty and Chingachgook myth, as Lawrence (52) concludes, must remain a myth: "It is a wish-fulfilment, an evasion of actuality."

Besides questioning one of the main American myths associating "true" masculinity with untamed, rough, aggressive male characters, Lawrence argued, just as Leslie Fiedler would forty years later, how American literary men seem to prefer a homosocial world of violence and adventure -where they can prove their masculinity and become national heroes- to women, sexuality, and the responsibilities of domesticity and childcare.[152] In Cooper's *Leatherstocking Novels* (1823-41), for example,

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[152] It is true that "the first legend to seize the American imagination" (Fiedler 339) is Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle, who seems to be a domestic, dreamy, passive, non-adventurous male character. Nevertheless, Rip already represents, though playfully, an early prototype of the American adventurous male, as he embodies "the flight of the dreamer from the drab duties of home and town toward the good

the eternal friendship between Chingachgook and Natty Bumppo is stronger than (heterosexual) marriage itself. In Lawrence's view, such a friendship represents "the nucleus of a new society…a new human relationship. A stark, stripped human relationship of two men, deeper than the deeps of sex. Deeper than property, deeper than fatherhood, deeper than marriage" (54). Like Chingachgook and Natty, Deerslayer flees from women and sexuality as well. Judith, the sensual woman, tries to seduce Deerslayer. And Deerslayer is almost tempted, but he never actually gives in: "A philosophic old soul, he does not give much for the temptations of sex. Probably he dies virgin" (Lawrence 61).

Despite its path-breaking arguments, which Fiedler would elaborate on some years later, Lawrence's text falls prey to numerous sexist biases, which derive from the writer's adoption of dominant American cultural concepts of masculinity. Women in American culture were recurrently stereotyped as sexual temptresses and blamed for distracting men from their nobler, more important tasks in the public sphere. In *Manhood in America:*

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companions and the magic keg of Holland's gin" (Fiedler 26). The Rip story was, therefore, a clear inspiration for the traditional literary image of the American hero as an adventurous, aggressive, womanless male. As Fiedler himself elaborates:

> In some ways, it seems astonishingly prophetic: a forecast of today's fishing trip with the boys, tomorrow's escape to the ball park or the poker game. Henpecked and misunderstood at home, the natural man whistles for his dog, Wolf, picks up his gun and leaves the village for Nature -seeking in a day's outing what a long life at home has failed to provide him. (341)

A Cultural History (1996), masculinity scholar Michael Kimmel (45-8) explains, for example, that in the nineteenth century a large number of advice manuals counseled American boys on how to control sexual temptation. While some advice texts had always emphasized the sinful and immoral roots of sexuality, nineteenth-century American manuals were particularly concerned with the secular effects of sexual behaviors, especially the debility, enervation, and diminishment of manly vigor. Popular advice books such as Sylvester Graham's *A Lecture to Young Men* (1834), John Todd's *The Student's Manual* (1835), William Alcott's *The Young Man's Guide* (1846) or Timothy Arthur's *Advice to Young Men* (1855) were all centrally concerned, as Kimmel (*Manhood* 45-8) elaborates, with emphasizing men's need for self-control over sexual temptations, passion, and masturbation. It was argued that conservation of sperm was the best way to save energy for other, more productive purposes. Sexuality was believed to threaten men's vital energies and diminish their manly vigor, thus making them unfit for the more important and productive tasks ahead. Sylvester Graham, for example, argued that immoral elements such as "luxury, indolence, voluptuousness, and sensuality" -all of which were indirectly equated with women- would lead men to surrender their

"nobleness, dignity, honor, and manhood" (qtd. in Kimmel *Manhood* 47).

Drawing on these Puritan and misogynist ideas, which kept haunting the

American cultural unconscious well into the early twentieth century

(Kimmel *Manhood* 142), D. H. Lawrence notes, for example, that

Deerslayer "is right of it [of dying virgin]." Instead of being pushed into "a

false heat of deliberate sensuality," Lawrence argues, "he will remain alone.

His soul is alone, for ever alone. So he will preserve his integrity, and

remain alone in the flesh. It is a stoicism which is honest and fearless" (61).

Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) is as

well one of the most influential texts on literary representations of

masculinity. In particular, Leslie Fiedler's "innovative" argument -originally

put forward by Lawrence but usually attributed to Fiedler- is that American

literature has always been centrally concerned with men's escape from

women and domesticity. From Cooper through Hemingway to Norman

Mailer and James Dickey, American literature written by men has

recurrently explored men's efforts to avoid women and (hetero)sexuality,

often through male comradeship. Since women in American literature have

been usually described as the feared and forbidden "Other," Fiedler argues

that "the mirror-image of the self is translated in the American novel...into

the comrade of one's own sex, the buddy as anima" (348). Fiedler's thesis proved particularly challenging for several motives. On the one hand, he posited that men's struggle to avoid (hetero)sexual attachments in American fiction signaled the American author's psychological immaturity. Furthermore, he described homoeroticism as one of the central themes of American fiction, at a time when homosexuality was considered pathological by the American Psychological Association.

Despite its subversive value, Fiedler's text has not gone unquestioned. For instance, Ann Massa's edition of *American Declarations of Love* (1990) contests Fiedler's "arresting assertion that American writing is either evasive or perverse in its treatment of love; or both" (Introduction 4). Even though Donald Greiner in his path-breaking *Women Enter the Wilderness: Male Bonding and the American Novel of the 1980s* (1991) agrees with Fiedler that men bond in canonical American novels, that they prefer leaving for the territory to staying in the civilized world, and that they try to escape women, he suggests that novels written by white males in the 1980s may still accept the first two parts of Fiedler's argument -men bonding and then escaping to the wilderness- but reject the third -women left behind

(*Women Enter* 2).[153] Analyzing the fiction of several American writers of the 1980s,[154] Greiner concludes that Fiedler's thesis is no longer applicable to the latest American fiction.

Finally, David Leverenz's *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (1989) is considered another key text on literary representations of masculinity. Drawing on various critical discourses such as feminism, new historicism, and psychoanalysis (and, to a lesser extent, deconstruction), Leverenz analyzes the representations of masculinity in the fiction of five American canonical writers of the 1850s: Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman. According to Leverenz, all five writers felt self-consciously deviant from dominant norms of manly behavior, and most of them were worried that their artistic "sensitivity" and their home-based jobs as writers -unlike other (more lucrative) jobs in the public/"masculine" sphere- could diminish their masculinity and feminize them. Moreover, Leverenz outlines three ideologies of manhood in the antebellum Northeast:

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[153] Despite its innovative theses, Greiner's text is, or so it seems to me, fatally flawed by its heavy reliance on biodeterminism as a theoretical framework to account for the origins and dynamics of male bonding. As is known, biodeterminist scholars (see, for example, Tiger; Tiger and Fox) defend male bonding as one of the main gifts, and causes, of human evolution. For a radical critique of biodeterministic models, see the work of feminist anthropology (Lamphere 11-33).

[154] He analyzes, among others, Frederick Busch's *Sometimes I Live in the Country*, John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, Larry Woiwode's *Born Brothers*, Ben Greer's *The Loss of Heaven*, Richard Russo's *The Risk Pool*, Padgett Powell's *Edisto*, Robert B. Parker's *A Catskill Eagle*, and E. L. Doctorow's *Billy Bathgate*.

patrician, artisan, and entrepreneurial, suggesting that in pre-Civil-War America the older ideologies of genteel patriarchy and artisan independence were being questioned by a new middle-class ideology of competitive individualism.[155] Therefore, this scholar wittingly relates gender to class conflicts, particularly the fundamental class conflict in the Northeast from the 1820s to the 1850s: the battle for dominance between the old landowning elite and the new middle class of entrepreneurial businessmen. As he himself concludes, "the middle class won, and its ideology of manhood as competitive individualism still pervades American life" (3).

Another positive aspect of Leverenz's work is its focus on the representations of masculinity in the fiction of nineteenth-century American women writers such as Caroline Kirkland, Sarah Hale, Susan Warner, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who, as Leverenz argues (and I would agree), "illuminate class and gender conflicts in American life with exceptional clarity, even starkness" (4).[156] Finally, Leverenz's study of texts such as

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[155] Leverenz's classification of American manhood into three distinct models has had an important influence on a number of subsequent works, most notably Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (1996). Indeed, Kimmel also refers to three recurrent types of American manhood, which coincide with Leverenz's classification: the Genteel Patriarch (Leverenz's patrician model), the Heroic Artisan (Leverenz's artisan), and the Self-Made Man (Leverenz's entrepreneur).

[156] Susan Harris shares a similar view, insisting on the necessity of re-evaluating nineteenth-century (sentimental) women's fiction. In her own words, "there appears to be an unspoken agreement not to submit nineteenth-century American women's novels to extended critical evaluation, largely, I think,

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-2) adds race to gender and class as analytical categories, and establishes a number of interesting links between the three concepts.

Nevertheless, Leverenz's text presents a number of shortcomings as well. Above all else, it seems to be fatally flawed to contemporary readers by a number of homophobic comments.[157] As he himself comments in the introduction to his text, "readers may feel skeptical or uncomfortable when I emphasize Hawthorne's fears of homosexual rape or argue that Ishmael and Ahab are twinned in their desire to be beaten" (5). And many readers, myself included, do certainly feel like that. In "Ahab's Queenly Personality: A Man Is Being Beaten," the tenth chapter in *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, Leverenz argues, for example, that Ishmael "shows an impulsive eagerness to be gripped by a strong man's dominance, whether Queequeg's or Ahab's -the stronger the better" (283). Much more controversial, though, is his explicit association between homosexuality, masochistic passivity, and humiliation. In his own words, Ishmael's

because the evaluative modes most of us were taught devalue this literature *a priori*" (44). On the need to revise and recuperate nineteenth-century American sentimental fiction, see also Tompkins.

[157] It becomes necessary to qualify, though, that Leverenz himself apologized for these homophobic comments during a speech on "Representations of Masculinity in American Literature" that he delivered at the University of Barcelona in March 2003. Of course, his apologies confirm the arguments I am making about *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, but indicate as well Leverenz's self-awareness, and public rectification, of some of his previous theses.

"homoerotic chumship, here and elsewhere, veils a masochistic passivity and a fascination with the spectacle of men being humiliated by manlier men" (283). One could provide further examples of the text's homophobia. Later in the same chapter, Leverenz argues, for example, that Ahab, "the captain of the good ship *Manhood*," soon finds out that he has been sailing toward "the ultimate in manly humiliations, a desire to be homosexually raped" (297). Leverenz keeps describing homosexuality in negative, oftentimes even pathological terms. Towards the end of the book, for example, the author identifies Ahab as a paranoid character. In his own words, a "paranoid" character "is what I see in Ahab here or, more precisely, in Melville's imagining of Ahab." While such a critical statement is, of course, open to questioning, he goes on to associate paranoia with homosexuality, which is unabashedly homophobic. In his own words, "one could call it childish or narcissistic or manipulative, to be sure. It does look homosexual, if taken half seriously" (298). While Leverenz's text has made some decisive contributions to the analysis of masculinity in American literature, its homophobia thus works to its own discredit. Tainted with the fear and hatred of homosexuality, Leverenz's critical work ends up encouraging traditional (mis)conceptions and stereotypes of the homosexual

and, in so doing, looks both outdated and alien to most contemporary, open-minded readers.

Although the works by Lawrence, Fiedler, and Leverenz are usually regarded as foundational for the study of literary masculinities, contemporary research on American literary masculinities has yielded new interesting ─and, in general, more open-minded─ results. It is far beyond the scope of this study to make reference (were it possible) to each of these results. Nevertheless, focus will be given to those which have been described as particularly relevant and innovative (Murphy "Introduction" 13). For example, Alfred Habegger's *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature* (1982) is an interesting study of the representations of masculinity in the novels of Henry James and William Dean Howells. Peter Schwenger's *Phallic Critiques: Masculinity and Twentieth-Century Literature* (1984) analyzes masculinity in the fiction of Mailer, Mishima, and Hemingway. In this text, Schwenger also points to the interface between sexuality and literary style, claiming that "there *is* such a thing as a masculine style" (12). Two relatively new and important texts are Wayne Koestenbaum's *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (1989) and Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden's *Engendering Men: The*

Question of Male Feminist Criticism (1990).[158] The former centers on literary collaboration between male authors. More specifically, Koestenbaum argues that when two men write together, they engage in double talk, "they rapidly patter to obscure their erotic burden, but the ambiguities of their discourse give the taboo subject some liberty to roam" (3). According to poststructuralist theory, any monolithic body of ideas contains the very difference it rejects. Following this idea, Koestenbaum contends that within male texts of all varieties lurks a homosexual desire which, far from reinforcing patriarchy, challenges it and offers a way out. On the other hand, Boone and Cadden's edition of *Engendering Men* signals "several avenues" from which a practical criticism by men doing feminism might emerge (Introduction 4). Boone and Cadden note that American men have already begun to redefine themselves as men and, therefore, as critics of the literary and cultural texts that we have inherited and are in the process of recreating. "In engendering ourselves, in making visible our textual/sexual bodies," these scholars conclude, "we thus acknowledge our part in a movement whose time, we hope, has come" (Boone and Cadden

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[158] Although focused on the cultural construction of masculinity in nineteenth-century *British* literature, Richard Dellamora's extraordinary study on *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (1990) should also be mentioned here.

Introduction 7). In order to illustrate these critical ideas, Boone and Cadden's collection of essays re-theorizes the male position by examining Anglo-American culture and literature of the past four hundred years. The essays analyze poetry, fiction, the Broadway theater, film and television, and broader cultural and psychoanalytic texts. Moreover, they also draw on a large number of methodologies (Marxist criticism, deconstruction, New Historicism, psychoanalysis) and experiment with "an equally wide range of voices (confessional, lyrical, scientific, journalistic)" (Boone and Cadden Introduction 3).

Women have also made decisive contributions to the feminist analysis of literary constructions of masculinity. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland's edition of *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism* (1990) has analyzed several male writers in order to begin to examine the feminist inclination of their works. Thus, many of the essays included in this collection insist on the subversive, feminist potential of several texts written by male writers, such as Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)[159] and Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1886), among others.

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[159] Nina Baym, for example, called Hawthorne a "protofeminist" because of this novel.

Finally, other relatively recent and significant texts are Mark Gerzon's *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Faces of American Manhood* (1982), which focuses on five archetypes, or hero-images, of masculinity in American culture which "influence our behavior whether we are aware of it or not: the Frontiersman, the Soldier, the Expert, the Breadwinner, and the Lord" (4); David Rosen's *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity* (1993), which analyzes "the English heterosexual male of fiction in a tightly limited time-culture span, from Beowulf to Paul Morel" (xv); and Michael Kane's *Modern Men: Mapping Masculinity in English and German Literature, 1880-1930* (1999). Kane's text re-reads some of the canonical works of modernist literature in English and German with reference to the issues of masculinity, relations between men, national identity, and patriarchy, which were "major preoccupations of male writers as they attempted to come to terms with, or react against, the decline of patriarchal power due to the rise of modernity itself as well as of feminism" (vi).[160] The book revolves

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[160] Another text that focuses on British modernist literature is Declan Kiberd's *Men and Feminism in Modern Literature* (1985). Unlike Kane's, though, Kiberd's text proves both naïve and conservative. For example, Declan posits androgyny as the solution to sexual inequality, claiming that men need to accept and explore their feminine side. Though Kiberd admits that "androgyny may decline into mere narcissism" (223), this scholar fails to recognize, as has been argued in chapter 3, that those qualities traditionally deemed "feminine" (such as emotionality, tenderness, ability to nurture and take care of the others, etc.) are simply human qualities. Moreover, Kibberd gives away his extreme conservatism when he notes, for instance, that "a woman's primary role is that of motherhood and most women have some or other of the attributes which fit them for this role" (226). Insisting further, this critic argues that "the devaluation of

around two main axes. On the one hand, it explores the leitmotif of the "double" in modernist fiction, which shows, Kane argues, that the "Other" is part of ourselves. In his own words, the image of the "double" seems to show how "all those qualities traditionally deemed to belong to 'another world' -another social class (the proletariat), another race (foreigners), another gender (the feminine) -are discovered to be a repressed part of the self which had been projected onto others, but which has come back to haunt that self" (vii). On the other hand, Kane argues that while one recurrent strategy employed to "solve" the modernist crisis of masculine identity consisted in projecting those confusions troubling masculine identity onto scapegoat others, another common strategy attempted to re-inforce the boundary between the inside and the outside of the nation and to identify with the corporate body of the nation. This corporate body was usually idealized as a community of men, as a *male body*, which would be "clearly distinct from a threatening, foreign and feminine realm of confusion and specifically of gender confusion" (vii). The book concludes with an analysis of masculinity in the literature of the 1920s. Thus, the historical

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motherhood and the assault on family life are telltale marks of a society that has lost its sense of community" (226). Of course, after three decades of feminist thinking, such statements should no longer require any type of (dis)qualification.

context for this part is the rise of Fascism, which Kane sees as a paranoid attempt to restore the homosocial patriarchy and to rid it of its own fears by projecting them onto others who could be isolated and/or exterminated (viii).

Most of these works concern themselves with literary representations of *white* masculinity. Nevertheless, it is important to insist here that second-wave masculinity studies is characterized by its growing emphasis on the study of non-white masculinities.[161] Therefore, it might be worth pointing out some of the latest, and most relevant, publications on literary representations of African-American masculinity (Clark; Awkward *Negotiating* and *Inspiriting*; Marriott; Nowatzki), Asian-American masculinity (Cheung; Zhong; Chan; Brownell and Wasserstrom; Eng *Racial*), Chicano masculinity (Mirande; Brandes; Ozieblo; Gutmann), Jewish masculinity (Rosenberg), Indian masculinity (Sinha; Hansen), etc.[162] Of course, the list of texts that explore literary representations of ethnic

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[161] It becomes important to acknowledge, once again, the immense debt that most of these works owe to feminism. Indeed, many of these writings are inspired by previous feminist work on ethnic, literary femininities. A detailed bibliography on this feminist work has been compiled by Michael Flood in the section on "Gender and race/ethnicity" (*The Men's*).

[162] There is also a growing body of literature on "Masculinities in indigenous, tribal and non-Western societies" (*The Men's*).

masculinities is enormous and far too long to achieve here.[163] It seems more relevant to note, though, that most of these recent texts appear divided between on the one hand their emphasis on gender-ed and ethnic identities and on the other the poststructuralist theories, on which they often rely, which insist that are our gender-ed and ethnic identities are never stable and fixed. As Lynne Segal notes in this respect, the writing on men and masculinities most committed to the project of exposing the radically constructed nature of sexual difference and gender binaries comes from recent texts influenced by poststructuralist and Foucauldian scholarship (New xxx). Of course, the strength of this theorizing of gender as a discursive formation is its questioning of all universalizing or essentialist categories. In these texts, masculinity, like femininity, is "always only an anxiously claimed identity, tied to linguistic and materialist practices that are never fixed or secure" (New xxx). Nevertheless, Segal insists, as has been pointed out in chapter 2, that these new discursive trends tend to diminish the importance of traditional, if shifting, gender relations and conventions within the different institutions which work, *however ambivalently*, to maintain men in more powerful positions than women in

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[163] Such a list may be found in Michael Flood's annotated bibliography on gender and masculinities under the sections "Literature and literary theory" and "Race and ethnicity" (*The Men's*).

most, if not all, social spheres (New xxxi). Thus, much contemporary work on literary representations of ethnic masculinities finds itself divided between poststructuralist and identity-based approaches to gender and ethnicity.

While this debate has already been explored in the second chapter of this thesis, it might be worth emphasizing that, as in the social sciences, the most innovative approaches to the discussion in American literary and cultural theory have also been able to synthesize sexual politics and poststructuralist theories. David Eng's seminal text *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (2001) is a case in point.[164] In the introduction, Eng insists that his project attempts to interrogate "the commonalities that support, as well as the dissonances that qualify, coalitions among American men" (*Racial* 4). Insisting further, he argues that precisely because the feminization of the Asian American male in the U. S. cultural landscape often results in his figuration as feminized or homosexualized, we must take care to explore the theoretical links between queer studies -with its focus on (homo)sexuality and desire- and women's studies -with its focus on gender and identity- in relation to the production

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[164] Other similar attempts have been made, for example, by Michael Awkward (*Negotiating*) and Sally Robinson.

of Asian American male subjectivity (*Racial* 16). Thus, Eng combines (feminist) sexual politics and queer theory in innovative ways.

4. 2. Masculinity studies in American literary criticism

Despite the growing body of texts on literary masculinities, the field remains largely unexplored in the academia. While the feminist analysis of literary women and femininities has already become part of the academic curriculum, and is often familiar to *both* female and male students, the feminist analysis of literary masculinities remains largely unknown. As literary critic Berthold Schoene explains:

> Ask any discerning male student to write an essay on Jane Austen's representation of women, or the straitjacketing impact of patriarchal gender politics on the women in Shakespeare's comedies, and the result is often clearly and cogently argued. However, ask them to comment on the representation of men and the response is often a mixture of discomfort, nervous agitation and silence. (viii)

There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, the analysis of the images of women in literature has a fairly long history within feminist literary criticism, while the feminist analysis of literary masculinities is a

relatively recent -and by comparison- small addition to the academy. Except for a few critics like Fiedler and Leverenz, men have just begun to analyze masculinity in contemporary American culture and literature. As Peter F. Murphy indicates, "more recent, and sometimes more radical, books have been written by sociologists, psychologists, and historians, not literary or cultural critics" (Introduction 4). Furthermore, there are very few texts that suggest how an analysis of literary masculinities could proceed. And, no matter how well-intentioned, it does not seem to be enough for men simply to adopt and start imitating feminist perspectives, aims, and resolutions. In order to deal with the specific dilemma of their masculine condition, men, as Schoene (ix) elaborates in this respect, must try to develop their own counter-discourse against patriarchy.

Although we still miss a critical vocabulary pertinent to the analysis of literary masculinities, a men's studies approach[165] to American literature may prove beneficial for several reasons. First of all, just as the erroneous assumption that male experience equals human experience affected American literary criticism's treatment of women as characters and authors,

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[165] As has been suggested, the label *studies of masculinities* seems preferable to *men's studies*. However, much of this section draws on an article by James D. Riemer, who uses the term *men's studies*. Therefore, this section keeps his original terminology.

so it has limited our perceptions about men in literature. Therefore, men's studies entails a radical re-vision of the way we read literature and of the way we perceive men and masculine ideals in American literature. As James D. Riemer indicates, "in the past 10 to 15 years, men's studies has examined our culturally defined ideals of masculinity and how they affected men's lives, transforming universal human experiences into ones that are distinctly masculine" (289). Thus, a men's studies approach to American literature shifts the focus of criticism from the manner in which men's lives reflect abstract, universal issues to a more intimate, personal concern with how cultural values, particularly those related to ideals of masculinity, affect men's lives on a personal level (Riemer 293-5). Rereading, for example, supposedly universal and genderless issues such as emotions (chapter 3) and violence (chapter 5) from a men's studies perspective may help illustrate how masculinity ideals affect, and often restrict and complicate, men's lives in American culture and literature.

Another implication of rereading American literature from a men's studies perspective is the possibility of analyzing a significant part of American literary works as social documents reflecting American society's

conceptions of masculinity.[166] Since American society is plural, rather than monolithic, men's studies, as Riemer (290) indicates, is centrally concerned with showing the multiple conceptions and representations of masculinities in American fiction. For example, Ernest Hemingway's representations of stoic, tough, violent, and apparently unemotional male characters in *In Our Time* (1925) differs substantially from John Steinbeck's portrait of the close, affectionate, and atypically nurturing male friendship between George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* (1937). If, as it seems, a writer's concepts of masculinity may differ from those of his contemporaries, the difference tends to be even greater when we contrast representations of masculinity from disparate historical epochs. One need only compare, for example, the representations of masculinity in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Novels* (1823-41) and Richard Ford's *A Multitude of Sins* (2001)[167] to see how manhood ideals have been radically transformed over the years.[168]

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[166] Social historians such as Michael Kimmel (*Manhood*), Joe Dubbert, and Peter Filene have already made such a sociological use of American literature, although on a limited scale (Riemer 290).

[167] Some of Ford's short stories in this volume will be analyzed in detail in chapter 5.

[168] A men's studies approach to American literature not only analyzes how men and masculinities change over time, but also what aspects of masculinity remain unchanged. Thus, one could find some commonalities, for example, between the fiction of Ernest Hemingway and the contemporary American writer Chuck Palahniuk, both of whom represent violence as a reaffirmation of masculinity. See chapter 5 (sections 5.3 and 5.4) in this respect.

Like social concepts of masculinity, then, literary concepts of masculinity are culture-specific and context-bound. Moreover, cultural and historical changes in the meanings surrounding masculinity often result in - and reflect back- changes in literary representations of masculinity. Thus, the relationship between studies of literary masculinities and the larger field of masculinity studies has been described as a reciprocal one (Riemer 291). Just as rereading American literature for what it says about social conceptions of masculinity widens the base of men's studies knowledge, information obtained from other fields, such as sociology or psychology, can illuminate our rereading of American literature in new and interesting ways by affecting the shape of literary criticism itself (Riemer 291). Despite the undeniable value of literature as a social document reflecting our masculine ideals, however, such literary analyses cannot be taken as literal sociological, psychological, or anthropological studies on American masculinity. As James D. Riemer insists, studies of literary masculinities "cannot be expected to give the whole 'truth' about manhood in relation to a particular social, economic, racial-ethnic environment," although "they can offer valuable insights into areas for further, potentially corroborating research by sociologists, psychologists, and social anthropologists" (291).

Besides shedding light on the social construction of masculinity, a men's studies approach to American literature is also valuable in rereading works by authors who have been often associated with defining and perpetuating manly ideals (Riemer 297). Such a re-reading entails not only questioning patriarchal masculinities in literary texts, but also challenging former traditional critical readings of these texts. Just as male characters' lives are often limited by ideals of masculinity, so does the acceptance of traditional patriarchal values influence and limit the ways criticism has analyzed the works of American writers clearly identified with traditional manly ideals. For example, critics like Mark Spilka have argued that in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) Jake Barnes betrays the manly code and fails the test of masculinity. Spilka claims that, being sexually impotent, Jake cannot seduce Brett Ashley and so he is not a "real" man. For Spilka, Jake fails the manly code as he delivers Brett into the hands -or, rather, the bed- of Romero, who, in Spilka's view, is more of a man than Jake is. However, a men's studies approach to the novel will show how Jake *is not* a failure as a man. Rather, he is *considered* as such by a patriarchal code which links masculinity to sexual possession through penetration. It is not Jake who fails the code, but the code and other male ideals that have

failed the man. As James D. Riemer concludes in this respect, "ideals of manhood are the source of Jake's problem and often the reason he is unable to deal with it in any manner but escape" (297).

Despite the social and historical value of literary texts such as Ernest Hemingway's *Fiesta*, one should avoid restricting the sociological analysis of American masculinity to literary works that focus on the values of the white, middle class, which James D. Riemer indentifies as a "limitation characteristic of a majority of the research and scholarship in men's studies" (291). By studying literary works that depict men's lives beyond the bourgeois experience, we could see how masculinity varies according to a man's ethnic, class, and/or sexual specificities.

From what has been pointed out so far, one could conclude, then, that the aim of a men's studies approach to American literature is "Re-vision," which the writer and essayist Adrienne Rich beautifully defined as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (90-91). In studies of American fictional masculinities, this re-vision, as James D. Riemer indicates, entails analyzing both traditional and alternative literary models of manhood. In Riemer's own words:

> To change men's lives [one needs] more than recognition of the limitations and negative effects of our present ideals of manhood. There also must be a recognition and reinforcement of positive alternatives to traditional masculine ideals and behaviors. (298)

Admittedly, there are not many "positive" or "alternative" images of masculinity in American literature. The American literary tradition has provided us with men who embody any number of traditional masculine ideals, and men who fight the burden and limitations of those ideals. Seldom are we provided with positive images of men who represent alternatives to those traditional ideals (Riemer 298). There are, however, some "positive" images of masculinity in American letters. For example, in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937) George and Lennie fight economic hardship and social isolation by developing a close friendship pattern that is unusually intimate, supportive, and generous. Similarly, in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) Milkman Dead, who becomes more and more relational and other-directed as the novel advances, moves beyond his father Macon's individualistic, self-centered, and competitive masculine values. Likewise, Tayo, the protagonist of Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), returns to his Native-American origins to reshape his masculinity. Moving away from

violence and War in the Pacific, Tayo chooses to re(dis)cover his ancestral heritage and the communal values of his culture. In so doing, he finally becomes a much more relational, caring, and nurturing male character. In Richard Ford's *Independence Day* (1995), Frank Bascombe gradually abandons the manly code of individualism and emotional disengagement, and he finally becomes a more relational, nurturing, and supportive father and lover. Similarly, in Ford's *Rock Springs* (1987) and *A Multitude of Sins* (2001) several male characters, as we shall see in chapter 5, move away from their violent fathers or their equally aggressive male friends, embracing a new, alternative, non-violent model of manhood. Making us aware of these innovative literary texts might thus be one of the most significant contributions that a men's studies approach to literature can make. "For, in the end, it will be easier for men to revise the way they live their lives if," as Riemer (299) suggests, "we can help them recognize the possibilities of what they might become."

4. 3. Men in feminist literary criticism

Studies of American literary masculinities, like studies of American masculinities in general (see chapter 1), are often informed by feminism (Boone and Cadden Introduction 1). In chapter 1, focus has already been given to the question of men doing feminism. However, it now seems pertinent to address the more specific question of men in feminist literary criticism. After all, the question of men in feminism is not exactly the same as the question of men in feminist literary criticism. As Toril Moi indicates, "while the latter is an interesting and relevant problem in its own right, it is strange, to say the least, not to find a single discussion of the difference between these two questions" ("Men" 186). It now seems appropriate, therefore, to address the particular question of men in feminist literary criticism, which, like the issue of men in feminism, has raised a particularly controversial -and still open- debate within American masculinity scholarship.

Literary hermeneutics has shown how texts are not simply mimetic or reflective: they are not limited to describing real or fictional worlds. Because a text may be differently interpreted by each of its readers, texts, as

Ben Knights (22) elaborates, produce a multiplicity of meanings and new performances of themselves. In those performances, readers play a central and active part. Thus, reading is an interactive and social act. In our inter-personal reading practices, we have traditionally been addressed as gendered beings (Knights 22; Fetterley). As Judith Fetterley has shown, both women and men are taught to read as men. While there are some exceptions to the rule,[169] the Western reader has been usually addressed as a man because of three main factors (Knights 22): 1) cultural assumptions about knowledge, about gender, and about maturity; 2) the terms of the text itself, especially its power as a discourse, an address that makes proposals about who reads it and according to what basic rules; and 3) institutions of education and reading. Elaborating on that, Ben Knights comments:

> The dominant traditions in Western literatures have addressed the reader on the understanding that the normal position was that of being a male…The ideal community of readers with whom any one individual has been invited into solidarity would be made up of men. Reading as a man has thus been proffered to all, whatever their actual gender, as the neutral and universal position from which other positions are deviations. (22)

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[169] For instance, most of the original readers of the novel were women (see, for example, Fiedler; Eagleton).

Many feminist literary critics (see, for example, Fetterley; Pearce; Reid) have long focused attention on this fact, which they have also tried to question and modify. They have shown how women can become "resisting readers" (Fetterley) of the patriarchal discourses addressed to them. But what about men? Can they also become "resisting readers"? Opinions seem to be divided in this respect. Men's participation in feminist literary criticism is often considered yet another example of what Laura Mulvey famously described as the "male gaze."[170] A man who decides to take a look at feminist criticism may be easily criticized, as Ruthven (1) elaborates, by a type of feminist film criticism which sees "looking" as voyeuristic activity engaged in by men to the detriment of women, who are thus objectified.[171] Elaine Showalter's "Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year" (1983), the first prominent article on the male feminist critic phenomenon, seems to agree with Ruthven's worst suspicions. In this essay, Showalter denounces the appropriation of feminist criticism by several prominent male literary critics (such as Jonathan Culler, Terry

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[170] As Laura Mulvey has famously defined it, the *male gaze* often becomes "a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other" (31).

[171] Joseph Allen Boone notes, for example, that in the autumn of 1984 the Harvard's Center for Literary Studies created its Feminist Literary Theory Seminar, although "men were specifically not invited to this meeting; some of the founding members felt that the topic was too sensitive, that the women in the seminar needed to reach a group consensus before opening its doors to men" ("Me(n)" 162).

Eagleton, Wayne Booth, and Robert Scholes) eager to benefit from its early successes in the 1980s. Accepting Showalter's views, a number of critics like Robert Scholes have thus conceded that men's engagement in feminist literary criticism is an impossibility, insisting that men will never manage to read as women. As Scholes explains, "with the best will in the world we shall never read as women and perhaps not even like women. For me, born where I was born and living where I have lived, the very best I can do is to be conscious of the ground upon which I stand: to read not as but like a man" (218).

Nevertheless, it should be clear by now that just as men can -and should- engage in feminist theory and practice, they can also take part in feminist literary criticism. It is no more necessary to be a woman in order to do feminist criticism than it is to be poor in order to be a Marxist. In this respect, one should insist that while femaleness is a biological concept, feminism is a political option that can, therefore, be embraced by both women and men. In Ruthven's own words, "the purpose of making this distinction has been to free women (but inevitably men too) from sexist stereotyping based on limiting conceptions of their 'nature'" (8).

If feminism is, first and foremost, the struggle against patriarchal oppression, the important thing for men is not to worry about definitions and essences ("am I *really* a feminist?"), but to take up an unambiguous anti-patriarchal position (Moi "Men" 184). It is not enough to be interested in masculinity or in male sexuality or in gender differences. Such interests must somehow be developed as part of the anti-patriarchal struggle. Therefore, the question, as Toril Moi ("Men" 184) concludes, is not so much a matter of territory (whether men should be *in* feminism) but of ideological position (whether they should be *against* patriarchy).

Patriarchal notions of masculinity are constantly being reinforced through social practices of communication, including literature, both oral and written. Nevertheless, fictions are not monolithic but provide some room for play and negotiation, since they are performative and rely on the reader to go on re-inscribing or changing themselves. In other words, there is no such a thing as a text in itself since a text only becomes meaningful(l) when it is read. In this sense, then, male readers, as Ben Knights (23) elaborates, can also learn to read against the dominant assumptions both of

texts and of the institutions of reading, interpretation, and criticism.[172] In the end, they could reap benefit from doing so. While it is true that men have usually been the beneficiaries of their textual identification with the universal, such identification may reinforce identities and narratives which, while giving power and privileges to men, reduce and/or distort them in other ways.[173] As a fictional construct, masculinity has often been restricted by the narratives addressed to us. So, men might develop a gender-specific perspective in order to achieve what Ben Knights has called "estranged masculine readings" -namely, "readings which -while reflexively conscious of the gender identities of those practising them- do not accept a hegemonic masculinity as an inescapable given" (23).

Thus, men could, and should, do feminist literary criticism. The male feminist critic does not need to be charged with hermeneutical rape, since "entry and interpenetration," as Jane Gallop (xiii) reminds us, do not always mean "disrespect or violation." Most men who write feminist literary criticism are totally convinced of both the value and the need of their job. Most of them see radical feminism as a practice of exemplary resistance to

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[172] After all, both women and men have also had to *learn* to read as men. As Knights insists, reading as a man is as "unnatural" for a man as learning to curse or spitting in the street (23).

[173] For an analysis of the distortions involved in universalizing conceptions of masculinity, see Armengol ("'Attention'").

an oppressive regime. Personal relationships with feminist women aside, their attitude to feminism, as Ruthven (9) elaborates, is often one of commitment rather than curiosity.

Certainly, it is often said that men will appropriate feminism; that because men are used to running things, they would take over feminist criticism if given half the chance, their appropriation of it constituting another form of oppression and colonization; and that the academic men who are interested in feminist criticism will soften its radicalism by professionalizing it, transforming it into an optional "approach" to literature and offering it as something both new and relevant to students fed up with traditional approaches. However, all these arguments, as Ruthven (11) suggests (and I would agree), are weakened by the fact that even the latest feminist trend is heavily dependent on men to articulate its position, and continues to require their services. For example, female feminists working in socialist and Marxist political parties, struggling against racism and imperialism, fighting dictatorships and mobilizing against nuclear war and ecological disasters have always had to work with men. Feminist theory is also indebted to the work of men such as John Stuart Mill and Friedrich Engels, while feminist literary criticism has made extensive use of Michel

Foucault's work on sexual and discursive practices, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, and Jacques Lacan's analysis of the close links between psychoanalysis and linguistics.

It seems, therefore, that men can play, and have played, a key role in feminist theory and criticism. Little wonder, then, that a number of recent American feminist critical texts, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating's landmark edition of *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002), have incorporated male-authored contributions. In her "Preface" to the book, the late Gloria Anzaldúa comments that *This Bridge We Call Home*, published thirty years after *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, remains indebted to the earlier text in terms of both character and structure. However, she elaborates that *This Bridge We Call Home* expands on *This Bridge Called My Back*, giving it a new shape. One of the key differences between the two texts is the gender of the contributors to each volume. While *This Bridge Called My Back* was written exclusively by women of color, *This Bridge We Call Home* incorporates a number of contributions by white males. Anzaldúa acknowledges that, in so doing, the text risks the displeasure of many women of color, who will not want whites

or males as contributors to the book. Nevertheless, she is convinced that, although it would have been easier for her to limit the dialogue to women of color, excluding white males from feminist (and ethnic) criticism "comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth" (Preface 3). It is true that many women of color are possessive of *This Bridge Called My Back* and view it as a safe space, as "home." However, it is equally true, as Anzaldúa insists, that there are no safe spaces. "Home" can be unsafe and dangerous because it is associated with intimacy and thus thinner boundaries. Staying "home" and not moving out from our own group comes from resentment and proves limiting. "To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others." As Anzaldúa elaborates:

> Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded. Effective bridging comes from knowing when to close ranks to those outside our home, group, community, nation -and when to keep the gates open. (Preface 3)

In Anzaldúa's view, then, change will decline unless we attach it to new growth or include new growth in it. We thus need to move away from

simply focusing on what has been done to the "Other" (victimhood) to a wider level of agency, one that questions what we are doing to each other. This does not entail abandoning previous ideas, but "building on them." Moreover, to include white males is not an attempt to restore their privilege, but "a refusal to keep walking the color line." As Anzaldúa elaborates, "whiteness may not be applied to all whites, as some possess women-of-color consciousness, just as some women of color bear white consciousness" (Preface 2). Moreover, to include (profeminist) men in the feminist critical debates may help challenge traditional gender divisions. In her own words, "these inclusions challenge conventional identities and promote more expansive configurations of identities -some of which will soon become cages and have to be dismantled" (Preface 4).

It would appear, then, that (white) men can, and should, contribute to feminist (and ethnic) literary studies. After all, separatist views on feminist criticism seem to remain ignorant about the conditions in which feminist discourses operate and circulate (Ruthven 9-10). Even when written by and specifically for women, feminist criticism is read also by academic men. After all, no literature teacher can afford to ignore feminist contributions to Marxist studies of the institutionalization of literature, particularly the

indictment of androcentricity that becomes apparent through the preponderance of male authors on academic syllabi (Ruthven 9-10). One should also try to avoid separatist views on feminist literary criticism because they end up dividing the sexes in such a way that men must either ignore feminism or criticize it. Most separatist feminists, as Ruthven (11-2) explains, argue that men should be discouraged from writing feminist literary criticism for the same reasons that they should be discouraged from teaching in women's literature courses, since having the oppressor talk about his oppression to the oppressed is morally inappropriate. However, such a view, as Ruthven (11-2) herself elaborates, fails to examine the unquestioned identification of men with oppression. Rather than identify men with a universal and unproblematized conception of patriarchy, female feminist critics should encourage men to incorporate the lessons of feminism into everything they do and write. In this way, they would contribute to a transformation of society which would render superfluous much current feminist polemic (Ruthven 11-2).

There exist various areas from which a male feminist criticism might emerge. First of all, young men, as Joseph A. Boone ("Me(n)" 174) indicates, seem more likely to engage in feminist criticism than older men

are. We need to account for an important generational factor, since there are now men in academia young enough for feminism to have been a fundamental component of their intellectual formation. Moreover, we should avoid lumping all men together as a uniform category. We should pay special attention to those marginalized male voices, particularly gay, whose interests often intersect, though do not always coincide, with those of female feminists (Boone "Me(n)" 174). Just as it seems important to account for the diversity and disagreement within the feminist movement itself, women and men also need to keep this principle in mind when considering the possibilities of a male feminist critical activity, its own potential for diversities, differences, and disagreement. In this sense, then, male feminist literary criticism is not about more of the same. Rather, it is about the "imagination of difference that does not break down into two agendas, but [that] opens onto a complicated map of contiguities" (Miller "Man" 141-2). The fact that men can be feminist but not women is crucial, as male feminists cannot simply *repeat* the words and actions of female feminists. Speaking as they do from a different position, the "same" words acquire "different meanings" (Moi "Men" 184). Repeating the words of a female feminist, however honestly, a man signals the fact that he has not

considered the differences in power -and therefore in speaking position- between them. As Toril Moi elaborates in this respect:

> The main theoretical task for male feminists, then, is to develop an analysis of their own position, and a strategy for how their awareness of their difficult and contradictory position in relation to feminism can be made explicit in discourse and practice. ("Men" 184)

4. 4. The sex and/or the death of the author

While it seems clear, then, that both women and men can practice feminist (literary) theory, male feminism is not -and should not always be- identical with female feminism.[174] Like the sex of the critic, the sex of the author remains an equally important aspect of textual criticism. [175] Admittedly, the relevance of knowledge about the author to knowledge about the text has been diminished repeatedly in the twentieth century (Knights 135). The relevance of the author to literary criticism was questioned by several

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[174] Similarly, it has been argued that while masculinity affects both men and women, it influences male and female bodies in different ways (Halberstam; Gardiner Introduction 15).

[175] On the importance of keeping sex/maleness as an analytical category, see also chapter 2 (sections 2.5 and 2.6).

formalist perspectives of the first half and middle of the twentieth century, although it was Roland Barthes who famously proclaimed "The Death of the Author" in his 1968 essay. Moreover, both Marxist and poststructuralist studies have tended to play down the importance of the individual author. Marxist historians have argued, for example, how the subjectivities of "individuals" are always shaped and constructed by social and political circumstances, claiming that individualism is itself a specific historical phenomenon. On the other hand, poststructuralist thinkers insist on the dangers of treating "experience" as an unmediated category, the absolute possession of the autonomous and sovereign individual. As Ben Knights concludes from all this, "at the end of the day, any account of the texts as a wave of codes, or as the product of linguistic and cultural practices, is bound to diminish the significance of the individual author" (136).[176]

Nevertheless, a number of scholars have insisted that the sex of the (male) author cannot be ignored. For example, some critics have argued that the fact that a novel is written by a man matters because the fact itself explains features of the text's content and/or style. For instance, in analyzing

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[176] It has already been pointed out (see chapter 2) that both historicism and poststructuralism have also challenged essentialist notions of "sex," claiming that it is a historical and discursive, rather than an immutable and biological, construction.

works such as Henry James's *The Lesson of the Master*, James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, or D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, Ben Knights himself stresses the importance of taking gender into consideration in what might otherwise become "an ostensibly gender-neutral discussion about art and 'the artist'" (50). However, Knights insists that, in terms of content, these male-authored works are far from monolithic, unambiguous, or unitary:

> We find in masculine narrative a recurrent ambivalence towards the figure of the male artist, who is at once envied for his direct contact with a highly charged and precious domain, and also despised as not altogether a man...Such a figure is divided where a man is conventionally supposed to be unitary. (50-1)

On the other hand, some critics have referred to stylistic features which are supposedly distinctly masculine. In *Writing Men* (2000), Berthold Schoene argues that a major concern among many contemporary British male writers is their self-conscious envisioning of an *écriture masculine* that would question their predecessors' often stereotyped and profoundly patriarchal conceptions of masculinity (xiii). Similarly, in *Phallic Critiques*, Peter Schwenger insists that "there *is* such a thing as a masculine style" (12). Just as Virginia Woolf defended her belief in the feminine sentence,

and just as Hélène Cixous posited the existence of *écriture feminine*,
Schwenger claims that "the time has come...for the question of a masculine
mode to be taken seriously" (7). In Schwenger's view, a masculine style is
characterized by several features. First of all, any attempt to define a
woman's style or a man's style depends to some degree on content. In his
own words, "masculine or feminine subject matter, then, will influence the
effect of any style" (11). Second, "feminine" and "masculine" styles need
not be defined strictly by sex. Thus, a man's style is not limited to men:

> It certainly is not one that is written by all men. It is not a style
> 'natural' to men, but one that is artificially created. Moreover,
> its nature as a masculine style is not absolute but relative.
> Because of the elusiveness of both style and sex, it will never
> be possible to pinpoint objectively the 'masculinity' of a piece
> of writing. (12)[177]

Although Schwenger qualifies that *écriture masculine* is not the same
as male writing, which would leave him immune to the charge of
essentialism, he keeps using the terms "male" and "masculine" style quite
interchangeably throughout his work. Moreover, his theory of a "masculine"

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[177] Obviously, Schwenger relies heavily on Hélène Cixous for his defence of an *écriture masculine*. As is
known, Cixous also insisted that *écriture feminine* is not confined to female writers and, indeed, she
mentioned several male authors as examples of such a practice. Moreover, she argued that "it is impossible
to define a feminist practice of writing and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can
never be theorized, enclosed, coded -which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist" (883).

style is fraught with several other problems and contradictions. For example, one wonders about the very existence, and critical usefulness, of a category which is not possible "to pinpoint objectively." And even if you can tell by careful reading whether a text is written in a "masculine" style or not, what happens to this case?

> Does it not become circular? What about those stereotyped, stylised genres -Restoration Comedy, some forms of journalism, or romantic fiction are examples- where the genre itself is so formulaic that any one might learn to do it? There seems to be a dead end here. (Knights 137)

Finally, since Schwenger insists that a "man's style" largely depends on content, the notion can very easily fall prey to sexual stereotyping. After all, it is often the case that stereotypical female attributes like emotions and passivity get labeled as "feminine," while stereotypical male attributes such as strength and aggressiveness are defined as "masculine." Since Schwenger argues that form depends a lot on content, it is highly likely, then, that the literary representation of stereotypical male and female attributes will be defined as "masculine" and "feminine" styles, respectively.

Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland make a similar point in relation to *écriture feminine*. These critics acknowledge that the *écriture*

feminine of the French feminists has provided several "generative insights" and has helped to undermine a phallocentric ideology in a number of ways. Nevertheless, they insist that to define a language that is playful, open, disruptive, non-hierarchical, and anti-theoretical as "feminine," and one that is logical, closed, rigid, hierarchical, and theoretical as "masculine," keeps the very binary oppositions a Cixous or an Irigaray try to dismantle (Introduction 5-6).[178] Moreover, this attribution of traits to gender makes easier the appropriation of language for political means. Certain gender-identified constructions (e.g., "a text trying to close itself is *male*, whereas a text striving to remain open is *female*") can be viewed as "fictions of an era," political strategies whereby certain marginalized forms are appropriated by certain marginalized readers as the "prototypical" genres of their own voices (Claridge and Langland Introduction 6). After all, "male-traditional" has usually been equated with the technological rationality that has been a target of social critics from the early Romantics to the Frankfurt School. Similarly, the term "feminist," as Graff (137) elaborates, is often equated with the world view which has been named "contextualism" or

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[178] Toril Moi (*Sexual*) and Donna Stanton have made similar points.

"historicism" and may be exemplified in such philosophical trends as modern pragmatism, existentialism, and post-structuralism.

From what has been suggested, it would appear, then, that neither content nor form can help us determine the sex of the author. Thus, one may be tempted to proclaim the "death of the author," at least insofar as his/her actual biological sex is concerned. Nevertheless, it is my contention that as long as patriarchy continues to exist, it does *not* seem ethically advisable to ignore knowledge about the sex of the author.[179] Indeed, knowledge about the sex of the author -and, by extension, about his/her ethnic, class, and/or sexual specificities- becomes absolutely essential to continue the work begun in the 1970s by feminist scholars, who have long been working not only to recuperate silenced women authors, but also to redefine the curriculum both in higher education and in schools so as to present a higher amount of women's texts. Knowledge of the author, as Knights insists, has been central to this enterprise, and the perseverance of women authors and scholars struggling against patriarchal oppression should be taken as "a role

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[179] This does not mean, though, that the abolition of patriarchy would necessarily entail the "death of the author" or his/her sex. As has been suggested (see chapter 2), *equality* should not be mistaken for *sameness*. It is both possible and desirable to be equal and yet be able to keep our (sex) differences.

model for women readers and students -and in turn for a new generation of women writers" (137).[180]

Moreover, the project of "degendering" literature often ends up privileging male fiction. For example, the formalist tendency of the 1940s and 1950s to ignore (the sex of) the author often favored men's texts over women's literature. The fatal flaw of the formalist position (at least as adopted in mainstream Anglo-American literary criticism in the 1940s and 1950s) was its naïveté about its own critical assumptions. As Ben Knights elaborates:

> Curiously, the impersonality of the author and the priority accorded to the words on the page almost always favoured texts by men, and went along with a canon whose advocates unabashedly overlooked the implicit theories upon which it rested. (136)

Finally, one should bear in mind that our knowledge about an author (however minimal or impressionistic) always influences how we read. And since one of the first things that we want to know about people is their sex, that knowledge (with all the attached assumptions and presuppositions) becomes part of the framework within which we read. Bearing all this in

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[180] For an deeper analysis of the close relationship between sexuality, authorship, and representations of masculinity in (nineteenth-century British) women's literature, see Armengol ("Travestismos").

mind, one must concur with Ben Knights, then, that the sex of the (male) author matters, "if for no better reason than because if the reader does not know, she or he will make it up" (137-8).

In line with these arguments, then, I believe that the sex of the author tends to *influence* his or her literary works, although I also think that it does not (always) *determine* them. It does not seem fair to lump all male (and female) writers into the same category. Just as not all women writers can be considered feminist, there is the exemplary feminism of various male writers who managed to move away from patriarchal representations of women and gender.[181] It is probably true, as Sally Robinson notes, that white male novelists -like black, women, and/or gay writers- have been lumped into one category in post-sixties American culture. As she explains:

> While white male novelists…might have until recently been read simply as "novelists," many might now find themselves categorically defined *as* white male novelists: they might find themselves *marked*, not read for their expression of a personal, individualized vision but, like women writers or African

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[181] These include, among others, Samuel Richardson, whose eighteenth-century novel *Clarissa* has been described by Terry Eagleton as "arguably the major feminist text of the language"; Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), which represent "the frustrations and tragedy of women trapped in the conventions of a patriarchal society" (Ruthven 11); Henry James' *The Bostonians* (1886), which Judith Fetterly has described as an excellent analysis of the power relations between men and women as social classes; and Thomas Hardy, who challenged the sexual ideology of his time by creating characters like Tess Durbeyfield and Sue Bridehead, "whose failure to conform to acceptable patterns of behaviour caused social upheavals which are replicated in formal disruptions in the novels" (Ruthven 11).

American writers, habitually read as the exemplars of a particularized -gender and racialized- perspective. (16)

The analysis of white male authors as a specific gendered and racialized group helps to rethink universalizing conceptions of white men and their (literary) works as representative of hu*man* experience. Nevertheless, one should also bear in mind that white masculinity, as chapter 2 has tried to demonstrate, is far from static and monolithic. Thus, white male fiction is equally complex and varied, and has provided both conservative and innovative perspectives on men and masculinities, as chapter 5 will also try to illustrate and exemplify.

While this thesis analyzes white male authors as representative of a specific, rather than universal, gender perspective, it also contends, therefore, that white heterosexual men's fiction, like their identity, is diverse and often contradictory. White male fiction has indeed produced both patriarchal and re-visionary/feminist representations of men and masculinities, although it is surprising to see how little work exists on male authors challenging the same patriarchal structures that women fight, especially since most literature professors teach male writers. Certainly, any struggles they fight against patriarchal culture, as Claridge and Langland

(Introduction 19) elaborate, are likely to provide "knowledge of the sort sure to empower everyone -women and men- in the analysis of the gender status quo."

Rather than identify men with an unquestioned and vague notion of patriarchy, it might thus be more helpful, as Joseph A. Boone ("Me(n)" 166) has argued, to strive to locate the male voice as a third or "odd term" in a gendered discourse that consists of (at least) man, woman, and the cultural ideology that we call patriarchy. In this way, we could perhaps begin to move away from the unproblematized equation of maleness with a universal patriarchy, which often proves simplistic and (at least partly) inaccurate.

CHAPTER 5. GENDERING VIOLENCE: THE (DE)CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AS VIOLENCE IN AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

> What gender comes to mind when I invoke the following current American problems: "teen violence," "gang violence," "suburban violence," "drug violence," "violence in the schools"?…Of course, you've imagined men. And not just any men, but younger men, in their teens and twenties, and relatively poorer men, from the working class or lower middle class. But how do our social commentators discuss these problems? Do they note that the problems of youth and violence is really a problem of young *men* and violence? Do they ever mention that everywhere ethnic nationalism sets up shop, it is young men who are the shopkeepers? Do they ever mention masculinity at all? No.
>
> —Michael Kimmel *The Gendered Society* (2000)

Male violence remains a major social problem in most contemporary cultures worldwide. Cross-cultural anthropology (see, for example, Gilmore; Cornwall and Lindisfarne) seems to suggest that, in most cultures around the globe, men are more aggressive than women, who often become the victims of patriarchal violence. In the United States, the links between masculinity and violence seem particularly strong. Besides being the main cause of

domestic violence, American men -often, as we shall see, from ethnic and/or economically disadvantaged social groups- constitute as well 92 percent of all persons arrested for robbery; 87 percent for aggravated assault; 85 percent of other assaults; and 82 percent of disorderly conduct (Kimmel *Gendered* 243). Paradoxically, however, the close relationship between masculinity and violence remains (largely) unexplored. As Kimmel indicates, the fact that the vast majority of violent people are men seems so natural as to raise no questions or discussion (*Gendered* 243).

Drawing on the latest work on male violence carried out by several masculinity scholars (see, for example, Kimmel *Gendered* and "Violence"; Segal *Slow*; Beneke *Men*), this chapter thus sets out to explore the recurrent association between masculinity and violence, which will be described as the result of different social and historical, rather than natural or essentialist, factors. While most psychoanalytic and anthropological explanations for male violence describe it as inevitable and universal, such arguments seem to be undermined by the very existence of a number of pacifist cultures where men, as we shall see, are extremely gentle and nonviolent. So as to complement psychoanalytic and anthropological accounts of the relationship between masculinity and violence, then, the chapter will also use

sociological and historical explanations, which are culture-specific and context-bound.

In effect, analyzing the links between American masculinity and American violence from a socio-historical perspective involves two different things (Kimmel "Violence" 2: 810). First, we must study male violence in the contemporary United States, comparing it with other industrial countries. Second, we must explore the evolution of the association between masculinity and violence over American history. Even though male violence has traditionally played a central role, as we shall see, in American cultural history, chapter 5 will try to illustrate that what was culturally constructed can also be culturally de-constructed, and that American literature can play a fundamental part in this cultural de-construction.

Focusing on contemporary literary re-visions of male violence, then, the chapter will center on a selected number of contemporary American literary works that seem to question and re-write from innovative perspectives the classical cultural conception of violence as a symbol of virility. Focus will thus be given to Russell Banks's *Affliction* (1989) and several short stories in Richard Ford's *Rock Springs* (1987) -namely,

"Communist," "Great Falls," "Optimists," and "Sweethearts"- and *A Multitude of Sins* (2001)- especially two stories in the collection entitled "Under the Radar" and "Calling," respectively. As we shall see, both Banks and Ford seem to re-read male violence, which in their fiction is shown to often derive from economic hardship, as a (self-)destructive force for women as well as men. In highlighting the invariably detrimental effects of violence on both genders, these works thus seem to provide both hope and inspiration for moving beyond the traditional view of violence as a proof of masculinity and virility. Besides questioning traditional representations of violence as a symbol of male heroism, Ford's fiction also portrays, as we shall see, boys and men who decide to move away from the influence of violence, rejecting their violent fathers or their aggressive (male) friends. So, Ford's literature will receive special critical attention in chapter 5, as he not only challenges and undermines violent masculinities, but also appears to offer new, alternative, non-violent constructions of masculinity in American culture and literature.

Though chapter 5 will focus on the subversive re-presentations of male violence in the fiction of Russell Banks and Richard Ford, such revisionary depictions will be preceded by, and contrasted with, more

traditional fictional approaches to male violence, which in this chapter will be exemplified by Ernest Hemingway and Chuck Palahniuk. Even though Hemingway's view of violence as a test of manhood recurs in much of his fiction, chapter 5 will use "An African Story" (1972) to illustrate his specific conception of hunting as a symbol of virility, which has been repeatedly undermined, as we shall see, by Richard Ford. Hemingway's story will, therefore, be explored not only as an example for his literary association between masculinity and violence, but especially as a contrast to Ford's innovative literary re-visions of the Hemingwayesque notion of hunting as a test of manhood.

Another work which illustrates the continued depiction of violence as a reaffirmation of manhood in contemporary American literature is, as we shall see, Chuck Palahniuk's best-selling novel *Fight Club* (1996). Though focused on Richard Ford and Russell Banks's innovative re-visions of male violence, chapter 5 will thus borrow as well from Chuck Palahniuk's fiction to try to illustrate the prevailing connection between manhood and aggressive behavior in contemporary US fiction. By analyzing Banks and Ford's subversive re-writings of male violence *vis-à-vis* Hemingway and Palahniuk's more conventional representations of the subject, the chapter

attempts, therefore, to provide examples for both the traditional construction and the possible de-construction of male violence in contemporary American culture and literature.

5. 1. Gendering violence: Theoretical explanations for the relationship between masculinity and violence

In the United States, men constitute 99% of all persons arrested for rape; 88% of those arrested for murder; and 83% of all family violence (Kimmel *Gendered* 243). In most industrialized countries worldwide, masculinity is a risk factor in drunk driving accidents as well. In general terms, men as a group tend to be much more violent than women as a group (Kimmel "Violence" 2: 809).[182]

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[182] It is true that women are also violent. Some scholars (see, for example, Segal *Slow* 261-71) argue that there has been a dramatic increase in women's criminality. However, Kimmel (*Gendered* 248) insists that women's criminality has indeed *decreased* since the eighteenth century. Court records show a gradual decline in women's arrests since the eighteenth century, due, at least in part, to changes in the definition of femininity and the "cult of domesticity." By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a clear separation between the public and private spheres. Women were thus confined to reproductive and domestic work in the home, which was followed by a parallel decline in female court involvement. Clearly, women could not become criminals if they were excluded from the public sphere and the outside world. Despite the increase in women's criminality over the last years, Kimmel (*Gendered* 248) elaborates, the base numbers were so small to start with that "*any* modest increase would appear to be a larger percentage increase than among men." Moreover, it must be remembered that women's violence tends to be defensive, while men are often the initiators of violent acts. As Kimmel himself concludes in this respect, "while men's violence may be instrumental -designed to accomplish some goal- or expressive of emotion, women's violence often is the outcome of feeling trapped and helpless" (*Gendered* 249). It follows, then, that violence remains a clearly gendered behavior.

However, most scholars and social commentators, as Michael Kimmel ("Violence" 2: 809) has noted, keep ignoring the close links between masculinity and violence. For example, when discussing youth and violence, sociologists attribute rising rates of violence among young boys to access to guns, mass media violence, parental neglect, drug consumption, poverty, and many other factors. Seldom, however, is the word "masculinity" explicitly mentioned. As Kimmel himself explains:

> Imagine, though, if the phalanxes of violence were composed entirely of women. Would that not be *the* story, the only issue to be explained? Would not a gender analysis occupy the center of every single story? The fact that these are men seems so natural as to raise no questions, generate no analysis. (Kimmel *Gendered* 243)

While it is true that the links between masculinity and violence remain largely unanalyzed, a number of masculinity scholars have recently put forward different theoretical explanations that attempt to account for the close relationship between maleness and violent behavior.[183] From a

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[183] Some highlight biological differences between men and women, arguing, for example, that male hormones, especially testosterone, trigger male aggression. While it is true that testosterone is associated with aggression, it does not provoke the aggression, but simply facilitates an aggression already present. It does nothing for non-violent males, for instance (Kimmel *Gendered* 243-6). Nor is there a causal relation from hormone to behavior. For example, athletic winners, as Kimmel (*Gendered* 243-6) elaborates, experience increased testosterone levels *after* they win. Violence causes increased testosterone levels as much as hormonal increases lead to violence.

psychoanalytic perspective, Nancy Chodorow (*Reproduction*) has explained that individuation and separation from mother is one of the central components of masculinity. While girls can achieve femininity without separating from mother, boys can only become men by separating from her. However, men's separation from mother is both arduous and precarious because, according to Chodorow, most males experience all through their lives an unconscious desire to *regress* -that is, to recover a sense of primary fusion with mother. In Chodorow's own words, "underlying, or built into, core male gender identity is an early, nonverbal, unconscious, almost somatic sense of primary oneness with the mother, an underlying sense of femaleness that continually, usually unnoticeably, but sometimes insistently, challenges and undermines the sense of maleness" ("Gender" 13). Because boys must separate from mother to become "real" men, masculinity comes to be defined as the opposite of women and femininity. So, men must constantly prove that they are *not* (like) women, that they are not feminine. Men defend against their (unconscious) desire to regress and identify with mother through validating a compulsion to prove their masculinity. In this context, violence becomes one of the central mechanisms through which men can prove their masculinity (Chodorow "Enemy"). Therefore, men

come to embody an inherently violent or compulsive masculinity, which Timothy Beneke has defined as "the compulsion or need to relate to, and at times create, stress or distress as a means of both proving manhood and conferring on boys and men superiority over women and other men" (*Proving* 36). Failure to do so often results in the social or individual perception that one is not a man. One must take distress and act "like a man" or run the risk of being considered feminine -a "sissy" or "mama's boy." Masculinity, as Beneke (*Proving* 36) concludes, thus becomes a relentless violent test.

Several masculinity anthropologists, perhaps most notably David Gilmore, have also tried to explain the close relationship between masculinity and violence, which he sees as a universal cultural phenomenon. Gilmore's cross-cultural anthropological research has shown that most cultures worldwide include social codes of masculinity that require the endurance of violent tests, irrespective of degree of industrialization or form of social organization. Indeed, a key difference between masculinity and femininity in most cultures around the globe is that the former has to be proved through violent tests or proofs of action, while the latter may be proved without resorting to violence. Indeed, a girl who likes playing rough

or noisy games is often regarded as unfeminine, as a tomboy. Although proving femininity usually involves questions of bodily ornament or sexual allure, an "authentic" femininity, as David Gilmore (12) explains, does not usually involve violent tests or proofs of action. When a girl menstruates for the first time, she comes to be considered a woman by her community. In most cultures worldwide, menstruation, a purely biological or bodily process, signals a girl's entry into womanhood. Manhood, on the contrary, is, primarily, a cultural ideal that must be achieved, and constantly proved and reasserted, on the public stage. In most cultures worldwide, violence becomes a primary means of proving masculinity.

There exist numerous examples of violent masculinity in many cultures around the globe (Gilmore 12-20). For example, Gilmore's anthropological work has shown how the male inhabitants of Truk Island, a little atoll in the South Pacific, are expected to prove their manhood by going on deep-sea fishing expeditions in tiny dugouts and spear-fishing in shark-infested waters. If any men avoid such challenges, their fellows, male and female, ridicule them and call them effeminate and childlike. In East Africa, on the other hand, young boys from a number of cattle-herding tribes -including the Masai, Rendille, Jie, and Samburu- are taken away from their

mothers and subjected at the outset of adolescence to bloody circumcision rites by which they become "true" men. If a boy cries while his penis is being cut, he is shamed for life as unworthy of manhood, and his whole family is shamed. After this public demonstration of manhood, the young boys initiates are isolated in the wilderness. There, all alone, they learn the tasks of responsible manhood: cattle rustling, raiding, killing, etc. If this period proves successful, they return to society; only then are they allowed to marry.

In Ethiopia, the Amhara, a Semitic-speaking tribe of rural cultivators, have as well a deep belief in masculinity called *wand-nat* (Gilmore 15). To show their *wand-nat*, the Amhara boys are obliged to engage in whipping contests called *buhe*. During these whipping ceremonies, faces are lacerated, ears torn open, and red and bleeding welts appear. Moreover, Amhara youths are made to prove their virility by scarring their arms with red-hot embers. Any sign of weakness is mocked. In the New Guinea Highlands, boys must also undergo a number of brutal manhood rituals, which include whipping, flailing, and beating by other men. If they avoid such rituals, boys are shamed for life (Gilmore 15-6).

Other examples of stressed manhood include the !Kung Bushman of southwest Africa, who must alone track and kill a large adult antelope. Only after his first kill of such a buck is he regarded as fully masculine and allowed to take a wife. Masculinity, as Gilmore (16) elaborates, must also be proved in aboriginal North America. For example, between the ages of twelve and fifteen, the Tewa boys of New Mexico, also known as the Pueblo Indians, are taken away from their homes, purified by ritual celebrations, and then whipped mercilessly by the Kachina spirits (their fathers in disguise). Each boy is stripped naked and lashed on the back four times with a crude yucca whip that draws blood and leaves permanent scars. After these initiation rituals, which Tewa boys are expected to undergo stoically, they are considered men (Gilmore 16).

The compulsion to prove manhood, as Gilmore (16-8) elaborates, is not limited to non-industrialized cultures. In urban Mexico, for example, a man is generally expected to prove his manhood by standing up to challenges and insults. Besides being tough and brave, he must always be ready to defend his family's honor. In most eastern European countries, masculinity must also be demonstrated. In the Balkans, for example, a real man is one who drinks heavily and fights bravely while, in Christian Crete,

men demonstrate their masculinity by stealing sheep and besting other men in games of chance and skill. Anglophone cultures have always had their own manhood tests as well. As David Gilmore indicates, "we too have our manly traditions…Although we may choose less flamboyant modes of expression than the Amhara or Trukese, we too have regarded manhood as an artificial state, a challenge to be overcome, a prize to be won by fierce struggle" (17). For example, boys belonging to the gentry of modern England were submitted to hard trials on the road to their majority. They were removed at a tender age from mother and home, as in East Africa or New Guinea, and sent to public boarding schools, where a cruel "trial by ordeal," including physical violence and terrorization by elder males, provided an access to manhood (Gilmore 17).

The culture of the United States has always encouraged men to prove their manhood through violence as well. For example, in the antebellum American South, southerners of all social classes placed great emphasis on manly honor as a defining characteristic of the southern character. As Gilmore elaborates, "a defense of southern 'manliness' was in fact offered by Confederate writers of the time…as one justification for regional defiance, political separation and, finally, war" (20). The need to prove

manhood also figures prominently in the agenda of the American Boy Scouts, who set out to "make big men of little boys" by promoting "an independent manhood," as it does in the frontier folklore of the American West, past and present, as seen in numerous cowboy films (Gilmore 20).

Gilmore's anthropological accounts, alongside Chodorow's psychoanalytic arguments described earlier, have provided a number of valuable insights into the relationship between masculinity and violence. However, both of these theories about male violence can be, and have been, contested in a number of ways.[184] While psychoanalysis generally describes (male) violence as an intrinsic component of the hu*man* psyche,[185] anthropological explanations for male violence tend to describe it as a trans-cultural reality. Thus, both psychoanalysis and anthropology tend to describe male violence as inevitable and universal. There are, however, some cultures where men are not violent with each other, which questions

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[184] Chodorow herself, in her later work (*Femininities*), warns against the somewhat simplistic psychoanalytic accounts of gender that characterized her earlier work (particularly *Reproduction*) and that have been described in this chapter.

[185] In general terms, psychoanalysis sees (male) violence as inevitable. According to Freud (*Civilization*), human nature is always divided between the Eros drive or instinct, which strives for communion with others and tries to preserve life, and the Thanatos (death) drive or instinct, which works for the violent dissolution of everything united. In Freud's view, both forces are equally strong and intrinsic to mankind. Inevitably, then, violence and death are part of human nature. For this idea, Freud, as Gray ("Enduring" 37) reminds us, is himself indebted to the early Greek philosopher Empedocles, who insisted that the universe is in eternal change, in generation and decay, because Love and Strife are always at work in the animate and the inanimate.

the alleged inevitability and universality of masculine violence. For instance, the people of Tahiti in French Polynesia and the Semai of Malaysia hate violence and confrontation (Gilmore 202-19).[186] As Gilmore explains, there is no stress on proving manhood among the men of Tahiti. The Tahitians make no effort to protect their women or to feign off foreign intruders. Tahitian men do not hunt. There are no dangerous or strenuous occupations that are considered masculine. There is no warfare or feuding. There is no concept of male honor to be defended, no "getting even." As Gilmore elaborates, men share a cultural value of "timidity" which forbids retaliation, and even when provoked men rarely come to blows. "Prohibitions against aggression," as Gilmore (206) concludes, "go far to exclude thoughts of revenge even when cheated."

Similarly, the Semai people of central Malaysia are among the most unaggressive and retiring people on the face of the earth. The Semai believe that to resist advances from another person, sexual or otherwise, is equivalent to an aggression against that person. As Gilmore (211) explains,

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[186] As has been suggested, Gilmore sees male violence as universal. Although he includes the Tahitians and the Semai in his anthropological work on men and masculinities, he insists that these isolated cases are simply two "exceptions" that confirm the general rule of men as violent. Instead of analyzing these two cultures as examples for the cultural relativity, and specificity, of male violence, as I attempt to do, Gilmore thus diminishes their importance by defining them as "exceptional." In so doing, then, he, like most anthropologists, simply emphasizes the cultural universality of masculine violence, ignoring its cultural variability and specificity.

"they call such aggressiveness *punan* -a very important concept in their culture, meaning roughly 'taboo.' Punan is a Semai word for any act, no matter how mild, that denies or frustrates another person." Elaborating on that, Gilmore comments that if you punan someone, his or her heart "becomes heavy." Thus, the affected person might hurt himself or become disoriented and do something wrong, or even violent. The whole village could thus be punished, since the spirits forbid untoward behavior. To avoid such tragedy, Semai always accede mildly to requests and importuning. Adopting punan as an ideal, Semai thus rely on a pervasive and strict non-violent image. This extreme pacifist self-image is incorporated into personality structure as an unconscious element of the ego-ideal. Thus, the Semai do not say "Anger is bad;" they claim, "We never get angry" and an angry man will hide his real feelings. As Gilmore himself concludes, Semai children also may not be disciplined or punished, and "they never hit each other or fight, and even noisy arguments are forbidden because noise 'frightens people'" (212-3).

Though exceptional, then, the existence of unaggressive men such as the Tahitians of French Polynesia and the Semai of Malaysia appears to undermine most psychoanalytic and anthropological accounts of male

violence, which tend to describe it as inevitable and universal. If, as it seems, neither psychoanalysis nor anthropology can fully account for the relationship between masculinity and violence, it may now be helpful to turn to sociological and historical explanations, which are culture-specific and context-bound. In effect, analyzing the links between American masculinity and American violence from a socio-historical perspective implies two different things (Kimmel "Violence" 2: 810). First, we must discuss male violence in the contemporary United States, contrasting it with other industrial countries. Second, we must explore the origins and evolution of the association between masculinity and violence in American history and culture. The analysis of male violence as a specific cultural and historical product -rather than as a universal and eternal phenomenon- not only helps undermine essentialist notions of masculinity as intrinsically violent but also, and more importantly, offers some hope for change. For, if the links between masculinity and violence have, as it seems, been culturally and historically constructed, they might also be culturally and historically de-constructed by social, political, and cultural means.

5. 2. Male violence in contemporary American culture

Young American men, as Kimmel ("Violence" 2: 810) indicates, are the most violent group of people in the industrialized world. The American homicide rate is between 5-20 times higher than any other industrial democracy, although the United States imprisons 5-20 times more than any other country in the world except Russia. In 1992, young men between 15 and 24 had a homicide rate of 37.2 per 100.000. This figure is about 10 times higher than the next closest industrialized country, Italy, and more than 60 times greater than the same age group in England. And this seems to be getting worse. Between 1985 and 1994, homicides by 14-17 year old males more than tripled, as have the numbers of men in prison. What all these figures suggest, then, is that in the contemporary United States masculinity is closely linked to violence. Elaborating on that, Michael Kimmel explains:

> Male socialization is a socialization to the legitimacy of violence -from infantile circumcision (the U.S. is the only nation to routinely practice male genital mutilation for non-religious reasons), to being hit by parents and siblings, to routine fights with other boys, to the socially approved forms of violence in the military, sports, and prison (the U.S. is the only

industrialized country that still employs capital punishment), to
epigrams that remind us not to get mad, but rather to get even,
that the working-world is the Hobbesian war of each against all,
a jungle where dogs eat dogs. ("Violence" 2: 811-2)

Very often, male violence equals men's violence against women. The

United States has among the highest rates of rape, domestic violence, and

spousal murder in the industrial world. As Kimmel (*Gendered* 254)

elaborates in this respect, nearly 40% of all women who are murdered are

murdered by husbands or boyfriends; every six minutes a woman in the

United States is raped; every 18 seconds a woman is beaten, and every day

four women are killed by their batterers. Violence against women occurs in

all class, ethnic, and cultural contexts. Educated, successful, sophisticated

men -lawyers, doctors, politicians, business executives- beat their wives as

much as uneducated, working-class men (Kimmel *Gendered* 262).

It is true, however, that there *are* some differences (Segal *Slow* 256).

For example, one of the best predictors of the emergence of domestic

violence is unemployment and poverty. Rates of domestic violence tend to

be higher in African-American families than in white families as well.

However, it must be stressed that (low-class) African-American men tend to

be more violent than white (middle-class) men not because of their race or

ethnicity, but because of their particular socioeconomic situation. Since masculinity has been traditionally associated with power and success, African-American men, who generally lack access to any of these masculine ideals, feel emasculated. Thus, African-American males, like working-class white men, use violence as the only form of power they have to reclaim and reaffirm their masculinity. As feminist psychologist Lynne Segal elaborates in this respect:

> In a culture which constructs masculinity around ideas of dominance, social power and control over others, but then denies to some men any access to such prerogatives, it is not surprising that subordinated men may be more likely to resort to violence as the only form of power they can assert over others. (*Slow* 256)

Unlike many other masculinity scholars (see, for example, Faludi *Backlash*), then, who describe male violence as a form of male power, a number of writers like Segal (*Slow* 256) or Kimmel (*Gendered* 257) have recently shown how male violence does not occur when men feel most powerful, but when they feel relatively powerless. More often than not, it occurs when men have low levels of self-esteem and feel that they are losing power. For example, rape does not usually result from a masculine feeling

of power, but from a feeling of relative powerlessness. Many men, as Kimmel (*Gendered* 257) explains, see women's beauty as an act of aggression. It invades men's desire and makes men feel vulnerable. Having committed what men see as an "invasive" act of aggression, women reject men and say no to sex. Rape is a way to get even and to retaliate. "These feelings of powerlessness," as Kimmel (*Gendered* 257) elaborates, "coupled with the sense of entitlement to women's bodies expressed by the rapists…combine in a potent mix." Very often, then, rape derives from men's contradictory feelings of powerlessness and entitlement, impotence and a right to feel in control.

This applies not only to rape but to domestic violence as well. Family violence researchers like Kersti Yllo have argued that men use domestic violence to exert power and control over their wives. In Yllo's view, men use domestic violence to frighten their wives, to ensure submission to the husband's rule in the home. Nevertheless, domestic violence is, as has been suggested, closely related to a man's feeling of powerlessness, rather than omnipotence. As Kimmel insists, "violence is restorative, a means to reclaim the power that he believes is rightfully his" (*Gendered* 262). Usually, then, abusive men batter their wives when they feel they are losing

power or control over their lives. In Spain, where male violence against women is one of the main current social problems, there have recently been several efforts to try to understand the causes (and consequences) of this type of violent behavior. Spanish woman director Icíar Bollaín, for example, produced a highly acclaimed film, *Te doy mis ojos* (2003), which seems to lend further support to the idea that domestic violence usually derives from a man's feeling of powerlessness. Midway through the film, Pilar (Laia Marull) tells her husband Antonio (Luis Tosar) that she wants to get a job as tourist guide. When Antonio learns about his wife's desire for self-realization, he feels that he is losing power and control over her life. Antonio fears that her job outside the domestic sphere will give her more freedom and autonomy, and perhaps the chance to meet another man. Antonio is afraid that she will eventually abandon him. Thus, he disapproves of his wife's desire for autonomy and resorts to violence to try to keep her in the home, under his control. Fortunately, however, he does not succeed. Violence always has disastrous effects, not only on women but also on men's lives. Men may batter and/or kill their girlfriends or wives. However, relying on an aggressive form of masculinity ends up destroying men themselves. In *Te doy mis ojos*, Antonio's aggressiveness and obsessive

jealousy make him wretched and unhappy. When his therapist (Sergi Calleja) asks him to describe a moment of happiness on a blank sheet of paper, Antonio has nothing to write about.[187] Antonio is unhappy because he does not know how to express his feelings without resorting to violence. In traditional patriarchal discourse, violence is the only legitimate way in which men can express their emotions. However, Bollaín shows how violence ends up destroying and isolating men. At film's end, Antonio, who embodies patriarchy itself, is abandoned. Similarly, in Martin Scorsese's film *Raging Bull* (1980), middleweight champion Jake La Motta is portrayed as a man whose possessive aggressiveness towards his wife ends up destroying his friendships, his career, and his marriage. As Segal has commented in this respect, "throughout the film La Motta's acts of violence are inseparable from his pent-up frustration and his actual powerlessness to express how he feels and to get what he wants" (*Slow* 259).

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[187] In Spain, there exist several therapy groups, such as the one directed by Toni Vives from the IRES-Institute in Girona (Catalonia), devoted to the treatment, and social reintegration, of male abusers. Such groups exist as well in South America. At the University of Puerto Rico, there exists a therapy group called "El colectivo," formed by several psychologists who work to change and reintegrate violent men. Understandably enough, these groups have been subject to harsh criticism, particularly from feminist women, who want all economic and human resources to be addressed to the victims, rather than the perpetrators, of domestic violence. However, these therapy groups seem to prove particularly helpful, since very few of its members resort to violence again after leaving prison (Vives, p.c.). For further information on these therapy groups, see www.hombresigualdad.com

If, as it seems, domestic violence has disastrous consequences for both women and men, then it becomes absolutely essential to look for strategies that may contribute to putting male violence to an end. In this sense, it seems fundamental, as Segal (*Slow* 260) indicates, to fight for social policies and socio-economic changes which enable women to leave violent marriages. In other words, a serious effort has to be made to reduce gender inequalities and to protect women from a culture of violence that often targets them. However, it seems increasingly clear that focus should also be given to the roots of the problem of male violence. In other words, it is essential to redefine masculinity and to work to dissociate it from violence. Boys must be taught that they can become men without resorting to violence. Moreover, boys and men should be instructed on the detrimental effects of violence on their own lives. Some profeminist men, such as Michael Kaufman in Canada or Michael Kimmel in the United States, are working in men's organizations against domestic violence. Kaufman was the father of the successful white ribbon campaign against domestic violence, which mobilized both women and men, while Kimmel leads in the USA the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS).[188]

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[188] In Spain, there are several men's groups against domestic violence, too. See, for example,

These organizations defend women who are the victims of male violence, at the same time as they work to dissociate masculinity from violence, teaching men about the disastrous effects of violence on their own lives. As Kimmel has explained, men are also the victims of violence, just as they are overwhelmingly its perpetrators (*Gendered* 263).

Besides supporting battered women and working to dissociate definitions of masculinity from violence, the eradication of male violence entails, as Lynne Segal (*Slow* 270-1) has argued, working to reduce the detrimental effects of late capitalism on the working-class man. Because working-class men often feel exploited and emasculated at work, they often use violence against women as the only form they have left for demonstrating their power and masculinity. Thus, domestic violence seems to reflect back the increased barbarism and aggressiveness of public life, as late capitalism continues to discriminate according to one's class, race, and gender. In Lynne Segal's own words:

> Who or what, then, do we identify as the epitome of 'violence', 'abuse' and 'aggression' in that [American capitalist] society? Those who are brutalised within an underworld of fear and exploitation? Or those who may never directly engage in acts of violence or physical force, but orchestrate the degradation and

brutalisation of others? The entrenchment of poverty and inequality in the world's richest nation has occurred precisely to enable the US to spend ever-greater sums on 'defence', and to conduct aggressive interventions in Central America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. (*Slow* 270-1)

It seems clear, then, that eradicating male violence will require significant individual, social, and economic changes. Though it seems both possible and absolutely essential to dissociate masculinity from violence, this will be difficult, especially because the equation of masculinity with violence remains deeply ingrained in American history and culture. As we shall see, the cultural history of the United States -which remains, as has been said, the only industrialized country that employs capital punishment- is also a history of male violence.

5. 3. Images of violence as a test of manhood in American cultural and literary history

Most masculinity scholars seem to agree that, in American history, the origins of the cultural association between masculinity and violence may be traced back to the eighteenth century. At that time, Scottish and Irish immigrants began to settle the American South, where brawling, dueling,

fighting, hunting, and drinking became the means to express masculinity and virility. As Michael Kimmel (*Gendered* 252-3) elaborates, violence has always been highest where young men gather, especially away from the "civilizing" influence of women. No wonder, then, that the American frontier, the stage for one of the largest concentrations of young males in the history of the industrialized world, provided as well a legacy of violence to American culture (Kimmel *Gendered* 253).[189] American cowboys, as seen in endless westerns, proved their manhood by standing up to challenges, fighting with each other, and, above all, killing Indians.

Michael Paul Rogin's seminal work *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (1975) has indeed shown how the Indian massacre at the time of Jackson's Presidency helped to reinforce white masculinity. In Jacksonian America, particularly between 1824 and 1852, expansion across the continent became the central element of American politics. Prior to that, in 1790, two-thirds of the American population of 3.9 million lived within fifty miles of the Atlantic. In the following fifty years, 4.5 million Americans crossed the Appalachians, one

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[189] For an in-depth analysis of the specific relationship between (male) violence and the American frontier, see historian Richard Slotkin's seminal trilogy (*Regeneration*; *Fatal*; *Gunfighter*), which has also shown the continued influence of the myth of the frontier in twentieth-century American culture.

of the greatest migrations in American history. The western states formed less than three percent of the U.S. population in 1790, and yet they amounted to twenty-eight percent in 1830. In two decades, the west would become the most crowded region of the United States.

Indians inhabited in 1790 almost all the territory west of the original thirteen states. If Americans were to expand and take possession of the continent, Indians would have to be dispossessed. Indian removal thus became Andrew Jackson's major political aim during his Presidency (Rogin 3-4). In order to reconcile the destruction of the Indians with the American self-image as a democratic country, white Americans, as Rogin (6) elaborates, often resorted to imperialistic discourses, which described Indians as "childish" creatures who needed to be looked after by their white "fathers." The Indian was said to remain in the childhood of the human race. Indians were seen as part of the human family as children, children who could not mature. Therefore, their replacement by whites, as Rogin (6) himself explains, came to symbolize "America's growing up from childhood to maturity." The Indian massacre thus served to prove and reinforce white manhood. While childhood is associated with boyhood, the concepts of adulthood and maturity remain culturally inseparable from manhood. By

submitting the Indians, who were regarded as childish and boyish, white males could reaffirm their maturity and manhood -and hence their superiority. In conclusion, then, the violent subjugation of the American Indian helped reinforce the hegemony of white masculinity (Rogin).[190]

It seems clear, therefore, that violence in America has long been used as a means of proving and reinforcing masculinity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, fighting was recurrently prescribed for boys, who, it was argued, often needed to prove their masculinity through violent behavior. In one of the best-selling advice manuals of the early twentieth century, parents were told, for instance, that:

> There are times when every body must defend his own rights if he is not to become a coward and lose the road to independence and true manhood…The strong willed boy needs no inspiration to combat, but often a good deal of guidance and restraint. If he fights more than, let us say, a half dozen times a week -except, of course, during his first week at a new school- he is probably over-quarrelsome and needs to curb. The sensitive, retiring boy, on the other hand, needs encouragement to stand his ground and fight. (Puffer qtd. in Kimmel *Gendered* 253)

Lurking behind this piece of advice was the fear, as Kimmel (*Gendered* 253) comments, that non-violent boys would not become real

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[190] Similarly, the American institution of slavery, which also diminished the Negroes as childish and immature, helped reaffirm white masculinity.

men. In America, non-violent men have always been regarded as effete. Men's fears of emasculation, humiliation, feminization, and homosexuality account for a significant amount of masculine violence. Contemporary American (mis)conceptions of masculinity as violence derive as well from old Southern notions of "honor," which asked man to be constantly ready to fight to prove his masculinity before other men. While Southern whites called it "honor;" by the turn of the century, it was called "reputation."[191] By the 1950s, northern ghetto blacks referred to "respect," which has now been transformed again into not showing "disrespect," or "dissing." As Kimmel concludes, "it's the same code of violence, the same daring" (*Gendered* 253).

American culture and literature have long reinforced the connection between masculinity and violence, usually by means of the adventure story. Significantly, the American adventure story has been generally addressed to men, who have used it to learn to run risks, fight, defeat, and dominate others. In American culture and letters, adventure, masculinity, and violence do in effect seem to remain three inseparable terms. Most adventure stories

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[191] In Southern Spain, it is also referred to as "hombría." See Gilmore's anthropological work on Andalusian culture (32-55 passim).

raise the question of violence, which, more often than not, is enjoyed by men as "a corrupt excitement" (Green Introduction 6). That is, indeed, the view held by Martin Green in his influential work *The Great American Adventure* (1984), which analyzes adventure stories from Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), through Twain's *Roughing It* (1872), to Roosevelt's *Autobiography* (1913), to Hemingway's *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935), to Faulkner's "The Bear," (1942) to Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967). Green's study has shown how, in most American adventure stories, masculinity remains inseparable from violence. Despite their formal and historical changes, most American adventure tales share a number of themes and motifs, such as male protagonists, guns, nature, and the hunt. For instance, the hunter's passions and his great animal opponents appear in Parkman, and again in Faulkner and Hemingway. Sometimes, as in Cooper's Leatherstocking stories, the white male protagonist does not have to deal with wild animals, but with aboriginal people. However, the wild animal and the aborigine are represented as equally threatening. Invariably, the aborigines, like the wild animals, represent the threatening "Other" that the white male must master and subdue at all costs (Green Introduction 18). Yet the man of the woods -from Natty Bumppo and Nathan Slaughter to Big

Fellinka- is often more of a man than those he meets, and the genteel white heroes of those novels, from Oliver Effingham to Roland Forrester to Randall Jethroe, have to measure up to him. In order to do so, the white heroes resort to adventure. Risky and violent adventure thus affords white men the unique possibility of measuring up to their aboriginal counterparts and proving their manhood. As Green elaborates:

> Adventure (the experience) has been the great rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, as in the Boy Scout movement; and…adventure (in books) has been the ritual of the religion of manliness, which was the unofficial religion of the nineteenth century, if not of the twentieth. In mainstream books it quite displaced the Christian values. Adventure experience was the sacramental ceremony of the cult of manhood. (Introduction 6)

It would seem, therefore, that the image of violent adventure as a test of manhood has influenced American literature since (at least) the nineteenth century. In twentieth-century American fiction, the image may be traced back to Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), which celebrated and made increasingly popular the literature about the bloody battles between American cowboys and Indians,[192] and has since continued to pervade, as

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[192] Including numerous scenes of violence and manly daring, the western has since become one of American men's favorite literary and filmic genres. In this sense, one should mention, for example, the mythic westerns with John Wayne and Cary Grant. Significantly, many of these films were released in the 1950s, after the end of the Second World War, to keep alive the figure of the male hero in the imagination

Martin Green (Introduction 6) has shown, the fiction of twentieth-century American writers such as Hemingway, Faulkner, or Norman Mailer, among many others.

Even though the combination of violent adventure and masculinity recurs in the fiction of uncountable (canonical) American writers, the present chapter will use Ernest Hemingway as an example for the traditional conception of violence as a test of manhood in twentieth-century American literature. While it is far beyond the scope of this study to carry out an in-depth analysis of male violence in Hemingway's numerous and complex novels and short stories, chapter 5 will explore the representation of masculinity and/as violence in one of his posthumously published short stories,[193] "An African Story" (1972). While Hemingway's notion of violence as a test of masculinity recurs in most of his fiction about war, bullfighting, boxing, etc., "An African Story" represents his specific idea of hunting as a symbol of virility and heroism, which seems to have been radically questioned, as we shall see later in this chapter, by the

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of the returning American soldiers. Unencumbered by the responsibilities of family and domesticity, the cowboy image in novels and films tended to idealize the world of male violence and homosociality, and thus provided the returning soldiers with fantasies of evasion from their new real situation as "victims" of domesticity and of their wives's feminizing influence. See Segal (*Slow* 1-25) in this respect.

[193] "An African Story" appeared as a story within a story in Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*, a novel also published posthumously in 1986.

contemporary American writer Richard Ford. Hemingway's short story will thus be used not only as an example for his (literary) association between masculinity and violence, but also, and above all, as a contrast to Ford's subversive re-writings of the traditional Hemingwayesque conception of hunting as a proof of manly daring.

Hemingway's obsession with violent adventure as a test of manhood seems to derive from his own biography (Minter 138-41). Hemingway's father was a violent and abusive man who insisted that his sons learn to hunt and then eat what they killed, even if it was muskrat. Violations of his code meant punishment, often with a razor strop, after which his children had to kneel and ask God for His forgiveness. Besides hunting, Hemingway's father also asked his son to prove his masculinity through boxing. In both the music room at home and at a friend's house, Hemingway set up boxing rings in which he practiced the manly art of self-defense (Minter 139).

As he grew up, he became increasingly attracted to violent contexts and activities. During the First World War, for example, he volunteered for the Italian front. Although Hemingway was invalided home after having been seriously wounded while serving with the infantry, this experience inspired his novel of the Italian front, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Moreover,

Hemingway seemed to use the First World War to display and reaffirm his masculinity and virility. After World War I, Hemingway, as David Minter explains, "exaggerated his war experiences, including the combat he had seen, the wounds he had suffered, and the heroism he had displayed" (141). Besides the Great War, the writer was also attracted to other violent spheres, such as Spanish bullfighting -which recurs in novels such as *Fiesta* (1926) or *Death in the Afternoon* (1932)- and big-game hunting in Africa -which he represents, for example, in novels such as *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) and in many of his short stories.[194]

Hemingway's lifelong involvement in violent conflicts and activities such as war, hunting, boxing, bullfighting, etc. seemed, therefore, to serve two main (complementary) purposes. On the one hand, he used violence to test his own masculinity and manly daring. As David Minter has argued, Hemingway seemed to see the world as an eminently hostile place "he had been put on earth to test himself against and overcome" (138-9).[195]

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[194] On Hemingway's biography, see Lynn; Minter (138-41).

[195] The pervasive influence of violence on Ernest Hemingway -and, indeed, his whole family- finally had disastrous effects. On July 2, 1961, Ernest Hemingway shot himself. Of course, his death, like his childhood and his entire life, was a violent one. As Hemingway insisted, he was interested in the "simplest things" because they were fundamental; and in a violent world "one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental," he argued, "is violent death" (qtd. in Minter 142). In December 1928, Hemingway's father had also shot himself with a revolver that he had himself inherited from his father. In the fall of 1966, Ursula, Hemingway's favorite sister, poisoned herself, and in 1982, his only brother, Leicester,

Moreover, Hemingway's personal obsession with violence as a test of manhood was transformed into one of his main fictional subjects. His works dealt once and again with the issue of male violence, which he often idealized as a symbol of virility. Hemingway did in effect write numerous novels and stories where male violent behavior -which manifests itself in descriptions of bullfighting, fishing, hunting, and war- proved as dangerous as heroic. For example, in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) the snobbish Brett Ashley cannot escape the attraction of the manly Romero, a nineteen-year-old Spanish bullfighter, who is represented as the epitome of male bravery and heroism. Several of his stories describe fishing excursions into nature that result in male violence. Whereas stories such as "Big Two-Hearted River," originally published in *In Our Time* (1925), focus on aggressive fishing expeditions that pit the heroic male protagonists against nature, violence in Hemingway's fiction is commonly associated as well with heroic males engaged in bloody hunting expeditions. Inspired by his own safaris in Africa, short stories such as "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1935), "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936), or "An African Story" (1972), to name but a few of Hemingway's best-known stories about

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killed himself with a single shot to the head. It seems clear, then, that the Hemingways, as David Minter (140-1) concludes, could never get rid of a paternal legacy of violence. See also Lynn in this respect.

hunting, concentrate on adventurous heroes who test their masculinity by killing wild and powerful animals like African lions, buffaloes, and elephants. In these stories, as in most of Hemingway's fiction, violence is often synonymous with masculinity.

Although women may occasionally be associated with violence, as is the case of Mrs. Macomber in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936), they are then demonized as killers and destroyers of men. As will be recalled, Mrs. Macomber, feeling the erosion of her power and influence over her own husband, finally kills Mr. Macomber, whose "blood sank into the dry, loose earth" (Hemingway *Complete* 28). Whereas male violence in Hemingway's works is associated with bravery and heroism, female violence is thus related to murder. In Hemingway's (sexist) fictional universe, then, violence seems to have completely different connotations in male and female contexts.

In general, however, violence in Hemingway's fiction is masculine, simply because, as Leslie Fiedler famously proclaimed, "there are no women in his books!…he returns again and again to the fishing trip and the journey to the war -those two traditional evasions of domesticity and civil life" (316-7). In effect, the protagonists of violent hunting and fishing

expeditions such as the ones described in "An African Story" (1972) or "Big Two-Hearted River" (1925) are always men, David and Nick Adams respectively, and the same is true of Hemingway's war fiction. The narrator and protagonist of *A Farewell to Arms* is Frederic Henry, an American student of architecture who has enlisted as a lieutenant in the Italian army's ambulance corps. Similarly, the main character of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is Robert Jordan, a university instructor of Spanish from Montana who has come to fight for the Spanish Republic in the mountains north of Madrid.[196] As Ray B. West has argued, Hemingway's novels recurrently explore "the condition of a *man* in a society upset by the violence of war" (15; emphasis added).

Moreover, male violence in Hemingway's fiction is, as has been suggested, often described as heroic. While it is true that war-castrated Jake Barnes in *Fiesta* seems notably passive and non-heroic,[197] men in much of Hemingway's fiction do indeed seem to be irremediably attracted violence to prove their masculinity, bravery, and heroism. As Robert Jordan tells one

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[196] Both characters seem to have been shaped on Hemingway's first-hand experiences of violence and war, who volunteered as an ambulance driver in First-World-War Italy and became America's best-known international correspondent during the Spanish Civil War. Despite (or because of) his real war experiences, Hemingway, as David Minter (139) has argued, always felt driven to improve on his literary adventures.

[197] Nevertheless, Jake also engages in violent trout fishing expeditions with his friend Bill in the Spanish mountains.

of his fellow soldiers in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, "stop making dubious literature about the Berbers and the old Iberians and admit that you have liked to kill as all who are soldiers by choice have enjoyed it at some time whether they lie about it or not" (Hemingway qtd. in Gray "Enduring" 37).[198]

"An African Story" (1972), one of Hemingway's posthumously published short stories, makes a paradigmatic example for his common representation of violence as a symbol of virility and heroism. The story focuses on three men -David, the protagonist, as well as his father and their African guide, Juma- on an elephant hunting expedition in Africa. Predictably, then, the st ory concerns itself with (male) violence, which is clearly represented as a proof of masculinity and heroism. Even though Hemingway's hunters want to kill the elephant for its tusks, the hunt is also shown to be a violent test of manhood. As the (omniscient, third-person) narrator explains, hunting "made the difference between a boy and men" (Hemingway *Complete* 547).

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[198] Hemingway never gave up exploring the figure of the soldier-killer, who resurfaces in later, less successful novels such as *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950). Unlike *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, however, this novel, as Svoboda (166) reminds us, is not set in the midst of war, but in the recollection of war by an embittered and aging American infantry colonel, veteran of the violent Hurtgen Forest battles that Hemingway covered as war correspondent in 1944.

The story begins by emphasizing the strength and majesty of the old elephant, whose shadow was so huge that "covered" the men, and whose left tusk was so long "it seemed to reach the ground" (545). According to Juma, the native guide, who had already wounded the elephant but had failed to kill him five years ago, the animal was "bigger than anything" (548). By celebrating the extraordinary qualities of the animal, then, Hemingway depicts the elephant as a worthy adversary that can only be defeated by equally worthy, heroic men. While both Juma and David's father are depicted as expert hunters who were "very sure of themselves," David is represented as a younger hunter, although he also shows his dexterity in killing two birds. David is congratulated by his own father on his improved hunting skills: "You were splendid today…I was very proud of you. So was Juma" (549). Thus, "An African Story" represents the three men as equally worthy adversaries of the old elephant.

The hunt proves extremely violent and bloody. When the three men eventually find the old elephant and shoot at him, the animal attacks Juma, who is seriously wounded, "the skin of his forehead hanging down over his left eye, the bone of his nose showing and one ear torn" (552). Nevertheless, Hemingway's hero seems to prefer death to humiliation. Thus, Juma,

limping and bloody, shoots at the animal again, which is finally killed and transformed into "a huge wrinkled pile" (552). In Hemingway's story, then, hunting seems to be represented as a form of pitting man against nature, which is finally submitted and tamed by male violence. By engaging in dangerous and bloody hunting excursions, Hemingway's male characters can test themselves against nature and overcome it, thus proving their superior and heroic masculinity. As the narrator of "An African Story" explains, "Juma and his father and he [David] were heroes…and the men who had carried the tusks were heroes" (554).

It is true that David, unlike his father and Juma, finally appears to acknowledge the death of the elephant as unnecessary and unjust. As David himself reflects, "my father doesn't need to kill elephants to live" (550). Thus, David seems to show his sympathy for the old elephant, which he describes as "his friend" (551). Nevertheless, "An African Story" offers no real challenge to the traditional conception of violence as a proof of masculinity and heroism. On the one hand, Hemingway writes that David "had no love for the [old] elephant…He had only a sorrow that had come from his own tiredness that had brought an understanding of age" (551). Moreover, the emphasis of the story is not on David's "dissident" comments

on hunting, but rather on the celebration of the hunt as a spectacle and performance of beauty, masculinity, and heroism. As tha narrator explains, "he [David] did not know that nothing would ever be as good as that again" (Hemingway *Complete* 551). In Hemingway's life and works, the preoccupation with death and killing was always secondary to his more meaningful concern with representing his violent passions, particularly hunting and bullfighting, as expressions of beauty, (male) courage and heroism.

For example, in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), which may be described as Hemingway's guide to the "art" of bullfighting, he explains that on going to his first bullfight he "had expected to be horrified and perhaps sickened" by the killing of the picadors's horses (*Death* 1). However, he did not mind these actions at all. In focusing on "the tragedy of the bullfight" and its ritual celebration of male courage and heroism, "the minor comic-tragedy of the horses" seemed totally irrelevant and insignificant (8). Moreover, Hemingway insists that there is no moral standard to separate those who are affected by the killings from those who are not, claiming that the former are "capable of greater cruelty to human beings than those who do not identify themselves readily with animals"

(*Death* 4-5). In Hemingway's view, then, sentimental people like animal lovers may be crueler than callous ones like himself.

In line with Hemingway's own view of the killing of bulls as a heroic activity, "An African Story" thus seems to be centrally concerned with celebrating the killing of the elephant, which is also referred to as "the old bull" (Hemingway *Complete* 549), as a ritualized test of manhood, a proof of virility and male heroism. While Hemingway probably felt obliged to introduce David's negative comments on the killing of the elephant as a defense to readers who might find such a cruel murder morally indefensible, Hemingway's defensiveness about hunting is, as Mark Spilka (224) has argued, clearly "overdetermined." The emphasis of the story does indeed seem to fall on the heroic actions of the hunters, not on David's dissident voice. In fact, David himself, despite his critical comments on the killing of the elephant, is eventually seduced by the heroic vision of hunting. At story's end, David, like his father and Juma, cannot resist the temptation to be worshipped by the African natives as a heroic hunter. Finally, David sits next to his father and Juma on the seats of the old -and so most respected- African men, and the three of them are served by the native women and boys, who cannot yet hunt and so are considered inferior to adult men.

Enjoying the privileges reserved only to the most honorable adult men in African communities, male hunters in Hemingway's fiction thus seem to be eventually elevated to the category of heroes. As Hemingway writes:

> Then they [David, his father, and Juma] sat on old men's stools under the shade of the fig tree with the tusks against the wall of the hut and drank beer from gourd cups that were brought by a young girl and her younger brother, the *servant* of heroes, sitting in the dust by the heroic dog of a hero who held an old cockerel, newly promoted to the standing of the heroes's favorite rooster. (Hemingway *Complete* 554)

It would appear, then, that "An African Story" ends up reinforcing Hemingway's traditional conception of violence and hunting as symbols of virility and heroism. Although the constant need to prove and reaffirm masculinity through violent behavior has been radically questioned by pacifists, feminists, and anti-sexist men, contemporary American culture keeps transmitting and reinforcing the image of masculinity as a violent test. Influenced by Ernest Hemingway's fiction, the "virility school" (Schwenger 13) in American letters -formed by writers such as James Dickey, Frederick Exley, Norman Mailer, or Robert Stone, to name but a few- keeps promoting the traditional masculine fiction whereby boys become men through stressful tests. As Norman Mailer himself comments, "nobody was

born a man; you earned manhood provided you were good enough, bold enough" (25). In American letters, as in American culture in general, the heroic image of a violently achieved manhood thus remains widely legitimized. The image, as anthropologist David Gilmore has concluded, is pervasive, "ranging from Italian-American gangster culture to Hollywood Westerns, private-eye tales, the current Rambo imagoes, and children's He-Man dolls and games; it is therefore deeply ingrained in the American male psyche" (20).

A men's studies rereading of Chuck Palahniuk's best-selling novel *Fight Club* (1996), which David Fincher's filmic adaptation also turned into a box-office hit in 1999,[199] might help illustrate the prevailing connection between masculinity and violence in contemporary American culture and literature. While much criticism has focused on the analysis of violence in the novel, the specific relationship between masculinity and violence in the

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[199] While it is far beyond the scope of this chapter to carry out an in-depth analysis of filmic representations of masculinity, it may be relevant to note here that American cinema, like American literature, often links masculinity and violence. In 2001, the *Center for Women and Literature*, co-founded by Dr. Àngels Carabí and Dr. Marta Segarra (University of Barcelona), organized an interesting seminar entitled "Homes de pel.lícula: Re-visions de Hollywood," which explored representations of masculinity in Hollywood cinema. Focus was given to the representations of masculinity in films starred by Sylvester Stallone, Harrison Ford, and Brad Pitt, among others. The seminar illustrated, among other aspects, the close relationship between masculinity and violence in contemporary Hollywood cinema. Think, for instance, of box-office hits such as those of Sylvester Stallone in the *Rambo Trilogy* (1982, 1985, 1988); Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989); Clint Eastwood in *Unforgiven* (1992); Sean Connery in *The Rock* (1996) or, more recently, Brad Pitt in *Fight Club* (1999), to name but a few.

text has generally been overlooked, which seems to confirm Michael Kimmel's contention that, in American culture, male violence is often considered so natural as to raise no questions or discussion (*Gendered* 243). Our rereading of Palahniuk's *Fight Club* will focus, therefore, on exploring and illustrating the textual connections between masculinity and violence, which seems to be represented, as we shall see, as an anxiety-relieving mechanism for the alienated (white, middle-class, heterosexual) male in contemporary American consumer culture. In analyzing the specific links between masculinity and violence in Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, then, we will also try to underline the relationship between the topics of (male) violence and American capitalism in the novel, which have traditionally been discussed as two separate issues.

At the beginning of the novel, the nameless narrator of *Fight Club*, who lacks family and close friends, pretends to be ill to gain access to cancer and disease support groups, where he desperately looks for emotional bonding and affection.[200] Tired of his impersonal white-collar job and fed up

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[200] While the narrator in Fincher's film is called Jack, the narrator's identity in Palahniuk's novel remains masked. As Boon has argued, "by intentionally masking the narrator's identity in the novel, Palahniuk engenders him with the representational qualities of an everyman. He is the American male at the end of the 20th century" (267). Although Boone's description of Palahniuk's narrator as "an everyman" remains open to questioning, he does certainly seem to embody the anxieties undergone by many (white, middle-class, heterosexual) men in late capitalist American culture.

with the empty consumer culture that his generation has inherited, Palahniuk's narrator resorts to these support groups to give some interpersonal and spiritual meaning to his life. In these groups, he can cry with his partners and express his emotions openly and, as a result, he feels better and is able to sleep.[201] As he says, "walking home after a support group, I felt more alive than I'd ever felt. I wasn't host to cancer or blood parasites; I was the little warm center that the life of the world crowded around" (Palahniuk 22). However, these support groups offer him only a temporary respite. He soon suffers from insomnia again. So, the narrator and his friend Tyler Durden create a new Club where young American men come to relieve their sense of alienation by beating each other to death. In Palahniuk's novel, the narrator and Tyler feel very much alienated by the consumer society in the United States. As the narrator himself explains, "you buy furniture…then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug. Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you" (Palahniuk 44). Moreover, men in Palahniuk's work feel feminized by a late capitalist system that demands

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[201] These support groups, in which people can cry and openly express their emotions, might be read as Palahniuk's parody of some men's groups. See chapter 3 (section 3.3).

them to fulfil passive jobs over which they have no control. As masculinity scholar Michael Kimmel (*Manhood* 264) has argued, the experience of powerlessness (having no control over their actions on the job), meaninglessness (performing specialized tasks that they cannot relate to the whole), and isolation (inability to identify with the firm and its goals) has often led American men to feel alienated and feminized. Little wonder, then, that Palahniuk's narrator keeps complaining about his passive white-collar job, which he feels threatens and diminishes his masculinity. Last but not least, men in *Fight Club* also appear to feel feminized by the lack of masculine referents, as most of them were brought up only by their mothers. As the narrator himself comments, "I knew my dad for about six years, but I don't remember anything. My dad, he starts a new family in a new town about every six years….What you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women" (Palahniuk 50).

Feeling doubly feminized by their passive white-collar jobs and by their female-dominated families, men in Palahniuk's novel thus resort to violence and all-male fight clubs to try to relieve their feelings of feminization. So, when they leave their offices in the evening, men in *Fight Club* engage in bloody fights with other men to test and reaffirm their

masculinity, and to try to overcome the feminizing and alienating influence of American (capitalist) culture. Commenting on his bloody fight with Tyler, the narrator thus explains that, "instead of Tyler, I felt finally I could get my hands on everything in the world that didn't work…the bank that says I'm hundred of dollars overdrawn. My job where my boss got on my computer and fiddled with my DOS execute commands" (Palahniuk 53).

Admittedly, *Fight Club* can be, and has been, praised for several reasons, especially for its interesting portrayal of the alienated condition of the white American male in late capitalism. Commenting on David Fincher's popular adaptation of Palahniuk's novel to cinema, Boyd Petrie has argued that *Fight Club* offers "an unflinching look at what society has done to men…*Fight Club*…is a film that we…should see for perhaps a better understanding of what can happen to us men in this crazed, capitalist world" (2-3). Nevertheless, the novel/film's depiction of violence as a form of proving masculinity and diminishing the "feminizing" influence of capitalism remains largely controversial. As Petrie himself acknowledges, the film, which has been rated R for "disturbing and graphic depiction of violent anti-social behavior," ends up glorifying male violence (2).

It is true that Palahniuk's *Fight Club* does not represent violence as a solution or alternative to American capitalist and consumer society -indeed, the novel provides a harsh critique of capitalism but seems to offer no possible alternative at all.[202] Nevertheless, much of *Fight Club* does indeed appear to celebrate the traditional image of violence as a test of manhood, emphasizing the soothing effects of violence on the alienated (male) victims of the capitalist market. As the narrator himself explains, "nothing was solved when the fight was over, but nothing mattered" (Palahniuk 53). Even though *Fight Club* provides no real escape from capitalism, the novel thus depicts fighting as an anxiety-relieving mechanism for the alienated male in U.S. capitalist culture. In so doing, then, Palahniuk's text seems to end up reinstating the traditional conception of violence as an expression of (beset) masculinity. It should thus come as no surprise that many American men, feeling the pressure of capitalism and consumer society on their daily lives, have been attracted to the novel/film, and that some of them, as Duge (302)

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[202] Fight Club eventually evolves into Project Mayhem, an (all-male) terrorist group which focuses on destroying symbols of American capitalism like credit card companies. Project Mayhem becomes a totalitarian and sectarian terrorist group which erases individual will and personhood, threatening dissident members with castration. The novel, as Duge (302) has argued, shows, therefore, how Fight Club/Project Mayhem ends up reinforcing the type of social control that the men had originally been fighting against. Moreover, the protagonist himself eventually realizes the dangers of his Project and decides to abandon it.

has noted, have even created their own webpages offering advice on starting
one's own Fight Club.

5. 4. Re-visions of male violence in contemporary American literature

Despite the continued popularity of texts/films like *Fight Club*, the
traditional (fictional) construction of violence as a test and a reaffirmation of
manhood can be, and has been, radically challenged. While (American)
women's fiction has long denounced the terrible effects of patriarchal
violence on women, Russell Banks's *Affliction* (1989), for instance,
provides an interesting re-presentation of male violence, which he shows to
be indissolubly linked to economic hardship, as a (self-)destructive force for
women and men alike. Triggered by both poverty and childhood abuse at the
hands of an alcoholic father, adult male violence in Banks's novel is, in
effect, described as a self-alienating force. The protagonist of the novel is
Wade Whitehouse, a 41-year-old well digger, snowplow operator, and
small-town policeman who has always lived in Lawford, New Hampshire.
While his brother Rolfe, the narrator of the story, has left town and become
a high school teacher in Boston, Wade, like his parents, has stayed in

Lawford, which is described as a poor working-class area. Lawford suffered the worst consequences of the Great Depression, when "the mills got taken over by the banks, were shut down and written off, the money and machinery invested farther south in the manufacture of shoes" (Banks 9). Since then, Lawford has been seen mainly as a place between two places, "a town people sometimes admit to having come from but where almost no one ever goes" (9). Thus, Wade is languishing "in the region's dead economy" (10). He lives in a decadent trailer park built "on a brush-covered rocky spit of land" in a barren glacial valley: a hostile area "enclosed by a fierce geometry of need, placement, materials, and cold" (Banks 50).

Moreover, Wade suffers daily humiliations in his working life and feels emasculated as a result. As Lawford's part-time policeman, he is little more than "a private security guard hired by the town, a human alarm system whose main functions [are] to call for the emergency vehicle at the fire station or the ambulance service in Littleton" (Banks 82). As well driller and snowplow driver, on the other hand, Wade works for Gordon LaRiviere, Lawford's only successful businessman, a tyrannical boss who despises Wade as a failure. Wade has also been bitterly disappointed by marriage and is feeling emasculated by non-custodial fatherhood. To top it all, he suffered

childhood abuse at the hands of an alcoholic father. Glenn, Wade's father, himself a victim of poverty, is described as "a turbulent man who drank heavily, and though Glenn loved Sally [his wife], he beat her from time to time and had beaten the boys" (Banks 95). Thus, *Affliction* describes Wade's traumatic childhood in family poverty. As Robert Niemi has concluded, the novel offers "a chilling depiction of the kinds of psychological and emotional traumas that children and youth are apt to suffer growing up in families situated near the bottom of the socioeconomic heap" (149).

Unable to come to terms with all these socioeconomic and personal problems, Wade, rather than *surpass* his father through maturation, begins to *become* his father: "a sadistic, self-pitying narcissist who approaches everything in life with fear and loathing" (Niemi 154). Gradually, then, Wade becomes immersed in a fatal spiral of violence and death. Appropriately, most of the action of *Affliction*, as Niemi (156) has argued, is set during New Hampshire's deer hunting season, "a grisly autumn festival of macho brutality and death." Indeed, the event that shapes the novel's main plot is a mysterious hunting accident. On the first day of the season, Evan Twombley, a wealthy union official, dies, apparently by losing his footing and shooting himself (87). However, it is not really clear that

Twombley's death has been accidental. As president of the New England Plumbers and Pipefitters Union, Twombley was due to testify in Washington concerning presumed connections between his union and organized crime. So, Wade begins to speculate that Twombley's death was arranged by his son-in-law, Mel Gordon, the union's vice-president and treasurer, probably to cover his own criminal actions and to be able to gain access to the union presidency. In Wade's view, Jack Hewitt, Evan Twombley's hunting guide, killed Twombley because he was offered a large sum of money by Mel Gordon (Banks 242-3). Thus, Wade, whose imagination is haunted by unlikely conspiracy theories, sets out to uncover the "truth" behind Twombley's killing. Nevertheless, Wade's actions seem to be driven by deeper motives. As Robert Niemi elaborates, Wade's actions cover a deeper urge

> to strike back at Mel Gordon, a laRiviere crony who has humiliated him in the past; a desire to prove himself stronger than the young turk, Jack Hewitt; a need to vindicate and redeem himself through moral one-upmanship. But most of all, Wade's growing obsession with the Twombley case is fueled by displaced rage -rage at his father, his former wife, himself, and his life in general. (157)

Wade's obsessions finally turn into violence. Unable to make sense of the Twombley case -and, in a deeper sense, of his own life-, Wade shows nothing but frustration and despair, which is translated into violence and rage. At novel's end, several people in Lawford, such as the waiter Nick Wickham or the mechanic Chick Ward, report having had serious arguments with Wade in the last few days. Since Wade has become growingly aggressive, his girlfriend, Margie Fogg, has become afraid of him and is planning to leave the town. When Wade tries, albeit unsuccessfully, to persuade Margie to stay, he strikes his daughter Jill -"half by chance and half through the internal force of his programmed and terrible destiny" (Larsen 10)- and makes her nose bleed, thus losing her forever. Violence reaches its climax when Wade murders his hated father and burns the old man's corpse (342-3). Afterwards, he seeks out Jack Hewitt and murders him as well.

Despite these violent scenes -or, rather, *because of* them-, Russell Banks's *Affliction* remains a sweeping indictment against the propensity for male violence that is passed from one generation to the next. The novel emphasizes the detrimental effects of violence both on its victims and its own perpetrator. At novel's end, the violent Wade Whitehouse banishes

from life altogether, thus receiving one of the worst punishments of all - namely, complete disappearance, loneliness, and forgetfulness. Following the killings, Banks could have had Wade commit suicide or be captured or killed by law enforcement. However, the writer chose to have his protagonist fade into oblivion, a fate which is even more tragic, for, as Robert Niemi has concluded, "it describes a kind of posthumous existence, a twilight life of extreme loneliness, isolation, and anonymity that knows no closure" (160). Marginalized from his childhood, Wade Whitehouse finally disappears from life altogether.

Like Russell Banks, Richard Ford is another contemporary American writer who has questioned the traditional links between masculinity and violence from innovative perspectives. Admittedly, Ford has been recurrently compared to Ernest Hemingway (see Paul). Similarly to Hemingway's fiction, Richard Ford's stories are peopled with characters who engage in fishing, hunting, and boxing. Thus, violence is also a central theme of his stories. As the critic Ned Stuckey-French comments on *Rock Springs* (1987), one of Ford's best-known collections of short stories, the "allusion to violence, or the threat of violence…is often there and then the story unfolds" (106). Moreover, violence in Richard Ford's stories is always

masculine, since Ford, like Hemingway, focuses on the lives of male characters and protagonists. However, Ford himself has always insisted that he is not very familiar with Hemingway's work. In his own words, "'I never think about Hemingway…I never read Hemingway'" (Paul vii). Although there may be some similarities between Hemingway and Ford -such as their common description of fishing, hunting, and boxing as activities in which masculine violence is likely to occur-, there are significant differences between the two authors as well, particularly as regards their radically opposed depictions of male violence. Even if Ford's literary men are usually attracted to "sex, violence, crime and sports" (Wideman 4), their behavior seldom reaffirms their masculinity. Unlike Hemingway's fiction -which repeatedly associates violence with notions like masculinity, virility, and heroism-, Ford's stories show, as we shall see, the gradual demise of this archaic association.[203] In most of the stories in *Rock Springs* (1987), for example, male violence has disastrous effects, often bringing about familial dissolution. In "Optimists," Roy Brinson's murder of Boyd Mitchell leads to the disintegration of his family. In "Empire," Vic Sims is caught up in risky actions and, meanwhile, loses the opportunity for love and affection: "other

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[203] Elinor Ann Walker holds a similar view.

people fade in the light of the flame of danger" (Leder 112). Similarly,

"Sweethearts" shows how Bobby's violent behavior takes him to prison,

distancing him from his ex-girlfriend Arlene. And in "Under the Radar," one

of the tales in Ford's latest collection of short stories, *A Multitude of Sins*

(2001), Steven Reeves' decision to batter his wife leads to their final

separation:

> "I'm sorry I hit you," Steven Reeves said, and opened the car
> door onto the silent road.
> "I know," Marjorie said in an emotionless voice. "And you'll
> be sorrier." (Ford *Multitude* 151)

Ford's stories do indeed appear to condemn all forms of violence. In

Ford's fiction, as Priscilla Leder (100) has pointed out, violent sports like

hunting, fishing, and boxing always go wrong and/or result in mindless

slaughter. In "Calling," one of the stories in *A Multitude of Sins*, the

protagonist goes duck hunting with his father, which causes him to realize

his father's violent instincts. After the hunt, father and son separate and they

never meet each other again. Nor do violent sports thrive in *Rock Springs*. In

"Children," for example, Claude's aggressive fishing fails to impress Lucy,

who is much better at fishing than Claude himself. In what has been

regarded as a "typical Ford twist on male adventure" (Leder 111), the huge fish in "Winterkill" turns out to be a dead deer. Finally, in "Communist," Glen Baxter's cruel decision to let a wounded goose perish on a freezing lake triggers his girlfriend Aileen's separation from him. Even though most stories in *Rock Springs* are set in the American West, which has traditionally been associated with the cowboy myth and the idealized vision of male violence as heroic, aggressive behavior in Ford's fiction always fails to reaffirm masculinity. As Michiko Kakutani indicates:

> Mr. Ford's fictional world is hardly a brave frontier where heroes can test their mettle against nature. Rather, it's another contemporary outpost of rootlessness and alienation, a place where families come apart and love drifts away. (C28)

Many of the stories in Richard Ford's *Rock Springs* and *A Multitude of Sins* do indeed seem to challenge, as we shall see, traditional Hemingwayesque conceptions of masculine violence as heroic. Moreover, several of these short stories represent, as we shall also see, boys and men who decide to move away from violence, usually by rejecting their aggressive fathers or (male) friends. In this sense, then, Ford's fiction not only challenges violent masculinities, but also seems to represent new,

alternative, non-violent patterns of masculinities in contemporary American culture and literature. It might thus be interesting to analyze some of Ford's stories in greater detail.

Set in Great Falls, Montana, in 1961, "Communist" is one of the short stories in Richard Ford's *Rock Springs* that questions male violence, promoting as well new, alternative, non-aggressive patterns of masculinity. The story is told by Les, a forty-one-year-old narrator who recounts a moment in his life when he was just sixteen and was pushed out into the world, "into the real life then, the one I hadn't lived yet" (Ford *Rock* 233). Les enters "the real life" the day he goes hunting with Glen Baxter, his widowed mother's boyfriend. Baxter, a Cold War communist and a Vietnam veteran (and a drunkard), invites Les to hunting on a Saturday in November, 1961, when he pays a visit to Aileen Snow, Les' mother.

In "Communist," as in most of Richard Ford's short stories, hunting is an activity associated with masculinity and violence. Les is taught about hunting by his father,[204] first, and by Glen Baxter, afterwards. Both are described as equally violent men. Aileen describes her late husband as a man who used to "hunt, kill, maim" (Ford *Rock* 218). Actually, Les's father

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[204] Les notes, for instance, that his shotgun had been his father's (Ford *Rock* 221).

did not only teach him about hunting but also encouraged him to practice

boxing, an equally violent sport. In "Communist," hunting does indeed seem

to reiterate boxing. While hunting with Baxter, for example, Les cannot

avoid remembering his father's boxing lessons:

> Then I thought about boxing and what my father had taught me
> about it...To strike out straight from the shoulder and never
> punch backing up. How...to step toward a man when he is
> falling so you can hit him again. And most important, to keep
> your eyes open when you are hitting in the face and causing
> damage, because you need to see what you're doing to
> encourage yourself, and because it is when you close your eyes
> that you stop hitting and get hurt badly. "Fly all over your man,
> Les," may father said. "When you see your chance, fly on him
> and hit him till he falls." That, I thought, would always be my
> attitude in things. (Ford *Rock* 226)

For his part, Glen Baxter, Les' surrogate father, is as well a violent

man, who believes "most hunting isn't even hunting. It's only shooting"

(Ford *Rock* 223). Given Baxter's violent attitude, then, it is hardly surprising

that in "Communist," as in most of Ford's stories, hunting goes wrong. For

several reasons, Les' hunting expedition with Glen seems doomed to failure

from the beginning. First of all, Baxter is described as a wicked man who

used to shoot monkeys and beautiful parrots in Vietnam using military guns

just for sport. Moreover, Baxter, as Aileen warns her son, is keen on

poaching: "'Les, Glen's going to poach here,' my mother said. 'I just want you to know that, because that's a crime and the law will get you for it. If you're a man now, you're going to have to face the consequence'" (221). Moreover, Baxter is also shown to be a dangerous man who is hiding a pistol under his shirt against his bare skin and who is willing to kill a political enemy at any time. As Les himself explains:

> He said that Communists were always in danger and that he had to protect himself all the time. And when he said that he pulled back his VFW jacket and showed me the butt of a pistol he had stuck under his shirt against his bare skin. "There are people who want to kill me right now," he said, "and I would kill a man myself if I thought I had to." (Ford *Rock* 222)

Given his profile, it is little wonder, then, that Glen Baxter proves totally unable to control his violent drives while hunting. As Les tells us, Glen shot the geese as though he "seemed to want them all" (Ford *Rock* 227). Glen Baxter's cruelty reaches its climax when he lets a wounded goose die on a freezing lake. Les himself cannot understand why Glen does not want to go on and get the wounded goose swimming in circles on the water but unable to fly. After all, it "would've been easy." As Les explains to the readers, "the lake was shallow. And you could tell that everyone

could've walked out a long way before it got deep, and Glen had on his boots... the...goose...was not more than thirty yards from the shore" (231). In any event, Glen refuses to help the goose and laughs at Aileen's belief that birds are special things. Furthermore, Baxter does not allow Les to go on and get the wounded goose when his mother asks him to do so:

> "Then you go on and get it, Les," my mother said. "You weren't raised by crazy people." I started to go, but Glen Baxter suddenly grabbed me by my shoulder and pulled me back hard, so hard his fingers made bruises in my skin that I saw later. (Ford *Rock* 231)

Finally, Glen pulls the trigger and kills the wounded goose, shooting it repeatedly like a man gone mad. The bird thus becomes the target of Glen's anger and violence:

> He took his big pistol...and shot and missed. And then he shot and missed again. The goose made its noise once. And then he hit it dead, because there was no splash. And then he shot it three times more until the gun was empty and the goose's head was down and it was floating toward the middle of the lake where it was empty and dark blue. (Ford *Rock* 232)

Nevertheless, displays of male violence and cruelty are always severely punished in Ford's *Rock Springs*. Glen's aggressive behavior

cannot, therefore, go unchallenged. When Baxter finally kills the goose, Aileen decides to leave him, claiming that "a light can go out in the heart" (Ford *Rock* 232). In other words, Aileen realizes that there's nothing to love in Baxter, whom she describes as "just a son of a bitch, that's all" (Ford *Rock* 231). Opting for moral responsibility rather than violence, then, Aileen decides to abandon her boyfriend. Thus, male violence in Ford's fiction leads to familial dissolution. Moreover, Glen's violent action makes Les himself rethink the traditional association between masculinity and violence. It is true that throughout "Communist" Les seems to enjoy hunting and killing. As he himself explains:

> Glen looked back at me...The air around him was full of white rising geese..."Behind you, Les," he yelled at me and pointed. "They're all behind you now." I looked behind me, and there were geese in the air as far as I could see, more than I knew how many...And they were so close!...The air around me vibrated and I could feel the wind from their wings and it seemed to me I could kill as many as the times I could shoot -a hundred or a thousand- and I raised my gun, put the muzzle on the head of a white goose, and fired...It was a thing to see...I will never forget this. (Ford *Rock* 228)

Nevertheless, after Glen's cruel action, Les begins to question the limits of male power and violence. He hates Glen for his action and wants to

hit him. He would like to see him on the ground "bleeding and crying." However, he finally decides not to hit him, as he feels sorry for him, "as though he was already a dead man." In other words, Les comes to understand that Baxter was "not a bad man" and that his reaction was just that of a grown man scared of something he had never seen before, "something soft in himself" (232). As has been argued, traditional masculinity is indissolubly linked to violence. Men are often asked to prove their masculinity by resorting to violence. A "real" man is not supposed to show his emotional vulnerability and so he often uses violence as a (socially legitimated) form of male emotional expressivity. Although Baxter may feel compassion for the dying bird, he kills it because he is scared of his own "softness" and emotions. Because men often associate emotions and "softness" with women and femininity (see chapter 3), Baxter is afraid that if he shows compassion, he will be feminized, he will not be a "real man." As Priscilla Leder has noted in this respect, "violence destroys but compassion risks vulnerability" (107). Thus, he finally resorts to violence to try to prove his masculinity before Les and his mother.

Les, however, manages to move away from violence. Although he wants to hit Glen, Les resists his own anger and opts for his mother's moral

responsibility. Les' decision *not* to hit Baxter is highly significant for several reasons. On the one hand, it shows how Les is mature enough to contest his father's manly ideals, who had trained him to stay on his opponent until he falls, an implicit irony since Les' father soon "falls" himself and his place in his wife's bed is taken by the younger, fitter man, Glen Baxter. On the other hand, it suggests how Les is able to question the manly ideals that Baxter attempts to pass on to him, which, as Folks (153, 154) elaborates, are based on a stoic masculine code that accepts the harshness and violence of the outside world and that stresses the limits of pity. "Communist" shows, therefore, how masculine violence is indissolubly linked to cruelty and, finally, to familial dissolution. Moreover, Les, who sees how his mother leaves Baxter because of his aggressive instincts, learns to mistrust the aggressiveness and stubbornness of the traditional male role. In this sense, then, the story seems to move away from traditional concepts of violence as a form of male heroism, finally portraying Les as representative of a new, alternative, non-aggressive model of manhood.

As its title suggests, "Great Falls," another of the stories in Ford's *Rock Springs*, is "not a happy story" told by Jackie Russell, an adult male narrator recalling his parents' dramatic separation on a night in late October,

1960, when he was in his early teens (Ford *Rock* 29). The story revolves around the theme of a husband confronting his wife's lover at gunpoint. Jack Russell finds his wife with another man, Woody, and threatens him with a pistol, which precipitates the separation between Russell and his wife.

Although it is Jack Russell's attack on Woody that precipitates the separation between Jack and his wife, Russell is described as a violent and irresponsible male all through the story. He is portrayed as a hunter and a fisherman who does not know legal or ecological limits. Jackie remembers that when his father took him on his hunting and fishing expeditions, he used to "catch a hundred fish" and "kill around thirty ducks in twenty seconds' time" (Ford *Rock* 30, 31). Afterwards, he would sell them, although it was illegal to sell wild game. Jack Russell's hunting and fishing expeditions with his son would usually end with alcohol. After hunting, Jack would take his son to bars. There Jack would drink with some friends and they would laugh about hunting and fishing, while Jackie "played pinball and wasted money in the jukebox." Sometimes, Jack would even invite his son to drink whiskey (32, 33). Similarly to Hemingway's male characters, then, Jack Russell tries to prove his masculinity before other men by

violently pitting himself against nature. He tries to turn his son into a "real man" by initiating Jackie into fishing, hunting, and drinking.

However, in *Rock Springs*, in general, and in "Great Falls," in particular, displays of *macho bravado* like these are severely punished. As Priscilla Leder argues, Richard Ford moves away from Hemingwayesque descriptions of hunting and fishing as "ritualized, almost sacramental struggles between worthy adversaries" (100). In *Rock Springs*, as has been suggested, men's hunting and fishing expeditions often go wrong and/or result in mindless slaughter. In "Great Falls," Jackie himself is ambivalent about them. In his own words: "I thought even then, with as little as I knew, that these were opportunities other boys would dream of having but probably never would" (Ford *Rock* 30). Jackie diminishes his own statement of appreciation by emphasizing not what *he* feels, but what *other* boys would dream. In fact, nowhere in his long descriptions of catching fish and shooting ducks does he express real pleasure in the activity. In Ford's fiction, rather than pleasure, then, violent activities like hunting and fishing bring about emotional disengagement and familial separation.

After all, it is while Jack Russell goes hunting with his son that his wife meets her lover. Jack Russell decides to surprise his wife by arriving

home from hunting earlier than usual and cooking the ducks on the grill. However, when he and his son arrive home, they find "a man...standing there" (Ford *Rock* 33, 36). When Jack Russell learns about his wife's infidelity, he feels betrayed and takes a pistol out of his coat, threatening his wife's lover. Nevertheless, Ford's representation of this violent scene is far from conventional. On the one hand, neither Woody nor Jackie's mother seem to feel really threatened. As Jackie tells us, "I do not think she [Jackie's mother] thought my father would shoot Woody. And I don't think Woody thought so" (Ford *Rock* 41). On the other hand, Jack Russell himself, despite his attempts to shoot Woody, is really afraid of violence, "afraid he was doing this wrong and could mess all of it up and make matters worse without accomplishing anything" (Ford *Rock* 41). Thus, neither the lover nor the husband resort to violence or engage in an outdated duel. Finally, Jack drops his pistol and just hopes he does not have to think about Woody or his wife any more. At story's end, then, Jack Russell, who is initially described as a man who does not know the limits of violence, is portrayed as a pathetic and pitiful male character:

> My father looked at me, his big pistol in his hand. "Does this seem stupid to you" he said. "All this? Yelling and threatening

and going nuts? I wouldn't blame you if it did. You shouldn't even see this. I'm sorry. I don't know what to do now." "It'll be all right," I said. (Ford *Rock* 43)

Finally, then, Jack Russell's pistol fails to retain his wife, who abandons him looking for a new life away from violence. Male violence has equally disastrous consequences in the ironically entitled story "Optimists," another tale in *Rock Springs* that explores the detrimental effects of male violence on family life. Moreover, this story also seems to point, as we shall see, towards a new, alternative, non-violent model of masculinity.

"Optimists" is told by an adult male voice that recounts the moment when his life and that of his family changed radically, "ended, really, in a way none of us could have imagined in our most brilliant dreams of life" (Ford *Rock* 171). Frank Brinson, the fifteen-year-old protagonist of the story, sees his life change drastically and irremediably after his father kills a man when he arrives home from work one night in November, 1959. The plot of the story is as follows. Roy Brinson, a railroad worker, returns home from work earlier than usual, with a "wild" appearance. As soon as he arrives home, he begins to tell his wife Dorothy, his son Frank, and a visiting couple, Penny and Boyd Mitchell, about something awful that

happened not even an hour ago (Ford *Rock* 175). As Brinson begins to describe the accidental death of a hibo, Boyd, the other man, accuses him of not having done enough to prevent the man's death, "gruffly" suggesting that Roy should have put tourniquets on. Roy gets angry and strikes Boyd a powerful blow that kills him. "All that happened next," as Frank tells us, "is what you would expect to happen" (177, 180). The police arrest Roy and he goes to prison for killing a man. Although both Frank's parents, Roy and Dorothy Brinson, were "optimists" (as in the story's title), both thus seem to find their lives taking turns for the worst.

Although the story's plot seems relatively simple, the causes precipitating this event are not. In "Optimists," Ford explains, although he does not justify, his protagonist's regretful actions as the outcome of a number of circumstances. Although in the initial paragraph the narrator describes his father as simply somebody who "killed a man and went to prison for it" (Ford *Rock* 171), in the subsequent pages one is also reminded that 1959, the year when Roy Brinson killed Boyd Mitchell, was an extremely difficult time for Brinson. In 1959, Frank's father was a railroad worker in Great Falls, Montana, and that year was not a good time for railroads, especially in Montana, as it was the featherbed time then and

"everyone knew, including my father, that they would -all of them-eventually lose their jobs." By the end of summer in that year, Brinson became so worried about his future and that of his family that he gave up on fishing and hunting, his two favorite hobbies.[205] Instead, he worked more then and was gone more (172, 173). Roy Brinson, then, is portrayed as a man who fears losing his job, and thus works longer hours to try to provide for his family. So, when Roy arrives home exhausted from work, he reacts violently to Boyd's accusation of medical negligence. As in the case of Russell Banks, then, Richard Ford shows economic hardship to be one of the causes of (male) violence.

In *Rock Springs*, however, violence is always severely punished, no matter its motivation. Very often, as is also the case in "Optimists," it leads to familial dissolution. When Roy left Deer Lodge Prison, he and his wife separated, and she moved out. And, soon after that, Frank himself moved out by joining the Army. Thus, Roy Brinson is finally abandoned by all his family, living a sad and lonely life. As Frank himself elaborates, his father lost his job and began "drinking…and gambling, embezzling money, even

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[205] As has been argued, Ford's male characters are often attracted to violent sports like fishing and hunting.

carrying a pistol." Finally, Roy Brinson simply disappeared from view (Ford *Rock* 188).

For his part, Frank Brinson eventually comes to see his father as a man who made mistakes, as a man who could hurt people, ruin lives and their happiness: "A man who did not understand enough" (Ford *Rock* 183). In *Rock Springs*, sons must often deal with fathers as frail human beings rather than authority figures endowed with infinite wisdom and unshakeable integrity. In most of these stories, including "Optimists," fathers become demythologized when their sons are hardly adolescent. Frank realizes that his father should not be his role model, since violent men like Roy "always get left back" (Ford *Rock* 187). In Frank's view, Roy has fallen down, as much as the man he had watched fall beneath the train just some hours before. Unlike his father, then, Frank seems to have learnt that violence is something to be avoided. After all, once violence has passed by, "you have only yourself to answer to, even if, as I was, you are the cause of nothing" (Ford *Rock* 181). In this sense, then, Ford's story not only challenges the traditional violent masculinity represented by Roy, but also seems to suggest the possibility of a new, alternative, non-violent model of manhood as embodied by his son Frank.

"Sweethearts," another tale in *Rock Springs*, is similarly concerned with both questioning male aggressive behavior and presenting a new model of masculinity away from violence. The story explains Russell and his girlfriend Arlene's trip to take her ex-husband Bobby to jail. As we shall see, Russ, the narrator and protagonist in "Sweethearts," realizes the dangers of male violence, which he tries to avoid by resorting to love and affect. Russ witnesses the limitations of stereotypical male behavior in another man, Bobby, and keeps away from violence through love and his emotional connectedness to his girlfriend, Arlene. In this sense, then, Ford's story not only challenges the traditional conception of violence as a reaffirmation of masculinity, but also represents, once again, a new, different, non-aggressive model of manhood.

In "Sweethearts," Bobby is portrayed as a violent man sentenced to jail for a year for writing several bad checks and robbing a convenience store with a pistol. Jobless and penniless, Bobby descended into the world of violence and crime. Once again, then, violence in Ford's *Rock Springs* is represented as a direct result of economic hardship. Deprived of money, and without a partner to comfort him, Bobby does indeed seem to have lost control over his own life. While Arlene makes it clear that she is only in

love with Russell, who is "not a person who likes violence or guns" (Ford *Rock* 63), she is ready, however, to comfort Bobby when he needs her most. With the help of her boyfriend Russ, then, Arlene tries to console Bobby on his way to jail.

Despite their common efforts to try to recomfort Bobby, however, Russ and Arlene seem unable to control Bobby's violent drives. As a result of his long involvement in the criminal underworld, Bobby has become an extremely violent man. Unable to come to terms with his approaching internment, Bobby thus resorts to violence to try to express his frustration and despair. On their way to jail, Russ sees, for example, how Bobby looks "wild." The narrator also sees Bobby's jaw muscles tighten as though he "might slap" Arlene. On another occasion, Bobby smiles at Arlene "in a hateful way." On their way to jail, Bobby even threatens to kill Arlene with a pistol he pulls out of a black plastic bag: "'I thought I might kill Arlene, but I changed my mind'" (Ford *Rock* 55, 56, 62), he declares. Once again, then, Ford associates masculinity with violence, which, again, is shown to ruin men's lives. As Bobby confesses, crying, on his way to jail for his violent acts, "I feel like a dead man" (59).

Unlike Bobby, who cannot escape his violent instincts, both Arlene and her boyfriend Russ seem to move away from violence, although both accept their reality. Arlene, for example, suggests that they throw Bobby's pistol into the river. As Russ explains:

> Arlene said, "Let's throw the gun away, Russ." I had forgotten all about it…"Let's throw it in the river," Arlene said…Then Arlene took it by the barrel and flung it out into the window without even leaving the car, spun it not very far away from the bank, but into deep water where it…was gone in an instant. "Maybe that'll change his luck," I said. And I felt better about Bobby for having the gun out of the car, as if he was safer now, in less danger of ruining his life and other people's too. (Ford *Rock* 66)

Reflecting on Bobby's fate, Russ also appears to decide to keep away from violence. Russ realizes that there is a thin line between criminal and law-abiding behavior. He sees how any man can become a criminal as soon as he allows control over his life to be loosened from him. Thus, Russ knows he has to be careful. The narrator has learnt (from Bobby) that avoiding danger and violence demands ethical responsibility, as well as constant vigilance. In Russ's own words:

> Somehow, and for no apparent reason, your decisions got tipped over and you lost your hold. And one day you woke up

and you found yourself in the very situation you said you would
never ever be in, and you didn't know what was most important
to you anymore. And after *that*, it was all over. And I didn't
want that to happen to me -did not, in fact, think it ever would.
(Ford *Rock* 68)

Russ is convinced that it is much easier to lose your hold when, as in

Bobby's case, there is nobody to love you. In Russ's view, then, love

remains one of the best antidotes to violence. Arlene, who is Russ' most

important source of emotional strength, protects him against a fate like

Bobby's simply by remaining with him. Ford's protagonist, then, realizes

the dangers of male violence and, in so doing, opts for embracing a new,

alternative, non-violent model of masculinity based on love and affect. By

relying on love, rather than violence, as a reaffirmation of manhood, Russ

manages to keep away from trouble and live a happy life, based on

emotional connection, moral responsibility, and pacifism -or, as he says,

"not giving trouble or inviting it." In Russ's view, then, love is the essential

ingredient for an alternative, morally responsible, non-violent model of

manhood:

I knew what love was about. It was about not giving trouble or
inviting it. It was about not leaving a woman for the thought of
another one. It was about never being in that place you said

you'd never be in. And it was not about being alone. Never that.
Never that. (Ford *Rock* 68)

As in *Rock Springs*, male violence is also one of the main themes in Ford's latest collection of short stories, *A Multitude of Sins* (2001). Like *Rock Springs*, this recent collection keeps questioning male violence, which often leads to familial dissolution, and presenting new, alternative, non-violent models of masculinity. Unlike *Rock Springs*, however, which concentrates on working-class (and often jobless) male characters and protagonists, *A Multitude of Sins* focuses on the lives of middle-class men, who are shown to be equally capable of aggressive behavior. Ford's latest collection of short stories thus seems to illustrate how the traditional conception of violence as a proof of masculinity contaminates *all* social classes.

It is true that economic hardship remains one of the main causes of violence, as stories such as "Optimists" or "Sweethearts" in *Rock Springs* have illustrated and exemplified. Nevertheless, the analysis of Ford's *A Multitude of Sins* might help to challenge the (classist) view of working-class men as being the *only* violent group of men. While violence appears to remain one of the most clearly gendered behaviors in American culture,

violent acts may be perpetrated by both working-class and middle-class males. The available sociological evidence suggests, for example, that violence against women occurs in all class, ethnic, and cultural contexts, although it is (almost always) *men* who beat women. As Kimmel indicates, "lawyers, doctors, politicians, business executives…beat their wives as regularly and viciously as dock workers" (*Gendered* 262).

Several stories in Ford's *A Multitude of Sins* may be used to illustrate the pervasive influence of (male) violence on all social classes. "Under the Radar," for example, deals with a middle-class man's violent attack on his wife. On the drive over to a couple of friends' for dinner, Steven Reeves, who has a white-collar job in a chemical department in an important car company, is told by his wife that she had an affair with George Nicholson (their host) a year ago. However, she also insists that she regrets it, and that it is all over with now. After confessing her infidelity, Marjorie does indeed try to reassure Steve that she still loves him and that she will never be unfaithful to him again. "It would never happen again, was her view, since in a year it hadn't happened again" (Ford *Multitude* 141, 143).

Despite Marjorie's honesty and reassurance of her love for him, Steve feels confused and disappointed. "He did realize that he didn't really know

his wife at all" (Ford *Multitude* 147). Feeling terribly disappointed and betrayed, then, Steve finally hits his wife: "It was then that he hit her…He'd hit other people, been hit by other people, plenty of times -tough Maine boys on the ice rinks. Girls were out, though" (Ford *Multitude* 148). As has been argued, and as Ford's story seems to illustrate, male violence does not always occur when men feel most powerful, but often when they feel relatively powerless. Usually, violence is restorative, occurring when men have particularly low levels of self-esteem and feel that they are losing power and control over their lives. "These feelings of powerlessness," as Michael Kimmel (*Gendered* 257) elaborates, "coupled with the sense of entitlement to women's bodies…combine in a potent mix."

Nevertheless, displays of male violence, as has been argued, are severely punished in Ford's fiction. More often than not, they lead to familial dissolution. This also applies to "Under the Radar." As Marjorie tells her husband, "I'm sorry about being married to you, which I'll remedy as soon as I can." Although Steve tries to apologize for his violent behavior, Marjorie has already made up her mind to abandon him. She soon starts the car, leaving Steve behind. "And then that was all" (Ford *Multitude* 150, 151, 152).

"Calling," another story in *A Multitude of Sins*, also focuses on a violent reaction from a (middle-/upper-class) man, thus lending further support to the view of (male) violence as pervading all social classes. The story concerns itself with a man from a wealthy Southern family who goes duck hunting with his son Buck near New Orleans. The father had abandoned his wife and son for a (male) lover, but later "calls" -as the story's title suggests- his son to invite him to a hunting excursion together.

Predictably, their excursion, like most hunting narratives in Ford's fiction, goes wrong. From the beginning, the father is described as a violent man, "a man for abrupt moves and changes of attitude, unexpected laughter, and strong emotion" (Ford *Multitude* 56). Buck himself, the narrator of the story, explains that he had not always liked his father's violent behavior, but decided "that was what men did and accepted it" (56). This would, then, seem to confirm, once again, that the association between masculinity and violence has traditionally been naturalized in American culture. Buck himself had been taught to fire a rifle at school (38).

Nevertheless, Buck, unlike his father, finally comes to realize the absurdity of violence and hunting. When Buck decides not to shoot one duck ("What's the good of one duck shot down?" [61], Buck wonders), his

father, who had been drinking all over the excursion, becomes suddenly angry and violent. As Buck himself explains, "his mouth took an odd expression…and represented his view that I had balked at a crucial moment, made a mistake, and therefore didn't have to be treated seriously" (62-3). Relying on traditional (mis)conceptions of violence and hunting as expressions of male heroism, Buck's father thus seems unable to understand and tolerate what he interprets as a sign of cowardice and effeminacy from his son. So, the father reacts violently against the boy. Buck, on the other hand, realizes the absurdity of killing an animal just for fun, and refuses to do so. Finally, the protagonist of the story, who cannot understand his father's violent reaction (especially after having abandoned his wife and son for a lover), just hopes not to see his father again. Once again, a violent episode in Ford's fiction thus ends up causing familial dissolution. As Buck himself comments, "in time, my father came and went in and out of New Orleans, just as if neither of us had ever known each other" (Ford *Multitude* 65). In moving away from (male) violence, then, Buck, like several other male characters in Richard Ford's fiction, ends up opting for a new, alternative, non-violent model of manhood.

From what has been pointed out, it seems appropriate to conclude, therefore, that Ford's fiction provides us with an interesting analysis of both the causes and the consequences of (male) violence. As has been shown, violence in Richard Ford's stories, as in Russell Banks's *Affliction*, is predominantly male. While it often results from poverty and economic hardship, violence in Ford's fiction seems to affect men from all social classes. Working-, middle-, and upper-class males are shown to be equally attracted to violence. Nevertheless, Ford's stories pose a radical challenge to traditional literary representations of violence as a proof of masculinity and manly daring. After all, Ford's male characters usually resort to violence not when they feel most powerful, but when they feel relatively powerless. Moreover, Ford shows how masculine violence often leads to familial dissolution and social breakdown. In Ford's stories, violent men are fatally damned to social and emotional isolation. In contemporary American culture, where four women are daily killed by their batterers, Ford's fiction could thus prove a powerful reminder of the terrible consequences, for both women *and* men, of male violence. Last but not least, Ford's fiction might also be read, as has been shown, as offering some hope and inspiration for

new, alternative, non-violent models of boyhood and manhood in contemporary American society and literature.

It is true that male violence remains deeply ingrained in the American cultural imaginary, and it is equally true that numerous American novels and films keep celebrating violent versions of masculinity as heroic. However, this chapter has also shown how the classical association of violence with masculinity and virility is neither universal nor immutable. As has been seen, masculinity is not "intrinsically" or "naturally" violent. The connection between masculinity and violence in American culture was socially and historically constructed.

If, as it seems, the association between masculinity and violence was constructed by specific social and cultural factors, then it could, hopefully, be de-constructed by social and cultural means as well. In this sense, masculinity studies might play a fundamental part. While feminist scholars have long denounced the detrimental effects of male violence on women and children alike, masculinity scholarship is building on the feminist project by highlighting as well the self-destructive effects of male violent behavior. In so doing, studies of (literary) masculinities might contribute to questioning the traditional patriarchal view of violence as manly and heroic. Moreover,

literary works like Richard Ford's *Rock Springs* and *A Multitude of Sins* seem to emphasize, as we have seen, positive images of boys and men who manage to move away from violence, leaving abusive fathers and aggressive friends behind. By analyzing and underlining these positive representations of men and masculinities, then, studies of (literary) masculinities might also help to open up possibilities for new, alternative, non-violent patterns of manhood in contemporary American culture and literature.