

PERFORMING GENDER

In this chapter I will explore the discursive constructions of gender: its normative *performance* and its subversive *performative* constructions. The institutional rules of gender, I will show, include woman positioned as Other (especially woman as object of speech, vision, and act), woman as body inscribed by various controlling discourses (including costume and the general stylization of the body), and woman as body to be surveyed. Applying Searle's basic formula concerning the constitutive rules of institutions, "X counts as Y in context C" (*Speech Acts* 52), to the construction of the gendered subject, one can say that when positioned as the Other, an object, whose inscriptive body is foregrounded and put forth as spectacle, the person is constructed as a woman.

Indeed, womanhood came to be naturalized in the position of the marked Other (of the dichotomy of man/woman), which society has declared as "natural" and "normal" for her. This means that woman has typically been the object seen (while she herself did not see), the person spoken to or spoken of (while she herself did not speak), and the one acted upon (while she herself did not act). Only around the turn of the 20th century did the new female character appear in the subject position: empowered now to see, speak, and act, the modern woman appropriates for herself the possibility of self-construction as subject and agent (a possibility to be called into question by postmodernism later). Both are discursive processes producing social-cultural constructs; but while the first scenario—illustrated here by pre-modernist texts, where woman is produced, through *performance*, as an object—is the replaying of existing social scripts, the second—illustrated here by texts taken from modernist women writers—ignores, resists, and subverts normative expectations when, by applying radical-ontological *performative* processes, it produces woman as a speaking and seeing subject, as well as acting agent.

Moreover, woman's construction in the object position runs parallel with the similar naturalization of colored and gay persons as cultural Others. As members of culturally imperialized groups, they have followed similar trajectories of disempowerment (excluded from the category of the human, the "rights of man," and deprived of subjecthood and agency) and empowerment (claiming inclusion into the human and appropriating subjecthood and agency). Indeed, the persons constructed into objects along axes gender, race, and

sexuality have, in a homologous manner, challenged this normative performance, and applied radical performative processes in pursuing their entitlement to a speaking-seeing-acting subjecthood.

Simone de Beauvoir was probably the first to take an uncompromisingly constructionist approach, already in 1949, to female subjectivity when in her Introduction to *The Second Sex* she insists that woman “is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other” (xix). Of course, constructing woman into the Other has served as the prerequisite of the construction of the male self: only vis-à-vis the otherized woman is the centered male self the man. Not only is it more typical for men, Luce Irigaray insists, to say “I” to designate themselves (*I Love* 65), but it is safe to say that the female identity “originates in man” (*I Love* 64). Moreover, given the binarity implicit in Western thinking, the category of woman as other must be constructed in order to complement the category of the man. “The woman’s position as Other to the male subject,” Jessica Benjamin argues, goes hand in hand with “the binary logic that produces the complementarity of male subject-female object” (*Shadow of the Other* 37).

Womanhood is constructed, therefore, by a sense of its own definition from the outside: the subject that constructs her into an otherized object, offering her an image that originates in society. She is dependent on the approval of others for recognizing her own self-worth. Defined by others, she is, indeed constructed through discourse owned by the other. Moreover, woman’s objecthood extends to being an exchange object, a prize, in the homosocial world of men, as Gayle Rubin (“The Traffic of Women”) and later Sedgwick demonstrated (*Between Men*). Her desire that her subjectivity be affirmed is never satisfied; woman remains an object, an empty receptacle without substance (or subjectivity), who is, moreover, interchangeable with other women.

The construction of woman as object can be understood in linguistic terms as nominalization, the grammatical form condensing verb into noun, or process into end-result. This is a simplifying and, as cognitive linguists claim, mystifying technique; “a process is expressed as a *noun*, as if it were an entity” (O’Halloran 115). By uncovering the discursive processes that produced them, the performative analysis of the constructions of man, woman, black, white, gay, or straight will conclude that they are exactly such nominalizations whose coming about has been overshadowed by the taking of the nominal form instead of the verbal. For example, in the texts meticulously detailing the dressing or undressing ceremonies “essential” to womanhood, woman is constructed in the process of its becoming. James, Chopin, Dreiser, Wharton, Eliot, and Swift all look behind the nominalized form of woman and—as if applying the methods of critical discourse analysis—present her not as a mystified entity but as a process, unveiling, as it were, the stages of her self-construction.

When women are constructed as objects, they become icons in a process of “iconizing,” to borrow from Rachel Blau DuPlessis, which is “a peculiar form of erasure” (*Pink Guitar* 43). Neither does woman as icon write her story, nor is she the main actor of her story. In cognitive science terms one could say that women’s stories are primarily spatial stories and event-stories, but not action-stories (see Mark Turner, *Literary Mind* 26). In spatial and event-stories the events only happen to people in a particular space, while action-stories figure agents who perform various actions causing objects to move in a spatial direction (104). In narratives of patriarchy, women typically do not figure as central characters in action-stories; they fail to become agents in their own stories. For example, in the spatial image schema of birth as an object coming out of the container (which will be a premier image schema projected onto many other stories and concepts in our culture [*Literary Mind* 52]), the mother remains a passive body. In my reading, the fact that such exclusively gendered acts in women’s lives as childbirth have been paradigmatically conceptualized as events and not actions is fundamentally linked with the woman=object equation. For while childbirth is undoubtedly initiated by biological processes like contractions, the woman is perhaps no more at the mercy of “nature” than are the “protagonists” of *Moby Dick*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, or “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” to mention only three text dramatizing the clash of man-agent and “nature.” I see no (biological) reason why childbirth could not be presented as a similar battle between “natural forces” and the woman striving to retain some form of agency. The fact that childbirth is not conceptualized as the clash of two opposing yet in some way equal forces (where the human has the ambition at least to take on nature) speaks of the all-pervasive influence of the woman=object equation.

The construction of the self as other is intimately tied to the foregrounding of the body; both including the intense workings of power. Indeed, an all-pervasive movement of power against the body can be observed in the modern era. This is how Foucault describes power’s subjection of the body:

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A “political anatomy,” which was also a “mechanics of power,” was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies. (*Discipline* 138)

Women’s bodies have been preeminently the sites where such techniques of the machinery of power have operated, making them into subjected and practiced “docile” bodies.

Woman’s body will be the site of multiple social inscriptions, the always already gendered, racialized, and sexualized material. As Braidotti puts it, “[t]he

body is then an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces; it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed" ("Identity, Subjectivity" 169). Woman's body will be, moreover, the site where power is exercised incessantly; the manipulation of the female body emerges, Bordo has pointed out, "as an absolutely central strategy in the maintenance of power relations between the sexes" (*Unbearable* 143). These strategies include the stylization of her body, or regulatory practices whose function is the normalization or standardization of the body. Woman's acts will follow regulative rules that allow her performance to be meaningful within a particular set of conventions. In other words, its performative force depends on what Derrida calls a "context of legitimate, legitimizing, or legitimized convention" ("Performative Powerlessness" 467). These various stylized and repeatable acts, then, produce her as woman (woman produced by institutions and discourses) with a self gendered normatively.

Costume is the most obvious form of gender stylization. Whether the clothes adhere to masculine or feminine normativity, are expressions of transgendered identities, or are just vehicles of playful experimentation or fantasy (as is cross-dressing and drag), the performative power of the dress cannot be overestimated. Virginia Woolf was probably the first to come to the conclusion that costume plays a large part in gendering us into men and women. Here is the relevant passage from *Orlando* exploring the ways clothes make people, changing their views, and actually wearing them.

Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us. . . . Thus, there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking. (170–171)

When changed into a woman wearing dresses, "Orlando curtsyed; she complied; she flattered the good man's humours as she would not have done had his neat breeches been a woman's skirts, and his braided coat a woman's satin bodice" (170). Moreover, changes could be detected even in her face; but certainly the most important difference between a man and a woman lies in the possibilities available to them:

If we compare the picture of Orlando as a man with that of Orlando as a woman we shall see that though both are undoubtedly one and the same person, there are certain changes. The man has his hand free to seize his sword, the woman must use hers to keep the satins from slipping from her shoulders. The man looks the world full in the face, as if it were made for his uses and fashioned to his liking. The woman takes a sidelong glance at it, full of subtlety, even of suspicion. Had they both worn the same clothes, it is possible that their outlook might have been the same. (171)

Moreover, Orlando must come to realize that to be a woman, which includes being “obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature,” is “tedious discipline.”

She remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled. ‘Now I shall have to pay in my own person for those desires,’ she reflected; ‘for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline. (143)

When recognizing that women are not women “by nature” but made through the daily regimes of “hairdressing,” “looking in the looking-glass,” “staying and lacing,” “washing and powdering,” “changing from silk to lace and from lace to paduasoy,” and “being chaste year in year out” (43), Orlando actually argues for constructionism as against essentialism.

The construction of woman as having a decorative corporeality is tied to one of the defining qualifiers of Western epistemology, the one that privileges the eye among the senses. In this epistemology, woman has been turned into visual object, the object of the gaze, where the economy of the gaze is always gendered and is always rooted in power. Indeed, woman has been subjected to the gaze of men, where the gaze is understood as the extension of power. Here power is located in the seeing subject (in the subject position) always remaining unperceived, as Lacan emphasizes (*Four Fundamental* 77), whereas subjugation is enforced on the person seen (in the object position). The gaze, therefore, as Ann E. Kaplan has argued, reinforces the dominance-submission patterns of our culture, and creates an interlocking relationship between power and desire. Moreover, constituted by voyeurism and fetishism, the gaze “carries with it the power of action and of possession” (311), and only men can own desire (317). This is the gaze, as Donna Haraway puts it, which “mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, [and] makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation” (“Persistence” 283). Through this process, woman has been turned into icon, “displayed,” as Laura Mulvey claims, “for the gaze and enjoyment of men” (21). Although this presentation of woman as spectacle, as a body attracting the gaze of visual enjoyment is pervasive in our culture, the construction of woman as the iconic object of the gaze is especially obvious in narrative cinema, as has been demonstrated by Mulvey (*Visual*), Kaplan (“Is the Gaze”), de Lauretis (*Alice, Technology*), Jeremy Hawthorn (“Theories”), and Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (*Practices*), among others.

Much like the inmates in Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon as described by Foucault, women are on permanent display in society, displaying the ornamented surface of their bodies prepared by disciplinary practices according to the

accepted norms of gender. This state of being constantly under the commanding gaze and control of authority, will assure, Foucault insists, “the automatic functioning of power” (*Discipline* 201). Women are constantly surveyed by the “panoptical male connoisseur,” to use Sandra Lee Bartky’s phrase, who, by embodying “an anonymous patriarchal Other,” will grant woman an outside perspective and will allow her to “live . . . her body as seen by another” (“Foucault” 72). In other words, she will internalize the gaze and will take over the scrutinizing and disciplining of her body even in the absence of the onlooker. Surveyor and surveyed at the same time, she will produce herself—out of an obedience to patriarchy—as a self-surveying and self-policing subject who treats herself as a sight, a spectacle, an object. The body image, defined by Elizabeth Grosz as a “map or representation of the degree of narcissistic investment of the subject in its own body and body parts” (*Volatile Bodies* 83), will serve as the site of such self-policing for women, who will internalize the image of themselves, created by the policing spectator of woman as object, and be able to put themselves into the subject position only when experiencing their own bodies. Such continual self-observation, involving their bodies as both subject and object, will result in self-production. Moreover, woman is expected to continually make and remake herself; where the assumption behind this imperative is, as Kristeva has demonstrated in her essay “The Subject in Process,” that without such disciplinary practices woman’s body, as everything connected with femininity, is deficient.

The gaze has served as a gendering technique setting apart women from men in a particular way. Coinciding with the binary position of subject and object, it has become part part of the subject position of masculinity to look and size up the woman, and part of the object position of femininity to be surveyed, put on display, sized up by men. As John Berger famously puts it, “men act and women appear” (*Ways* 47). Only other culturally imperialized groups had to get used to being constantly looked at, especially blacks and Latinos, as Susan Bordo pointed out (*Male Body* 173). Nudity seems to carry very different connotations when applied to men and women; as John Ashbery remarked, “[n]ude women seem to be in their natural state; men, for some reason, merely look undressed . . . When is a nude not a nude? When it is male” (qtd. in *Male Body* 179). Indeed, when men are looked at, they will be feminized in a manner similar to how blacks and Latinos are feminized under the gaze. This is what happens in gay photography, for example. Or, to take a mainstream example, this is where the movie *Full Monty* gets its twisted humor from: the “absurdity” of heterosexual men exposing themselves (not in a pathological manner)—and thereby putting themselves in the feminizing object position.

Recipes for men and women: gender as (hetero)sexualized performance

A few years ago I did a survey about gender and sexuality in literary texts of relative canonicity in Europe, Hungary in particular. My aim was to find the criteria according to which we read gender identities, identities sometimes left unmarked or open by the writer. I was mostly interested in what role sexuality played in the identification, or presumed identification, of gender. My findings correspond to Butler's observation: "we live, more or less implicitly, with received notions of reality, implicit accounts of ontology, which determine what kinds of bodies and sexualities will be considered real and true, and which kind will not" (*Undoing* 214).

In this survey conducted in 2002, I asked my respondents, over one hundred Hungarian university students, to identify the gender of the character presented. Passages were taken from texts they have probably read, since half of them were on their high school compulsory reading lists (poetry, prose, drama). But these excerpts were not really easy to locate, and I took out all references that would give away gender specificities. The characters I asked them to identify were Jean Valjean (Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*), Vronsky (Lev Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*), Billy Budd (Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*), Rodolpho (Arthur Miller, *A View from the Bridge*), M. Boulanger (Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*), Tom Jones (Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*), Melanctha (Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*), Dorian Gray (Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), Miklós Toldi (János Arany, *Toldi*), Mme Récamier (Ignotus, "Madame Récamier"), an unnamed woman who enters (Sándor Márai, "Belépő" ["Entering"]), Medve [Bear] (Géza Ottlik, *Iskola a határon* [School at the frontier]), Krisztián (Péter Nádas, *Emlékiratok könyve* [Book of Memoirs], three women in the pharmacy (Géza Szöcs, "Találkozás a József téren" ["Meeting in József square"])).

I asked four questions:

1. Does the presented character see the events or is this character seen rather?
2. Can you identify the gender of the character?
3. Is the sexuality of the presented character marked or unmarked? If marked, is it marked heterosexual or homosexual?
4. Is this a "real man" or not? Is this a "real woman" or not?

It turned out, that

- (i) if the presented character is the one who sees (subject position), then "normally" he is presumed to be a man (Jean Valjean, Tom Jones, Boulanger, Vronsky). He will be read as a "real man" if he is shown as heterosexual (or at least "not homosexual"). That is, sex and gender coincide, making him a "manly man."
- (ii) If the presented character is the one who sees (subject position) yet is identified as a woman, then she is presented as an anomaly. Her

biological sex does not coincide with gender. Yet in the culture of compulsory heterosexuality, to use the well-known term introduced by Adrienne Rich (“Compulsory”), it is her gender that is assumed to act as the marker of her heterosexuality. But when taken as a “masculine woman,” she will not be read as a “real woman,” but as a homosexual.

- (iii) A woman who is seen (object position) is presumed to be “normal”; occupying the position declared unmarked (“natural”) for her. Being seen involves the foregrounding of her body and clothes, which will adhere to standards of correctness (she will be wearing feminine clothes). She will be perceived as a “real woman,” one whose gender and sex coincide. Obviously, she is heterosexual.
- (iv) If the person seen (object position) is a man, then his biological and social gender markers will not be understood to coincide. He is not perceived as a “real man,” but a “feminine” man. His feminization results from the discrepancy of the markers.

My two general conclusions can be summed up as follows.

First, while gender identity might not always be immediately obvious (Hungarian does not have gender in personal pronouns, for example), the reader, relying on explicit or implicit features, seems to decide, or want to decide, gender by filling in the textual blanks the writer might have left.

Second, the reader assigns a particular sexuality, sexual orientation, to the gendered character. I called this somewhat mechanical procedure—of marking both gender and sexuality—presuppositional (or biased, prejudiced) reading, since the basis of the decisions came not from the text but from cultural assumptions pre-existing the reading of these texts. In this reading identity is always already gendered, and gender is always already sexualized in such a way that the “feminine or womanly woman” and the “masculine or manly man” are taken as heterosexual, while the “feminine man” and the “masculine woman” are presumed to be gay. Heterosexuality naturalizes itself by appropriating originality and normativity. This mechanics of reception is indeed based on a binary understanding of both gender and sexuality, and relies on a supposedly “natural” relationship between the binary categories: the “natural” configuration assumes intelligibility, or a homogeneity of markers (manly man, womanly woman), while the contrary or heterogeneous markers (feminine man, masculine woman) suggest unintelligibility, confusion, deviance, ill-matching, or Foucault’s heterotopia. The markers can be understood as citations through which characters, phenomena, and events are read according to certain cultural presuppositions. Reception will depend on the degree to which the reader will be familiar with what these citational repetitions refer to, and is able to make predictions accordingly.

I found a particular marker especially significant among the identity markers of gender and sexuality: the direction of presentation or the gaze. In

other words: it makes a difference in the perception of both gender and sexuality whether the character in question is the one who sees or the one who is seen, whether the character is in the subject or the object position. This presupposing of the woman as “naturally” occupying the object position seems to support de Lauretis’s claim that woman is primarily a position rather than a set of objective attributes (“The Essence” 10). Moreover, the person in the object position is necessarily described in terms of body and clothing, conventional markers of gender. Seeing, or the gaze, is really an extension of power relations: a form of social control, which puts the woman into the object position. In literature—as in film—woman appears as the object of sight or spectacle, while man is in control of diegesis, with whom the viewer or the reader identifies during reception.

The embodiments of the ideal woman and ideal man seem to be determined by the culture of compulsory heterosexuality. What is interesting here, though not unexpected, is that compulsory heterosexuality is at work on gender and not biological sex. For compulsory heterosexuality is a matter of power and oppression, and is, as Monique Wittig has shown, the extended arm of power and social control: “it is oppression that creates sex [meaning gender] and not the contrary” (“Category” 64). The term *invert*, applied to the “feminine man,” who embodies a discrepancy between sex and gender, means *homosexual* because this “feminine man” is self-gendered female. In the culture of compulsory heterosexuality a man’s gayness means that he, as is commonly claimed, is a “woman trapped in the body of a man.” By the same token, the lesbian woman, a “man trapped in the body of a woman,” likes women in the culture of compulsory heterosexuality. “I am a woman to the extent that I have never loved one,” Butler claims (*Psychic Life* 162). And this is how Matthew O’Connor, one of the most famous cross-dressers in American literature, in Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*, refers to himself: “the girl God forgot” (73) or “the bearded lady” (100). So in this respect there is a reciprocity of sorts between the genders.

However, there is one basic discrepancy between the two genders as to the degree to which they are heterosexualized. All kinds of men can be “real men”: Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* is totally asexual, Miklós Toldi, a staple and much loved figure in an early 19th century Hungarian epic poem, *Toldi*, by the romantic poet János Arany, also lacks interest in women (he only loves his mother, is a fighter, a knight in the court of King Louis, and only feels comfortable in the company of his male friends), while Vronsky of *Anna Karenina* and Boulanger of *Mme Bovary* are famous womanizers even though they lack any sexual markers whatsoever. For women, on the other hand, only one path leads to being “real women”: explicitly and outwardly marked heterosexuality (Mme Récamier as opposed to Melanctha).

Gender as a binary construct, then, is clearly the product of heterosexuality. But while heterosexuality is not compulsory for men (they can be “real men” without women, as for example in the male quest genre), womanhood and

femininity are only meaningful in the matrix of heterosexuality. A “real woman” is the heterosexual partner of the man; but the “real man” can be a solitary quester even within the heterosexual matrix. He can even be a misogynist, while presenting himself as a “real man.” Thus gender indeed emerges, as Catharine MacKinnon points out, “as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women” (*Feminism Unmodified* 7).

To conclude, the reception and interpretation of canonical literary texts embodying our culture’s gender constitution rely on assumptions that fail to differentiate between gender and sexuality. More precisely, sexuality works as the determining element of the textual construction of gender. Sexuality determines and overrides gender.

Gender identification is overwhelmingly controlled by compulsory heterosexuality in literature, treating as the unmarked norm the coincidence of the biological and social markers of gender (“manly man,” “womanly woman”) and heterosexuality. Everything that falls outside this norm, any multiplication of genders is considered “unnatural” and causing disturbance; all alternatives to the binary system—opposing the order controlled by regulatory discourse and its citational repetitions—are seen as dangerous, therefore they must be marginalized or silenced. This is the restrictive discourse on gender, the exclusive way, as Butler points out, in which “the gender field performs a *regulatory* operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance forecloses the thinkability of its disruption” (*Undoing* 43; emphasis in original). Indeed, my findings support the claim made by Butler about the tandem emergence of heterosexuality and gender: “the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality” (*Psychic Life* 135). And, as Butler concludes, in these texts too, gender is most visibly “achieved and stabilized through heterosexual positioning” (135).

Gender performances and performative genders

The institutional rules of gender normativity, which I presented at the beginning of Chapter 3 and rearticulated in my survey, will serve as the presuppositional foundation against which each *performance* or *performative* process will be measured and interpreted. These are the rules that will provide, to apply Butler’s terminology, “a scene of constraint” within which gender’s “practice of improvisation” (*Undoing* 1) can be acted out. These assumptions will determine—as I have demonstrated in the previous short chapter—the reading of gender in texts without specific gender markers. These assumptions will figure in texts presenting expressive-replaying gender performances as well as those which turn on radical-ontological performativity. In the next chapters I will discuss texts where woman is constituted as object, other, and body; these are normative

gender constructions because they tie subjectivities to normative gender formations, given a certain compliance between the *performance* and the presuppositional foundation.

First I read *performance* texts, which foreground gender compliance (“Performances of gender compliance”; “The *performance* of cultural codes”; “Some misogynist reversals”). Here I discuss four pre-modernist writers (Henry James, Kate Chopin, Theodore Dreiser, and Edith Wharton), then read three modern writers (William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, and Flannery O’Connor), and finally take two short sections from the poetry of Jonathan Swift and T.S. Eliot. These *performances* are iterative, that is, they follow existing models and replay social routines. The woman is shown as a process, a becoming, who constructs her gender through what Butler calls “regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression” (*Gender Trouble* 33). Next comes my discussion of *performative* subjectivity (“Performative genders”); here I read five women writers (Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, H.D., Willa Cather, and Carson McCullers) who have initiated new discursive processes for the realization of female agency. These instances are characterized by a non-compliance between performative and presuppositional processes, resulting in non-traditional gender constructions, where the performed gender subjectivation will not match the norms of heterosexuality. Here we have transgressions, usually of both gender and sexuality; we cannot talk about iterative *performances*, since ties to existing routines or signifieds have been weakened. In the *performance* cases, gender is shown as stable and unproblematic; in this “framework of sexual difference” (Butler, *Undoing* 213), gender is tied to normative heterosexuality (woman is portrayed as “feminine” when she is part of a love-and-marriage plot) and is a culturally intelligible form here because it is predetermined by heterosexuality. In the *performative* cases, however, gender is portrayed as unstable, changing, problematic, and unintelligible, because it is dissociated from normative heterosexuality; this is Butler’s gender trouble framework. Here we have “queer” versions of gender, the term *queer* meaning, until the mid-20th century inversion of gender status; double lives, multiple identities (see George Chauncey). Or, as I found in a rather unlikely place, in Bret Harte’s “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” from 1869: queer is that which changes. “Luck is a mighty queer thing. All you know about it for certain is that it’s bound to change” (275).

I would like to make two observations in connection with the selected texts: first, on authorial gender categories; second, on the contingency of the selection. As to the first, while I picked more male writers than women in my discussion of expressive-replaying gender *performance* and only female authors in my discussion of radical-ontological *performativity*, I did this not because I tie these two narrative options to any kind of gender “essence.” It is not out of some essence, but from narrative position rather that male writers construct women

more easily as objects and female writers produce women as subjects. Moreover, it is a matter of whether the author intends to comply with or challenge patriarchal expectations: from my selection, it would seem that men are not quite as keen to transgress normative categories as women (although I will not make this claim). But certainly, the woman produced as subject from the woman writer's narrative position is no longer part of the dominant discourse; she will appear as a subject capable of self-constitution and self-representation, capable, in short, of agency. (I am sure t cross-examples exist too, but for the purposes of the argument put forth in this book, these texts should suffice.) As to the second observation, the one concerning the random and contingent selection of the texts: I hope that the heterogeneity of the case studies as well as the authors will supply its own argument in support of my claims set forth in this chapter.

Performances of gender compliance

(Henry James, *Daisy Miller*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove*; Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*; Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, 'A Pair of Silk Stockings'; Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*)

In the following I will treat cases of *performances* when existing social scripts are being replayed: when, in compliance with the hailing ideology, the woman applies regimes of stylization to her body or acts according to other social norms in order to perform traditional womanhood.

Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer, Edna Ponteliev, Carrie Meeber, and Milly Theale—these are staple names in American literature, protagonists of major canonical novels born during the thirty years between 1878 and 1905 (Henry James, *Daisy Miller* [1878]; Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* [1881]; Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* [1899]; Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* [1900]; Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove* [1902]; Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* [1905]). I would like to add to this list the lesser-known name of Mrs. Sommers (Kate Chopin, "A Pair of Silk Stockings" [1897]), who all but perfects the art of constructing herself through dressing. They all seem to measure themselves to some ideal of true womanhood conveyed via clothes, while at the same time they also become, in one way or another, the victims of these pressing norms.

In the first part of this chapter I will explore the different aspects of their *performances* of womanhood, and show that each of them is hailed by some social discourse, even where they seem to resist it. Dressing appears as a code of etiquette here, tying the novels to the English tradition of the novel of manners, which Tamás Bényei aptly translates into Hungarian as *etikettregény*, or novel of etiquette (*Az ártatlan ország* 59ff). I will identify two significantly different forms of authorial attitude to their discursive construction. According to the first, women use their dressing to express, or not to express, what they (or their authors)

imagine as the “inner self”; these are predominantly the women in the James novels, who, independent of whether they agree on the possibility of matching the dress to the self or not, take the pre-existence of the self for granted. (This claim applies to *The Wings of the Dove* to a lesser degree, for here I found arguments for the catachrestic self too.) According to the second authorial attitude, however, women construct their selves by dressing up; these are predominantly the women in my Dreiser, Chopin, and Wharton examples. (This claim applies to a lesser degree to Chopin, for in *The Awakening* I found arguments for the pre-existing self too.) It is in these latter cases where women, knowingly or unknowingly, construct themselves into catachresis—metaphor without referent—by applying the norms of gender to their bodies primarily, in terms of dressing, make-up, and body-movement, and thereby construct their selves too. These are women who are spectacularly not born but made: who know the rules, live by them (more or less), make themselves into women through these rules, and then must realize the consequences of their following of the rules.

The difference between these two approaches to the relationship of clothing and self—clothing as expressive of the self and clothing as constructing the self—corresponds to the two ways in which, according to Sandra M. Gilbert, English and American modernist men and women see the relationship of costume to self. While male modernists, Gilbert insists, see costumes as either true or false, depending on whether they hide or express “a heart’s truth” (“Costumes of the Mind” 193), women modernists believe that “costume creates identity” (193), and is “closely connected with the pressures and oppressions of gender” (195). Accordingly, Yeats, Lawrence, and Eliot always differentiate between mask and self, but Woolf, for example, sees costume and self as identical, Gilbert concludes (196). While I do not see this distinction to always hold according to the gender of the authors, I consider the distinction itself operative, as I will show, in my *performance* cases too. Of course, my first examples come from writers who were not modernists *per se*, and the question of modernism is not the point here either. James, Wharton, Chopin, and Dreiser were pre-modernist rather, preceding and preparing in various ways the modernist movement. In terms of applying or problematizing the inside/outside model of the modern episteme, which will later culminate in high modernism, either of them could pass as a modernist. While James will translate the high modernist dualisms into the self/mask or self/dress dichotomy, conceptualizing the invisible self as made visible by clothing, Dreiser, Chopin, and Wharton will problematize the inside/outside dichotomy of the modern episteme, insisting that the self is created by the inscriptions of social norms on the body, with clothing as prominent among these inscriptions.

Whether dressing is considered expressive of the self (as in the James texts) or the self is taken to be produced through dressing (as in the Dreiser, Chopin, and Wharton texts), the performative process is citational and theatrical, evoking and replaying existing scripts of womanhood. In short, both cases are *performances*.

**“Clothes that wear us,” or the performance of dressing: Henry James,
Daisy Miller, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove***

Henry James's *Daisy Miller*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Wings of the Dove* have several women characters fully aware of how society inscribes its norms on the female body through stylized performances. James is known for tracing the subjectivation of his characters as a process of development, with subjectivities evolving gradually. In the following, I interrogate texts where personalities evolve by way of social norms, dressing in particular.

Daisy Miller seems to accept and enjoy her female objecthood brought about by her choice of attire. When she first appears, her taste for fine clothing is emphasized.

The young lady meanwhile had drawn near. She was dressed in white muslin, with a hundred frills and flounces, and knots of pale-colored ribbon. She was bareheaded, but she balanced in her hand a large parasol, with a deep border of embroidery; and she was strikingly, admirably pretty. (5)

Her dressing is the expression of her taste and her innocence: her “hundred frills and flounces, and knots of pale-colored ribbon” both extend her self and stand for the values she is known for. As the innocent girl is introduced into society, however, her virginal nature will give way to flirtatiousness and the knowledge that her “extreme elegance” (23) can attract all eyes. Her becoming a flirt is best conveyed by her self-construction as object, the object of the gaze of men and women alike. For example, she knows exactly how to provoke men or make a grand impression on Winterbourne by descending the stairs of her hotel:

He waited for her in the large hall of the hotel. . . . She came tripping downstairs, buttoning her long gloves, squeezing her folded parasol against her pretty figure, dressed in the perfection of a soberly elegant traveling costume. . . . Daisy Miller was extremely animated, she was in charming spirits; but she was apparently not at all excited; she was not fluttered; she avoided neither his eyes nor those of anyone else; she blushed neither when she looked at him nor when she felt that people were looking at her. People continued to look at her a great deal. . . . (29–30)

Never being the subject to look, but always the object to be looked at, Daisy has now become conscious of her body as her greatest asset in society.

In *The Portrait of a Lady* the issue of womanhood as performance is repeatedly articulated. Its representation of the self is, moreover, problematized in a conversation between Madame Merle and Isabel, where the older woman defines a woman's clothes and “things” as “expressive” of her self:

What shall we call our ‘self’? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again. I know that a large

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part of myself is in the dresses I choose to wear. I have a great respect for *things*! One's self—for other people—is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive. (187)

In other words, Madame Merle takes the position that clothes and things put the self on display for others; for her, they are the visible extensions and legible expressions of what is otherwise hidden from society. Moreover, clothes and things give body and material to what is otherwise incorporeal and immaterial: the self.

Isabel, however, strongly disagrees.

"I don't agree with you," she said. "I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; on the contrary, it's a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly, the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should!"

"You dress very well," interposed Madame Merle, skillfully.

"Possibly; but I don't care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with it's not my own choice that I wear them; they're imposed upon me by society." (187)

Probably the first woman protagonist in American literature to recognize that clothes are imposed upon women by society, Isabel basically argues that certain models of behavior, among these the buying and wearing of "things," are prescribed by society, and as such originate in society and not in her self. She sees clothes as barriers to the manifestations of the self rather than its expression: for her, clothes are the extensions of "society"—or power, or ideology, we would say today—which will make uniform objects out of women. The argument seems to be locked in the modern episteme: it centers around the possibility of the visible expressing the invisible, without questioning the existence of the invisible. Of course, and here James is at his most progressive, it also about the issue of female agency, as he raises the dilemma of whether woman is subject by choosing her clothes or is object because her clothes are really chosen by her dress-maker, or society.

Described not just as having a "splendid decorative character," but also an "authentic" personality of "uncatalogued values" (339), Isabel, however, performs womanhood with a difference. Unlike other high-class women—like the Countess Gemini, for example, who travels "with her trunks, her dresses, her chatter, her little fibs, her frivolity, the strange memory of her lovers" (457)—Isabel resists the pressures of society, at least in terms of clothes, never wearing "anything less than a black brocade" (525), and her sometimes sharp tongue. Indeed, Isabel comes as close to becoming a rebel as it is possible in her social position, "her cleverness [being] . . . a dangerous variation of impertinence" (196).

She made up her mind that their manner of life was superficial, and incurred some disfavour by expressing this view on bright Sunday afternoons, when the American absentees were engaged in calling on each other. . . .

"You all live here this way, but what does it lead to?" she was pleased to ask. "It doesn't seem to lead to anything, and I should think you would get very tired of it." (196)

The Wings of the Dove presents several other women who express their differences by dressing differently. The first of these is Kate Croy, "a woman whose value would be in her differences" (42), right at the beginning of the novel. "[H]andsome, but the degree of it was not sustained by items and aids" (10), Kate has appropriated a particular form of fashion:

She had stature without height, grace without motion, presence without mass. Slender and simple, frequently soundless, she was somehow always in the line of the eye—she counted singularly for its pleasure. More "dressed," often, with fewer accessories, than other women, or less dressed, should occasion require, with more, she probably couldn't have given the key to these felicities. . . . She didn't hold herself cheap, she didn't make for misery. Personally, no, she wasn't chalk-marked for auction. (10–11)

So she seems to have attained more—with less. But soon Kate's "character" cannot hold against the pressures of social codes: she grows into a woman of material interests only, who must see "as she had never seen before how material things spoke to her. . . life now affected her as a dress successfully 'done up'" (27). Kate will take great pains at dressing—in a theatrical way. Now she uses her looks, her attire, simply to play her part: "to dress the part, to walk, to look, to speak, in every way to express, the part, so all this was what Kate was to do for the character she had undertaken, under her aunt's roof, to represent" (241)

It was made up, the character, of definite elements and touche—things all perfectly ponderable to criticism; and the way for her to meet criticism was evidently at the start to be sure her make-up had had the last touch and that she looked at least no worse than usual. Aunt Maud's appreciation of that to-night was indeed managerial, and the performer's own contribution fairly that of the faultless soldier on parade. (241)

It is in Kate's character that James abandons the idea of dressing as expressive of the self, allowing Kate to experience self-construction. Indeed, Kate is not only good at performing the norms of gender, but will actually construct herself catachrestically, into a woman with little "substance." "Wanting in lustre" (367) in comparison to Milly Theale, the protagonist of the novel, Kate is "practically superceded" by the "striking young presence" (367) of Milly, whom James refuses to present as one having merely a socially constructed self. It was a

self, James insists, which pre-existed her self-construction through dressing, allowing her a “sort of noble inelegance” (92):

She couldn't dress it away, nor walk it away, nor read it away, nor think it away; she could neither smile it away in any dreamy absence nor blow it away in any softened sigh. She couldn't have lost it if she had tried. . . . (92)

Milly's “noble inelegance” seems to stick out when she is with people who are “only people” (365): in her wonderful white dress she becomes indistinguishable from the noble Venetian surroundings, “the golden grace of the high rooms, chambers of art in themselves” (365). Milly is one of those Jamesian figures who have character—and this character may “break out” (366) and show in her dressing and her palace in Venice. The only problem with this supposedly pre-existing self is that it was her wealth which had actually shaped it: “that was what it was to be really rich. It had to be *the* thing you were” (92; emphasis in original). So what gave Milly her authenticity—her “noble inelegance” (92)—was in fact money. Indeed, money and the power that went with it had already interpellated her in the Althusserian sense before she could think about how to dress.

The empty signifier of the “world of fashion”: Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*

I will turn to those texts now which more easily assume that woman's self, including gender, is constructed. Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* narrates the construction and self-construction of its protagonist Carrie Meeber from the simple country girl to the elegant Chicago actress. As we learn from the first sentence already, Carrie was a modest girl, whose “total outfit,” when leaving her home at eighteen, “consisted of a small trunk” only (3). “[A]mbitious to gain in material things,” she set out for Chicago with dreams of becoming the “prey and subject” of the “mysterious city” (4). Most of all, she wanted to become a well-dressed woman—one to match the gentleman she first met on the train.

Carrie, the girl who judges people by their looks and whose ultimate dream centers on becoming an elegant woman, is utterly pleased by meeting Drouet. The man is described as a “masher”: one who is both a womanizer and an effeminate man—because he dresses in order to attract women and does this with the meticulousness of a woman.

His suit was of a striped and crossed pattern of brown wool, new at that time, but since become familiar as a business suit. The low crotch of the vest revealed a stiff shirt bosom of white and pink stripes. From his coat sleeves protruded a pair of linen cuffs of the same pattern, fastened with large, gold plate buttons, set with the common yellow agates known as “cat's-eyes.” His fingers bore several rings—one,

the ever-enduring heavy seal—and from his vest dangled a neat gold watch chain, from which was suspended the secret insignia of the Order of Elks. The whole suit was rather tight-fitting, and was finished off with heavy-soled tan shoes, highly polished, and the grey fedora hat. He was, for the order of intellect represented, attractive, and whatever he had to recommend him, you may be sure was not lost upon Carrie, in this, her first glance. (5)

As it turns out, Drouet's "philosophy of clothes" is much like Carrie's: he believes that "[g]ood clothes . . . were the first essential, the things without which he was nothing" (6). "A strong physical nature, actuated by a keen desire for the feminine, was the next," the narrator continues (6). The description of his "desire for the feminine" is, of course, quite ambiguous, emphasizing again the two aspects of the "masher": both his heterosexual attraction for women and his desire to be somewhat feminized, in the sense of actually wanting to appear better-dressed than most women. By being described as not just wanting to attract women through his elegance—"his suave manners, his fine clothes" (184)—but also to construct a body through dressing it up properly, Drouet is presented as a man who has appropriated the "feminine" style of "dressiness" (102).

As Carrie's mentor, Drouet ushers her into the world of clothes: he helps her pick them out, buy them, and wear them—from shoes and jacket to skirt and stockings (69–60). Snapping Carrie up, as Janet Beer accurately claims, "as surely as if he had spotted her at a warehouse," the woman is turned into "a doll, a mannequin for him to dress up" (169). Once this modern Pygmalion transforms her and passes her on to another man, Hurstwood, Carrie's commodification and objectification is final.

Carrie's becoming a fashionable city woman is accentuated by her accumulating knowledge of appropriate dressing style: wearing "a light grey woolen dress with a jaunty double-breasted jacket" when going for a walk (115), among others. *Sister Carrie* is a female *Bildungsroman*, where Carrie's road to knowledge or experience is paved by her improvement in dressing:

In a material way, she was considerably improved. Her awkwardness had all but passed, leaving, if anything, a quaint residue which was as pleasing as perfect grace. Her little shoes now fitted her smartly and had high heels. She had learned much about laces and those little neckpieces which add so much to a woman's appearance. Her form had filled out until it was admirably plump and well-rounded. (134)

She knew that she had improved in appearance. Her manner had vastly changed. Her clothes were becoming, and men—well-dressed men, some of the kind who before had gazed at her indifferently from behind their polished railings and imposing office partitions—now gazed into her face with a soft light in their eyes. In a way, she felt the power and satisfaction of the thing. . . . (222)

With this “improvement,” she gained a particular comfort in being looked at; she will be at ease when objectified by male gaze during her *performance* of gender, her being constructed by the dress-codes especially. No matter how much she had “improved,” though, Carrie must from time to time face the fact that—based on her dressing—she is not taken as one belonging to high-society. The more she improves, the more she becomes aware of the distance between herself and her ideal ladies. This is the point where her enjoyment of being looked at goes sour: when she realizes that she cannot compete with the really rich and elegant women, and those who size her up will recognize her inferior position.

Carrie found herself stared at and ogled. . . . With a start she awoke to find that she was in fashion’s crowd, on parade in a show place—and such a show place! . . . The whole street bore the flavour of riches and show, and Carrie felt that she was not of it. She could not, for the life of her, assume the attitude and smartness of Mrs. Vance, who, in her beauty, was all assurance. She could only imagine that it must be evident to many that she was the less handsomely dressed of the two. It cut her to the quick, and she resolved that she would not come here again until she looked better. At the same time she longed to feel the delight of parading here as an equal. Ah, then she would be happy! (280–281)

Her unhappiness comes from the bitter recognition of her second-rate elegance: she is determined to further improve, and dreams about the day when she can display herself as an equal. She expects to attain this further improvement through theater, the theatrics of dressing. This improvement of looks is the sole meaning of theater for her; this is why she does not quite understand, for example, why she is not considered a better actress, when “[h]er dresses had been all that art could suggest” (283).

She is her own art work, crafted by herself (and some friends) into a beautifully dressed body: the desired object.

Ah, what a prize! he thought. How beautiful, how elegant, how famous! In her theatrical and Waldorf setting, Carrie was to him the all desirable. (432)

Now Carrie has attained her dreams, has become the object of the desire of the man she had desired so much, but is—in spite of “her gowns and carriage, her furniture and bank account” (452)—painfully lonely and sad. Fully embodying “specularity,” as Janet Beer aptly puts it, Carrie is no more than a “reflection,” giving back “to the male onlooker the answer he is always looking for, the picture of his own desire, not hers” (171); as such, she is the “mediated woman,” described throughout “in terms of her appeal to other people and always uncertain of her own authenticity” (172).

Carrie ultimately fails in surpassing her objecthood and attaining subjecthood in part because she misunderstands the meaning of clothes. Until, in a moment of illumination, she recognizes the emptiness of her dreams.

Chicago, New York; Drouet, Hurstwood; the world of fashion and the world of stage—these were but incidents. Not them, but that which they represented, she longed for. Time proved the representation false. (452)

Carrie's recognition is graver than one might think: she comes to see her self-construction as only construction without any substance. Indeed, earlier she responded faithfully to the call of ideology, in this case the discourse of gender, when she made herself into a beautiful and well-dressed woman, an applauded and sought-after actress. But she did this with the hope that "the world of fashion and the world of stage" were the representations of something graver, something more substantial. She has to learn, however, that representation is "false": her constructed womanhood is but an empty signifier, a catachresis.

**The social mask of clothes:
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, "A Pair of Silk Stockings"**

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* seems to hesitate between showing woman as having a self which will be expressed by her dressing and presenting the construction of the catachrestic self through the call of social norms, dressing being prominent among these norms.

Edna Pontelier is a high-class woman, a rich Creole wife, whose looks are significant both before and after her spiritual and emotional awakening. She makes a grand entrance during one of her first appearances, when walking along the shore with her friend Madame Ratignolle:

She wore a cool muslin that morning—white, with a waving vertical line of brown running through it; also a white linen collar and the big straw hat which she had taken from the peg outside the door. The hat rested any way on her yellow-brown hair that waved a little, was heavy, and clung close to her head. Madame Ratignolle, more careful of her complexion, had twined a gauze veil about her head. She wore dogskin gloves, with gauntlets that protected her wrists. She was dressed in pure white, with a fluffiness of ruffles that became her. The draperies and fluttering things which she wore suited her rich, luxuriant beauty as a greater severity of line could not have done. (58)

The two women dress extremely carefully, not only as the occasion demands but also to create their own style. Especially Edna's dressing is depicted as the extension of her self: her changes of mood must be expressed by the choice of her dress, dress being "the question" which "too often assumes the nature of a problem" (120). Dress stands between herself and the world; in a sense it is a protective social mask for her, without which her self will show, allowing her to become too vulnerable. This is why, for example, her hesitation about rejoining

the company after she already went to her bedroom is expressed by her hesitation about whether to “go to the trouble of dressing again” (92).

Dressing up gains a very different meaning in the climax scene of the novel. Having prepared her body through elaborate and ceremonial forms which Butler calls the “embodied rituals of everydayness” (*Excitable* 152), she constructs her femininity through the *performance* of various effects required for the masquerade of the woman who aims to impress the privileged invitees of her dinner party. She becomes the “fetishized woman,” to use Linda Williams’ term (372), made up of individual female fetishes such as smooth and scented skin, shiny curls, good breath, round nails. As a consequence of her preparation, she reigns, because she is garbed, like a queen.

The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. There was a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders. It was the color of her skin, without the glow, the myriad living tints that one may sometimes discover in vibrant flesh. There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone. (145)

Edna experiences something rather strange: she becomes one with her dress. The stain glows with the shimmer of her “vibrant flesh”; the lace matches exactly the color of her skin. Here very obviously it is the dress that makes the woman; having no self to be expressed by her dress now, the catachrestic nature of her gendered self is foregrounded. Her sensations limited to the “extraneous,” Edna’s ennui comes with the realization of discords coming from an empty cavern: “a chill breath that seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords wailed” (145). Ultimately, Edna Pontelier falls because she cannot reconcile the discrepancy between her self-construction as object and her self-perception as subject (or desire to be taken as a subject). She longs for the affirmation of her subjectivity but is instead reduced, as all women are in the Lacanian framework, to desired object, “a sexual receptacle, property,” as Elizabeth Grosz puts it, “object, lacking, wanting what men have” (*Jacques Lacan* 134). Edna senses the contradiction between the woman who prepares herself as an object to be surveyed and admired and the one who would claim agency through her art. This contradiction is rooted in the co-dependence between patriarchal context and the woman as other-object-spectacle-body: her self-construction as a woman presupposes the context, which will not make any other scripts available for women. In other words, the transgression of these contexts—to be a woman and to be taken as a subject—is not permitted. Only in the final scene does she recognize the emptiness of her catachrestic objecthood, when she walks into the ocean naked: “for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her” (175). Only in the ocean can she, stripped of the social mask of clothes, become a

“new-born creature” (175). “She dresses down to the raw,” as Janet Beer points out, “she takes off her clothes in order to recodify herself in the eyes of the world” (177). But it is too late.

A short story predicated entirely on the normative gender assumptions of culture, Chopin’s “A Pair of Silk Stockings” presents womanhood as both process and product, construction and self-construction. It narrates how “little Mrs. Sommers” goes shopping and dresses herself completely in the department store, lured by the various products that she touches. Although first she wants to spend her unexpected fifteen dollars on her children, once in the department store, she changes her mind, until she ends up treating herself only with the luxury items of silk stockings, point-tipped boots, and gloves fitted to her hands. Not only does she buy them, but starts to wear them right away, surprised at the sudden change they bring onto her.

Her stockings and boots and well fitting gloves had worked marvels in her bearing—had given her a feeling of assurance, a sense of belonging to the well-dressed multitude. (265)

Her transformation is performatively brought about by her change of dress, having exchanged “her cotton stockings for the new silk ones which she had just bought” (264), wearing the “excellent and stylish fit” (264) of the new pair of boots, and enjoying her “little symmetrical gloved hand” (265) after her new gloves were fitted, smoothed, and buttoned. This change takes place step by step, from foot to toe, so to speak—to such a degree that her feet in her new stockings and boots do not even feel to be hers: “Her foot and ankle looked very pretty. She could not realize that they belonged to her and were a part of herself” (264). Probably she herself would agree with Woolf’s comment I mentioned earlier, it is “clothes that wear us and not we them” (*Orlando* 171).

After giving herself the additional treats of a good lunch in a most agreeable restaurant and a matinée theater performance, she gets on a cable car to return to her own life, but with a “poignant wish, a powerful longing that the cable car would never stop anywhere, but go on and on with her forever” (266). If for one day only, she could reconstruct herself into a “lady” which she, having seen “better days” (262), once was probably.

In this short story womanhood is clearly a construction (as well as self-construction and reconstruction): it is the end-product of the process of wearing womanly things and being engaged in “ladylike” preoccupations. Mrs. Sommers, however, is not simply self-constructed by following certain ideals of high-class dressing: in fact she is mostly prepared by others. It is the young girl behind the stockings counter, the clerk in the show department, the “pleasant young creature” fitting her gloves, the waiter in the restaurant, the usher in the theater and even her guests who contribute to this performance by carrying out the “disciplinary

practices” (Bartky 435) which will feminize her in a particular way. Mrs. Sommers does not perform these acts herself; instead, she will let others serve her, wait on her, or usher her: others will perform the *performance* acts on the otherized object of her body. Therefore, not only is she not a subject, but actually she is just the patient “suffering” from the regimes of power inflected on her body by others. In the meantime, she will be indeed transformed: she will become the costume; her masquerade will be all-pervasive: with nothing behind or beneath the mask, her womanliness will be nothing more than catachresis.

“Well-dressed till we drop”: Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

In Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart knows what duty society prescribes for her: “We are expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop,” she tells Selden (12). She takes great pleasure in the “luxury” of her pretty things:

As she entered her bedroom, with its softly-shaded lights, her lace dressing-gown lying across the silken bedspread, her little embroidered slippers before the fire, a vase of carnations filling the air with perfume, and the last novels and magazines lying uncut on a table beside the reading-lamp. . . . Her whole being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury; it was the background she required, the only climate she could breathe in. (25)

Lily longs for a life filled with this atmosphere of luxury: this is what she wants to breathe in, what she would like to have control her life. Wharton captures Lily’s social ambition in her love of dresses and her wanting to be “as smartly dressed as the [rich] women” (83). She admires her rich aunt, Mrs. Peniston, who “belonged to the class of old New Yorkers who have always lived well, dressed expensively, and done little else” (37). This being her “inherited obligation” (37), she could remain an outsider to the world, neither subject nor object, neither acting nor being acted upon, merely “a looker-on at life” (37).

With a passion for *tableaux vivants*, Lily will live moments of feminine objecthood to the full.

Lily was in her element on such occasions. . . . her vivid plastic sense . . . found eager expression in the disposal of draperies, the study of attitudes, the shifting of lights and shadows. Her dramatic instinct was roused by the choice of subjects, and the gorgeous reproductions of historic dress stirred an imagination which only visual impressions could reach. (131)

under Morpeth’s organizing hand the pictures succeeded each other with the rhythmic march of some splendid frieze, in which the fugitive curves of living flesh and the wandering light of young eyes have been subdued to plastic harmony without losing the charm of life. (133)

In *tableaux vivants*, Lily can step into the shoes of any historical character or reconstruct any historical situation; in these *performances* she is not required to have her own self in any way, rather, the more catachrestically she plays her role, the better performer she will be. While “displaying her own beauty” (131), she will give up her own self, or admit the fact that the self is lacking beneath the role. Her *performance* will highlight the fact that she owns nothing of herself: her body and beauty, even her thoughts and ambitions belong to the role she plays. But she only recognizes this when looking back, when, in preparation for her suicide, she tries to “set her possessions in order” (317). It is here that she recognizes to have been an object displayed for the gaze of men: “like some rare flower grown for exhibition, a flower from which every bud had been nipped except the crowning blossom of her beauty” (317). But again, this recognition comes too late.

In the cases of Carrie, Edna, Mrs. Sommers, Lily, and to some extent Kate Croy, the authors seem to claim at least two things: first, that woman is she who plays the role of the woman; second, this is an existing role, women just need to take the script and perform it. Gender is a matter of *performance* here, constructing the woman through a series of citational performative acts; her *performance* will have performative force in bringing about her womanhood. These performative acts of gender create indeed, as Butler claims, “the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (*Gender Trouble* 140); for gender is presented as “tenuously constituted . . . through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (140; emphasis in original). All these acts, furthermore, target the body, inscribing a variety of social signs onto it. Ultimately, gender evolves as the consequence of the *performance* of dressing as social scripting.

**The performance of cultural codes: the Southern woman
(William Faulkner, ‘A Rose for Emily’;
Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*;
Flannery O’Connor, ‘A Good Man Is Hard to Find’)**

Of course, not all discourses that construct women control the stylization of the body only; certain widely-known codes of conduct can be shown to underlie gender *performances*. This is especially true of the American South, where—as I will show in my discussion of William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, and Flannery O’Connor—the ideal construct known as the Southern lady or the Southern *belle* is predicated on the discourse of white/female supremacy, including the widespread acceptance of racialized and gendered social hierarchies and ensuing forms of behavior.

**A joint performance by actor and audience:
William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily”**

The cultural perceptions of the South form the discourse underlying the performance of Miss Emily Grierson in Faulkner’s masterpiece short story of 1930, “A Rose for Emily.” It is this discourse which allows the narrator to speak in the first person plural voice of the community and to insist that “Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town” (431), passing “from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse” (437). The making of Emily Grierson into “Miss Emily” is a performance because a set of cultural codes forms its presuppositions, which the performance complies with. Expressive citationality is at work in the theatrics performed by both the town and Emily Grierson; these citations of norms of gender and race, womanhood and whiteness, together bring about the icon of Southern womanhood.

Faulkner narrates both the construction and the self-construction of “Miss Emily.” She was originally made into the Southern lady by her father, who probably used his horsewhip not just on his horses. The town also took its share in the making of “Miss Emily”: objectified under their constant social gaze, the woman whose taxes had been waved by Colonel Sartoris himself, grew into legend. As Judith Fetterley observes, “[b]ecause she is Miss Emily Grierson, the town invests her with that communal significance which makes her the object of their obsession and the subject of their incessant scrutiny” (38). “Because she is a lady,” Fetterley continues, “the town is able to impose a particular code of behavior on her” (38). And although she resists this construction first, when she starts an affair with a Northerner and when she makes preparations of killing the man who wanted to abandon her, the community will reconstruct her womanhood. In both attempts she transgresses the social codes, and her transgressions are successful, even if she could not break out of her social construction. In speech act terms, we could say that her acts are “felicitous” as illocutions (the affair and the preparations both came about) but unsuccessful as perlocutions (she did not break out of the Southern code of female behavior). Ultimately she will give in to the community and allow the town to reconstruct her womanhood.

Faulkner presents at least two incidents that highlight this reconstruction. One clusters around the issue of her taxes. The theatrics of her not paying taxes has several acts. First Colonel Sartoris—being of a generation who would make such chivalric gestures—“invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily’s father had loaned money to the town” (431); next Emily Grierson pretended to believe it; then they send her a tax notice which she leaves unresponded; then the town sends her a formal letter to which she responds, declining it as if it had been a social invitation. Finally, they go to see her; she pretends to read their visit as a social occasion, and terminates it by telling the Negro servant to “see these

gentlemen out” (433). It is indeed a theatrical *performance*, where not only do both parties allow the issue of the taxes be repeatedly missed, but town and Miss Emily join in avoiding the graver issue of her poverty. Through the whole process, Miss Emily’s reconstruction as a Southern lady is reiterated by both parties; Emily “is a man-made object,” as Fetterley puts it, “a cultural artifact, and what she is reflects and defines the culture that has produced her” (35). However, her being a “lady” will prove to be an empty signifier, a metaphor without referent, a catachresis, which exists only in legend and lore, but not in reality.

The other series of incidents highlighting her discursive reconstruction circles around the issue of the smell. In a matter probably even more sensitive than that of her taxes, the town cannot find a way to confront her with the fact of the awful smell that developed after Homer Barron disappeared. For the cavalier Mayor Judge Stevens it is impossible to “accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad” (433). Indeed, trapped by their own acts, making the Griersons into “the high and mighty” (433) icons, the town has no way of confronting Miss Emily with such a vulgar issue—and, indeed, the smell went away in a few weeks. It is because of the woman’s construction into a lady that she can get away with the murder of Homer Barron. And only the young narrator—stripping “Miss Emily” of her stature and humanizing her as mere “Emily”—is able to reveal her crime, speak about the true reason of both the smell and her not paying taxes, and admit the fictional-discursive nature of their *performance*.

**Performance as mere theatrics:
Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire***

Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) is a text whose central topos is construction or constructedness itself. Gender and race participate in the construction of the characters, especially Blanche, while the issue of constructedness itself becomes the fundamental conflict of the drama.

Blanche is the master performer, not once allowing herself to be forced out of her role as a Southern white woman. Her *performance* includes an adherence to codes of dressing, language, and manners, as well as the citation and confirmation of such codes. She arrives “daintily dressed in a white suit in a fluffy bodice” (367), and remains all through the play “incongruous in this setting” (367) of Elysian Fields, where the Kowalski’s live. Shocked at imagining that her sister must live in such a “horrible place” (369), which she describes as a locale taken from a gothic piece of Poe’s, she will learn not only that Stella and Stanley live in just two rooms, but also that the place is owned by a “white trash” American, Eunice, while the DuBois plantation house, itself only a sad reminder of splendor gone, had fallen out of the hands of the family. Moreover, they have a “colored”

neighbor who they are friends with, and in general live in close proximity with African Americans.

Blanche's style of speaking is a version of mock-sophistication and pathos, aggrandizing and self-centered. She likes to take every incident to a symbolic level, at once placing it into a particular cultural discourse—of heroism, chivalry, and pathos—and interpreting it from that angle. "I stayed and fought for [Belle Reve], bled for it, almost died for it," she tries to explain the ordeal of her losing of their property (371); "I understand there's to be a little card party to which ladies are cordially not invited," she says, articulating the simple fact that the two women must be out during poker time (374); "Clothes are my passion," she tries to justify her indulgence in clothes; "I hereby endow you with them," she says as she hands over the legal documents to Stanley (376); "Possess your soul in patience," she calls out to her brother-in-law, who would need the bathroom urgently (395); "I take hot baths for my nerves. Hydro-therapy, they call it," she explains her passion for bathing (394); she blames Mitch for his "uncavalier" behavior, and calls his work-clothes "uncouth apparel," an "unforgivable insult to a lady" (399). Refusing to see herself outside of this cultural discourse, she cannot accept the passing of time: that her social status has changed and that she too is aging. She is indeed, as "a repository of White genteel culture" (72).

Always in need of being in the center of attention, she makes herself into an object, an actor in her own *performance*. She insists on being looked at only in dim light or after she made herself up and "done in" (378); with Stella acting as her sidekick assisting in her construction, she repeatedly provokes compliments. Never wanting to share the limelight with anyone else, she prefers her sister to be quiet around her and to willingly serve her. Disdainfully proud of her aristocratic background, she takes every chance to put down others, including the "boy" who was her husband and all other "unrefined types" (373), who do not go "for jasmine perfume" (377). Her prime target is Stanley the "Polack," who "insults" her love-letters just by the touch of his hands (376). Nostalgic of her past conquests, she continually reconstructs herself as the object of attention and desire of the finest gentlemen, as a woman who had excited admiration in the form of "tributes" from her "admirers" (375). She even flirts with Stanley and tries to make Shep Huntley into the cavalier suitor she fantasizes about. Not letting herself to be distracted from her show by what is in front of her senses, she repeatedly makes Stanley's friends into the gentlemen which they are not, telling them, for example, not to get up when she passes through the room.

Affected by the myths of the South through the "phony" "Barnum and Bailey world" (394–395) of the songs she sings during her endless bathing rituals, she proves to be ideal target of hailing social discourses. Indeed, the discourse of gendered and racialized superiority addresses her via popular songs, translating the cultural myths of the South into easily digestible genres.

“Say, it’s only a paper moon,
Sailing over a cardboard sea—
But it wouldn’t be make-believe
If you believed in me!” (394)

It is through these lyrics that she connects to the world: they form the grid of her reading of the world, while they also convey, in a simplified discourse, the ideology that underpins her theatrical *performance* of white Southern womanhood. With the usual aggrandizing pathos, she presents her way of making up things as just benevolent magic:

I don’t want realism. I want magic. Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don’t tell the truth, I tell what *ought* to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it! (400; emphasis in original)

It is Mitch, the only eligible bachelor among Stanley’s friends, to whom she gives her full routine, complete with citing her French Huguenot ancestry, having him put the colored paper lantern on the “naked light bulb,” telling of her repulsion by “a rude remark or a vulgar action,” constructing the tale that she came down to help Stella, complimenting Mitch for his “gallantry” (380) and for being a “natural gentleman” (391), making herself into the younger of the two sisters, or claiming the ability to create “*joie de vivre*” (390). Even her seeming honesty is part of a scheming self-construction; for example, when she says, “I want to *deceive* him enough to make him—want me” (388; emphasis in original), she only has her lying about her age in mind and not the whole show.

Blanche never allows her *performance* to stop, not even after Mitch actually dumps her, saying into her face that he has no intention of marrying her, or after it becomes clear that she must leave. It is her adherence to the role that prevents her from understanding Stella’s love for Stanley, or from believing Mitch when he says, “[t]hey’re crazy about each other” (382). Having become one with the mask, she has no chance of comprehending the significance of their making up after the fight, or reading as the sign of true love their coming “together with low animal moans [as] [h]e falls to his knees . . . and presses his face to her belly” (381). Refusing to recognize their mutual adoration, she tries to talk Stella into leaving the “madman” she is married to (383).

Blanche makes every effort to construct herself into the hypersensitive object on whom the vulgarities of living take their toll. The victim of a corrupt world, she finds remedy in quieting her nerves by taking marathon baths and expects to constantly receive kindness from people. Her nerves will be used in her justifying the loss of Belle Reve, the family mansion too. Here her self-construction serves the manipulative Blanche: giving no specifics, she will speak in vague metaphors only when asked by her sister about the loss of their house.

Her tricks work once again on Stella: her well-rehearsed pathos does indeed gain Stella's sympathy and lets the performer get away with performing the victim.

But while Stella is willing to join her sister in her *performance* of Southern womanhood, falling back to playing the sidekick to Blanche's show, Stanley seems to immediately see through his sister-in-law. He uncovers her theatrics as he opens her wardrobe trunk and finds feathers and furs, "genuine fox fur-pieces," pearls and gold bracelets, and even a tiara, a "crown for an empress," as Stanley ironically puts it (374), surprised that "[s]ome men are took in by this Hollywood glamor stuff" (375). "After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion," she explains (376). All the items proving to be worthless, their participation in Blanche's construction of the Southern *belle* as catachresis is all the more prevalent. The *performance* is all illusion without substance; it all takes place in the realm of the signifier only, with no connection to any signified "out there." Only Stanley is not taken by the *performance*, and unlike Stella, he refuses to assist her. He will corner her about the issue of the lost estate, will uncover the truth about her life in Laurel, and buy her return ticket. But Blanche is unmovable; her mask has become herself, there is no self behind the role. This is why Stanley fails to make her face the fact that it was Mitch who dumped her (and not she him) or that there was no telegram from Shep Huntley. Not even by raping her can he shock her back into the reality he believes to live in. In fact, the man's insistence only exacerbates her determination: she refuses to even acknowledge that she has been raped. Nothing, not even violence, can push Blanche into unconstructing herself. She rather chooses "lobotomy," "desolation and spiritual death," as a critic puts it (Brewer 77) than abandoning her self-staging.

Not that Stanley is a true hero, an "original." His constructedness is no less apparent: his uncouth "natural" appearance, talk, and behavior are as much part of his *performance* of the rugged, virile, sensuous male as jasmine perfume and talk about tributes from admirers belong to the woman's. The central conflict of the play does not stem from one character standing for reality and the other for illusion, as many critics of Williams suggest. The conflict between Stanley and Blanche is not between "realism and theatricalism," as Mary A. Corrigan claims (392); or between a symbolic and a realistic understanding of the world—"the fictive skills of Blanche" and "the hard-edged realism of Stanley"—as Christopher Bigsby indicates (12). "[H]er desperate flight from reality toward an illusory refuge," to quote Felicia Hardison André's words (50–51), is not really in contrast with Stanley's firm standing in reality. Rather, it is two catachrestic constructions that clash, where both are *performances* of well-known, easily identifiable scripts. He too performs in spite of the fact that while Blanche dresses up in the process of self-construction, he undresses; while she is comfortable when "all freshly bathed and scented" (374), he makes himself comfortable by removing his shirt or walking around in his pajamas. It would only seem that Stanley's rugged realism, his seeing things "as they are," stands in sharp contrast

to Blanche's elaborate mystification; for example, where for Stanley the bathroom is the place to relieve himself, for Blanche it is her haven where the ritual of cleansing will take place. But in both cases, discourse keeps interfering with the "thing itself" to such a degree that finally it becomes clear that the "thing" does not exist outside discourse. Talking openly of the necessity to pee is part of a *performance* whose other elements are drinking beer and playing poker with his male friends, giving orders to women, beating his wife and then using it as sexual foreplay, or raping his sister-in-law. Both are performers; only the scripts of their *performances* differ.

Critics have suggested that Stanley's construction into the brute realist evokes strong Africanist associations—to the degree that, as Mary F. Brewer points out, "a number of productions have cast the role with a Black actor" (74). Indeed, one cannot miss the discourse of white supremacy that controls Blanche's outburst against Stanley's "animal habits," his being "subhuman," and even "ape-like" (385). It is this "racialized discourse spoken by Stella and Blanche," as George W. Crandell points out, which "serves to define Stanley as the Other, a sexual, cultural, and by implication, racial alien" (342). Or, as Rachel van Duyvenbode observes, by assigning the "dark task of rape" to Stanley, Williams also assigns him the "dastardly role of the 'dark' male" and "superimposes [his] dramatic identity upon that of the contemporary racially marginalized" (204). In my opinion Stanley's racialization holds to the point of his being made into the virile male with its associations of black sexuality, where blackness is further emphasized by the whiteness of his adversary, Blanche. Indeed, his black racial position becomes visible together with the making of the woman's whiteness visible. I think the "blackness" of Stanley must be read together with the whiteness of Blanche, where this latter, the foregrounding of what was always invisible and unmarked, is indeed a major accomplishment of Williams. Both blackness and whiteness presented as catachresis, they become meaningful not in terms of their signifier-signified relationships (which catachreses lack), but in terms of signifier-signifier relationship: of whiteness to blackness.

Ultimately it is Stella who, without confronting her with the lies and the theatrics, makes arrangements for Blanche's departure; while institutionalizing her sister, she and Eunice smooth her way by participating in her *performance*. They compliment her on her looks and enter into a conversation with her about the particular Della Robbia blue of her jacket; in order to keep the show going, they do not question her claim that Shep Huntley sent a telegram, and are even willing to suggest that the man who came for her was "the gentleman [she] was expecting from Dallas" (407). The two women are joined by the empathic doctor in saving her face, allowing Blanche to exit as a lady taking the arms of a gentleman and uttering her memorable final words, "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (408).

**Popular culture mediating the performance:
Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"**

Written in 1955, Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" focuses primarily on the grotesque self-construction of the grandmother into a Southern lady, where the ideal she hopes to be approximating in her theatrics is empty and wholly detached from reality. Her *performance* is manifold, with the citation and iteration of cultural values going on in her speech, dressing, and ways of dealing with people. The *performance* constructs her as a lady: she is a lady because even in the most unforeseen situations she knows what rules, of etiquette mostly, to follow. Ultimately, it is this *performance* which brings about the brutal slaughtering of the whole family.

The old woman is the central consciousness of the short story: her words, which we hear both in the dialogues and the free indirect discourse used amply in the story, attest to her self-perception, while at the same time they are the instruments with which she will move the events. She uses a vocabulary which is clearly dated: for example, when expressing her wish to visit "her connections" (1122), naming her cat Pitty Sing after a character in an 1885 Gilbert and Sullivan opera, or calling the black boy "the cute little pickaninny" (1124). She is prim and proper, dressing as a lady should, wearing white cotton gloves, a navy blue straw sailor hat, and white organdy collars and cuffs trimmed with lace, pinning a scented "purple spray of cloth violets" (1124) to her neckline. Her conversation topics are lady-like—and fittingly commonplace—too, expressing her desire to look like a lady in case someone might see her dead after an accident, judging that it's a "good day for driving," cautioning her son about the speed limit, pointing out "interesting details of the scenery" such as the "brilliant red clay banks slightly streaked with purple" and the "silver-white sunlight" (1124), and insisting that "Europe was entirely to blame for the way things were now" (1127).

Disappointed at how patriotism is missing from the children, she teaches them Southern values, among these, the imperative that they should be "more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else" (1124). She will also teach them to view the black child as a spectacle, "a picture" (1124), that the plantation, together with the South's grandeur, is "Gone With the Wind" (1125), and that "[p]eople are certainly not nice like they used to be" (1126). Nostalgic of "better times" (1127) as well as her own past grandeur, she tells the children the story of what it was like when she was "courted" by the planter "Mr. Edgar Atkins Teagarden," who was property conscious to the degree that he had his initials carved into the watermelon that grew on his land (1125). Inventing a whole legend around an old plantation house, she clearly makes up the secret panel and manipulates the children into making a scene so that their parents would turn off the road. Perceiving herself as not just having a "sunny disposition"

(1126) but possessing some natural goodness too, the grandmother keeps telling nice things to people about how good and trustworthy they are.

I see O'Connor following in the footsteps of Faulkner and Williams in constructing the grandmother's subjectivity strictly according to the Southern code of behavior. Moreover, she foregrounds the discursivity of the grandmother's subjectivity by emphatically evoking one well-known "discourse" of Southern culture to produce her as a lady: Margaret Mitchell's popular novel and the film made out of it, *Gone With the Wind*, which she likes referring to. "[M]anipulated," as Thomas Hill Schaub points out, by the kitsch of democratic-liberal culture" (128), she allows herself to be hailed and thereby constructed by popular discourses which, I want to add, are themselves, as the novel and its film adaptation (as well as the Gilbert and Sullivan opera) at second or third remove away from the "original" myth of the South.

Much like Miss Emily in the Faulkner piece and Blanche in the Williams drama, O'Connor's grandmother character is also a man-made object, a cultural artifact, created by the self-serving myths of the South; as a catachrestic cultural construct devoid of referent, she is as vulnerable and fragile as the others were. Moreover, much like in the case of Miss Emily and Blanche again, the myth that produced her will now, in an encounter where myths lose their significance, turn against her and bring about her fall. First the accident seems to have affected only her properly selected outfit: "the grandmother limped out of the car, her hat still pinned to her head but the broken front brim standing up at a jaunty angle and the violet spray hanging off the side" (1129). Next, her irrational urge to make acquaintance with supposedly nice people actually throws the family into the arms of the convicts. Failing to see the consequences of her words, she admits having recognized the Misfit—and goes on blabbering, as if it was a social occasion. She is trying to construct the Misfit into a white gentleman, a "good man" (1131), one "not a bit common" (1131), who has "good blood" (1134), and who "wouldn't shoot a lady" (1131). But she becomes the victim of her own *performance* as she refuses to hear what the Misfit is telling her—his life story and that they have already killed quite a few people. Refusing to admit that she knows Bailey was taken to be shot, that she recognized his shirt on the Misfit, or that the shots she heard killed the rest of the family, the grandmother cannot not perform or step out of her role of the Southern lady. Only in the very last moments—when confronted with the harsh reality of his gun—does she get a chance to rid herself of her role and establish an honest rapport with the Misfit, now taking him for "one of [her] babies" (1135). Falling finally from the pedestal of her own (and her culture's) making, she is humanized in her death, half sitting and half laying "in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky" (1135). But once again, it is too late.

**Some misogynist reversals (Jonathan Swift,
'A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,' T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*)**

Lastly, I would like to support my thesis concerning gender performance with two well-known misogynistic texts, where the authors reverse, in one way or another, the normative construction of womanhood and trace the process whereby gender is unconstructed, or undone. The first text I have in mind is Jonathan Swift's "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1734), which describes the undressing ceremony of Corinna, "a batter'd, strolling Toast." The poem seems to carry to the extreme the claim that womanhood is but catachrestic masquerade, where the body and clothing are meant to cover (up) the void. Describing gender as performance, Swift offers elaborate images of corporeal womanhood available for construction and reconstruction. Defined by the "horror of the female body" permeating *Gulliver's Travels* too, this constructedness carries blatantly negative connotations and is synonymous with lack of substance. The underlying assumption here could be formulated as follows: women are objects, objects of the fascinated and horrified masculine gaze, fake objects, without substance or wholeness, constantly disassembled and reassembled from their artificial parts.

Then, seated on a three-legg'd Chair,
Takes off her artificial Hair:
Now, picking out a Crystal Eye,
She wipes it clean, and lays it by.
Her Eye-Brows from a Mouse's Hyde,
Stuck on with Art on either Side,
Pulls off with Care, and first displays 'em,
Then in a Play-Book smoothly lays 'em.

.....

But how shall I describe her Arts
To recollect the scatter'd Parts?
Or shew the Anguish, Toil, and Pain,
Of gath'ring up herself again? (600–601)

When the text is controlled by a misogynist, the woman becomes a monster indeed. She is without substance; her gendered self is that which is being constructed again and again through the ritual of assembling of its vulgar artificial parts. The reader gets a full view of the underside of what Butler calls the "theatricality of gender" (*Bodies* 232): the woman wears a wig, her eyes are removable, her eyebrows are mouse hair, her round cheeks are stuffed, her teeth are false, her breasts are raised by rags, her figure is the work of a corset, her skin is smoothed by grease—her whole feminine body is created daily by much "Anguish, Toil, and Pain." Femininity is here portrayed as the result of an elab-

orate negative *performance*, when femininity is being de-created into absence, void, and nothingness. Indeed, that there is nothing beneath the de-created image but repulsive vulgarity is what Swift's distancing and alienating irony suggests (and what he didactically explicates in the last line).

Probably the most famous example of modernist male misogyny is T. S. Eliot. The women in his texts have become typical figures of modernity, whose alienation and ennui are only strengthened by the fact that they are affected by this alienation and ennui indirectly, through the men that are supposed to define them. As passive extras in male quest plots, these women play second fiddle in the grand orchestra of male supremacy. At best, Eliot's woman character is a lifeless, ghostlike figure, one of those who "come and go/Talking of Michelangelo" ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"), or spends her life "serving tea to friends," mourning her lost youth, neurotically twisting lilacs "in her fingers while she talks" ("Portrait of a Lady"). At worst, as throughout *The Waste Land*, she is female hysteria personified, famous for her bad nerves; or she is the thirty-one year old yet "antique" looking Lil, whose abortion pills made her lose her teeth but who now will disappoint "poor Albert" for not being able to look good and give him "a good time"; she is the bored typist making monotonous love with the repulsive "young man carbuncular." The *performance* of women characters in *The Waste Land* complies with normative womanhood, especially in its misogynist versions. These social norms are framed by such underlying presuppositions as 'women are different from men, they are emotional (hysterical), objects, sexual objects, of male desire, they are bodies primarily, and as such are repulsive.' This set of presuppositions is inscribed (reinscribed?) in the text through the *performance*.

The desperate scene of the typist's life includes her stale things left from the morning and the previous day: her kitchen stuff and her feminine "notions":

The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, light
 Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
 Out of the window perilously spread
 Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
 Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays. (44)

The last line seems to give away the misogynist: the items that touch the body he is repulsed by, "[s]tockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays," become repulsive themselves. These are items that supposedly participate in the material construction of femininity, that is, they make the person wearing a wig, an underbodice, a corset, stockings, and lady-like slippers clearly desirable and desiring in the heterosexual context. Therefore, portraying these feminine notions as graceless and unbecoming parts of a repulsive love scene will evoke disgust not just in their love-making, but the womanliness of this woman too. Woman

appears as having a monstrous body that repulses the man. Heterosexual hegemony denies the woman a self outside the heterosexual context, yet the self constructed within this context is clearly hideous and ugly. Her place inside the male script is confining and repelling, yet she has no place outside.

In spite of the differences in terms of the social scripts evoked, the texts discussed in this chapter are similar in one important respect: they all portray women through their iterative *performances* of womanhood. Women appear as others, objects, bodies, to whom and on whom certain conventional regimes are applied in the course of these *performances*. The presuppositional context out of which the iterated scripts are taken are defined by the norms of patriarchy, which makes them into objects of the gaze, icons in social *tableaux*, lifeless mannequins whose sole desire is to look good, vehicles of etiquette and other forms of societal conduct, or passive extras in male quest plots. As such, these women cannot overstep the boundaries of objecthood. Relegated into mere decoration at best and into objects evoking male repulsion at worst, they are unable to construct themselves as subjects.

Performative genders: non-compliance with social norms (Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*; Willa Cather, *My Antonia*; Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*; H.D., *HERmione*; Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*)

When could it become possible for women to claim agency and construct themselves as subjects in texts? When was womanhood performed outside the heterosexual matrix, as revising or blatantly challenging the scripts behind the earlier *performances*? In American literature I see this moment around the turn of the 19th century, somewhere between 1890 and 1910. This is the time when the female *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* became widespread and ideas of the new came to be implemented by literary modernism across the whole spectrum. This is the moment when especially women writers drew attention to the fact that the subject in Western thought, or the human being, was gendered male. Moreover, other binary oppositions such as heterosexual/homosexual and white/black came to be added to the binary of gender, with each identity category slowly being understood as process, as something coming about. The women writers of the late 19th and early-mid 20th century—Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Willa Cather, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Nella Larsen, Jesse Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, Carson McCullers among them—all wrote about women who asserted themselves in the subject position. They gave entitlement to their women characters to subjecthood: to

speak, see, act, and desire. Indeed, at the beginning of the 20th century women writers re-appropriated speech, vision, action, and desire from men, and assigned feminine gender to each. Concomitantly, while the object woman's identity was shown as fixed and monolithic (the performed social script being fixed and unchanging), the subject woman came to have multiple selves, depending on the nature of each performative. This performative process involved an undermining of normative scripts of genders and resulted in ways of thinking never thought before, as new constitutive rules were introduced that created new forms of behavior.

Radical instances of performative identity reveal a non-compliance between the performative and its presupposed context. Because the binary logic of patriarchy is being undone in these texts, gender formations are not intelligible within the heterosexual matrix. Such gender constructions are often playful and imaginative, departing from familiar intelligible constructions. They belong to the realm of fantasy in the sense Butler describes fantasy as the "constitutive outside" of the real.

Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home. (*Undoing* 29)

Viewed from another perspective, such new gender formations, unintelligible in the heterosexual matrix, show new ways of loving, of being gendered, of being a man or a woman, as well as being human. Such new textual constructions go parallel with the political struggles, mentioned by Butler, of culturally marginalized groups "struggling *to be conceived as persons*" (*Undoing* 32; italics in original).

As I mentioned earlier, this non-compliance is most characteristic of modernist women writers, who seem to resist both biological and social determinism in revising the passive female subject produced by both (see Diana Fuss, *Essentially* 6). Aware of their performative constitution, women decide to adopt an agency for renewing the discourse that constituted women. And the only way for woman to claim agency is, as Butler has emphatically claimed, by putting woman in the subject position ("Contingent" 46), thereby realizing variations on the repetitions (*Gender Trouble* 145). Agency, though a contested term in poststructuralist theories, will appear in texts of culturally imperialized groups, who now demand the speaking-seeing-acting position. They will conform to both requirements of agency as defined by Kieran O'Halloran in that they will adopt causality (will do something that will result in a change in the patient) and will become their own energy sources (122). As agents and authors of their own life-scripts now, they will revise the presuppositions that previously shaped their

performances. By revising the presuppositions, new identities can be fantasized and then performed in ways other than the presuppositions would suggest. Indeed, with the subject reworking the “very discursive processes by which it is worked,” as Butler puts it, “‘agency’ is to be found in the possibilities of resignification opened up by discourse” (“Careful” 135).

Predictable as it may be to cite women writers as examples of performative subjectivity constructions, I think there are good reasons for this. The construction of woman as subject or object depends on the narrative position. With some rare exceptions (such as Hester Prynne in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, for example), women characters did not take center stage in (American) literature until the late 19th century in works of either male or female authors. Moreover, once (self-)constructed as subjects, the postmodern contention that subjective agency is dead did not work for women: the female subject, as Nancy K. Miller has demonstrated, has a structurally different relationship to power, authority, desire, and textuality, based on their different historical relation to identity.

Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men have had, women have not . . . felt burdened by too much Self, Ego, Cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, and hence decentered, “disoriginated,” deinstitutionalized, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, is structurally different. (“Changing” 106).

Women seem to have first-hand knowledge of “the condition of dispersal and fragmentation that Barthes valorizes,” Miller insists (109), and may have a different relationship to the fantasies of wholeness than men. Also, as Butler has shown, women, ever forced into the discursive situation of the other, may never have experienced the self as a coherent and unitary subject (“Contingent” 47). Therefore, women writers may legitimately want to revise this discourse through, among others, the revision of cultural presuppositions. But women writers have resisted presuppositions in other ways too, for example by refusing or revising categories, or the general categorization, aggressively donned on them by social norms constructing them predominantly in love-and-marriage plots.

Of course, some male writers have also successfully undermined the love-and-marriage plot: Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick locate the climax of the sexual plot of the Victorian novel in the moment when the failure and hypocrisy of the patriarchal marriage are revealed, and when this revelation becomes the secret bond between women (or a man and a woman).

[W]hen the fact of a marriage’s unhappiness ceases to be a pseudosecret or an open secret, and becomes a bond of mutuality with someone outside the marriage; when a woman says or intimates something about ‘her marriage’ to a friend or lover that she

would not say to her husband. These tend to be the most wracking and epistemologically the “biggest” moments of the marriage novel. Such a text, then, also constitutes an exploration of the possible grounds and performative potential of refusals, fractures, warping of the proscenium of marital witness. (“Introduction” 12)

Resisting controlling ideologies, subjectivities are performed against the background of presuppositions of biological and social determinism, the rigid binarism of gender and sexuality and the concurrent oppression of women. The expectations, of which presuppositions are parts, are flouted; the presupposition itself is destabilized, while identities are shown as fluid, unstable, transgressive. The readers are forced to give up their frame assumptions, or assumptions that pre-exist the texts.

Non-patriarchal narrative: Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*

The originality of *Three Lives* seems to derive from what and how the characters perceive. “Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition,” runs Stein’s well-known slogan in “Composition as Explanation” (513). Owing much to William James’s idea of getting into people’s consciousness, she performed, in Mina Loy’s words, the “aesthetic analysis of the habits of consciousness” (243). In fact, Stein does not only create the verbal replica of her characters’ consciousness but also of the process of composition. The “fine new kind of realism” that William James praised in *Three Lives* (qtd in Gallup 50) results, as Stein put it in her 1946 “Transatlantic Interview,” “not solely [from] the realism of characters but the realism of the composition” (*Primer* 16). The principle of this composition, then, boils down to experiencing without constantly “making sense”; allowing for some experience of Keats’s negative capability, or life’s way of happening, without selection, emphasis, hierarchies, or privileging—in other words, experiencing experience itself. Stein was, as she put it, “obsessed” with this principle of composition that she had learned from Cézanne: that “in composition one thing was as important as another thing” (*Primer* 15).

While the one-point perspective of realistic writing is rejected, elaborate attempts are made, through variation and repetition, to look at objects from several angles at once—just as if one’s consciousness might be imagined to hold these several shifting perspectives simultaneously. This is what Stein emphasizes in her essay on Picasso:

Really most of the time one sees only a feature of a person with whom one really is, the other features are covered by a hat, by the light, by clothes for sport and everybody is accustomed to complete the whole entirely from their knowledge, but Picasso when he saw an eye the other one did not exist for him and only the one he saw did exist for him. (*Picasso* 15)

Although rejecting the notion of mimesis in the traditional realistic sense, Stein achieves what Stephen Fredman calls “the impossible goal of total mimesis” (101), “the creation of artistic experience analogous to the rigors of living,” where the writer “endeavors to present an artistic experience that corresponds to the multiphasic, incomplete, discontinuous experience of life” (101).

Stein saw the story of Melanctha as the “quintessence” of this new kind of “anti-patriarchal” composition (*Primer* 15). Indeed, the second story of *Three Lives* goes probably the furthest in getting into a character’s consciousness and presenting a non-selective attention in a non-selective way. Melanctha’s story is one of the first manifestations of a woman’s text both in terms of the what and the how of its composition.

All the chapters of *Three Lives* are unusual in the sense that they do not portray women as participants in institutionalized heterosexuality, in love-and-marriage plots naturalized by romantic and realist fiction. The love-and-marriage plot does seem to be operative here, though, embedded in the context as a pre-narrative, a narrative preceding the characters. In *Three Lives* however, the characters revise and re-write these scripts. Although they have various relationships, these three servant girls—the German Anna, the black Melanctha, and the German Lena—are autonomous beings, who do not need men to give meanings to their lives. Their stories do not inform a heterosexual love plot, but are about women subjects who think and desire. Desire is indeed an important element of subjectivity, having taken over, Braidotti suggests, the thought-based cogito: the “old cogito,” she claims, has been replaced by the slogan *desidero ergo sum*, encompassing a number of other faculties such as “affectivity, desire and the imagination” (“Identity, Subjectivity” 160). Especially Melanctha emerges as a desirer and a quester (the text uses the word “seeker”), a role in literature previously reserved for men only. Melanctha is, then, the heroine of a female *Bildung*, and has a character as complex and changing as her male predecessors, among them Werther, Julien Sorel, or Raskolnikov.

“Melanctha Herbert was a graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive negress” (82), Stein writes early on, contrasting Melanctha to her more “feminine” friend, Rose, whose laughter “was just ordinary, any sort of woman laughter” (82), and who “had lately married Sam Johnson a decent honest kindly fellow” (82). The life of the autonomous quester is by definition more difficult and complicated than that of a more traditionally “feminine” woman.

Melantha Herbert had not made her life all simple like Rose Johnson. Melantha had not found it easy with herself to make her wants and what she had, agree.

Melantha Herbert was always losing what she had in wanting all the things she saw. Melantha was always being left when she was not leaving others.

Melantha Herbert always loved too hard and much too often. She was always full with mystery and subtle movements and denials and vague distrusts and complicated disillusiones. Then Melantha would be sudden and impulsive and unbounded in some faith, and then she would suffer and be strong in her repression. (86)

The reader knows next to nothing about Melantha's physical appearance; her identity is in no sense determined by the preparation of her body for heterosexual romance. In short, she is not constituted by man's desire. Stein describes her in a way in which mostly only men are described: as a wanderer and as a person having desires and pursuits. As such, Melantha's character is contrary to the standards of "true womanhood" still current at the turn of the century: she has various dangerous "longings," while at the same time she likes to occupy open spaces as opposed to the "separate sphere" of interior, bounded spaces (on true womanhood, see Barbara Welter; on separate spheres, see Linda K. Kerber). Had we not been informed of Melantha's gender, we would probably assume that a man was being portrayed here. The less important but more obvious reason for this probable misperception is that her character traits are such as are traditionally used to represent some male "essence": that she is bold and intelligent, "complex" and "desiring" (83), that she "had not loved herself in childhood" (87), that she "had always had a break neck courage" (87), that "it was only men that for Melantha held anything there was of knowledge and power" (93), or that she would "do . . . things that had much danger" (99). More significantly, our assumption about the person here described being a man would be based on our reading experience gained in a patriarchal, heterocentrist, and often misogynist culture: it is this experience—prompting the knowledge that such characteristics are emphasized in connection with men only—that creates our expectation about the character as gendered male in this text. Stein deflates our expectations by denaturalizing the social constructions of male and female identity, by taking away its "naturalness" as produced in patriarchy.

This composition can be considered non-patriarchal for several reasons. First, on the level of representation, the unfolding life stories do not comply with the rules of patriarchy. Stein unlocks her characters from the context of love-and-marriage plots: the women are not portrayed as participating in the masculine/feminine binary. Second, with the absence of plot linearity, a single storyteller, well-motivated characters, and closure, as well as its playful destabilizing of the signifier/signified relationship and "deliberately undermining certitude," as Peter Quartermain puts it (24), Stein's narrative technique can be

considered non-patriarchal (about women experimentalists challenging elements of patriarchal writing, see Friedman and Fuchs). Third, influenced, as Lisa Ruddick has convincingly argued (12 ff), by William James's distinction between "selected attention" and "wandering attention," the non-patriarchal "wandering" way of knowing is elevated in this woman's text. Indeed, Stein casts a particular part to the only man in "Melanctha," Jeff Campbell, who has his understanding blocked by thinking:

And Jeff tried to begin again with his thinking, and he could not make it come clear to himself, with all his thinking, and he felt everything all thick and heavy and bad, now inside him, everything that he could not understand right, with all the hard work he made, with his thinking. (169)

Jeff is constantly feeling in words, or thinking before feeling, therefore he is unable to perceive his own feelings. "You always wanting to have it all clear out in words always, what everybody is always feeling," Melanctha tells him (170). Jeff's language pre-selects what he will experience; for him, cognition precedes and limits perception, and his language habits control his experience of the world. Melanctha, on the other hand, gives up any desire to dominate what comes to her; instead, always in pursuit of the unfamiliar as unfamiliar, she is the non-patriarchal quester without any real object. (Actually, I do not see a significant difference between the women in quest of an indefinite object and the male quester after an intangible, abstract object such as the grail, the epitome of the quested object, which is really a catachresis, a metaphor without a referent.) "[S]he did not really know what it was that really held her" (92–93). "Melanctha did not know what it was that she so badly desired" (93). Her desire is not to master her experience, but to be immersed wandering in its darkness and excitement. Language is no mediator in this quest; rather, Stein shows ways of "unmastering" language and experience. As Charles Bernstein puts it, "[t]o be immersed in a language without the obsession to dominate it, conquer, take personal (even 'subjective') possession of it, as if it were property: perhaps this is virtualizing space of the modernist composition" (146–147). "Unmastering," then, seems to be an appropriate term in this context since it captures both Stein's relationship to language and her non-patriarchal representation of female subjectivity: that which, through an insistence of uncontrolled and unselected attention, playfully destabilizes the binarisms of gender and sexuality. This text is a major milestone of Stein's search for a new language through which, Luce Irigaray claims in another context, the feminine, being several, can speak to itself (*This Sex*).

Melanctha's identity is performatively constructed against a background of contrary expectations. The original presupposition concerns the identity of the "true woman" (identity presupposed): 'women are parts of love-and-marriage plots; such »feminine« women marry »decent honest kindly fellows« like Sam

Johnson; heterosexuality makes woman.' Stein performatively revises these frame assumptions, unlocking gender from sexuality. Her revised frame assumption goes as: 'not all women are parts of love-and-marriage plots; it is not necessary that heterosexuality make a woman and the category of heterosexuality override gender.'

Stein is at her most innovative here: dislodging her character from a patriarchal context, she creates her new woman *without* recourse to any iterable model of gender. She only evokes the narrative pre-text of the love-and-marriage plot so that she can disregard it and overwrite it. She creates a woman whose sole reference is she herself in the act of referring. The force of her *performative* destabilizes the presupposition, proving it to be mutable and revisable.

Androgyny as *démeublé*: Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*

Willa Cather provides a different example for constructing woman as subject. Almost all of her novels are unusual with respect to the absence of the love-and-marriage plot (the only exception being the little known first novel *Alexander's Bridge*). In two of her novels especially, Cather provides clear alternatives to the familiar drama of heterosexual love, *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *My Ántonia* (1918). In the first Cather's job was easier: the genre of the *Künstlerroman* needed to be re-gendered for Thea Kronborg, the passionate and determined opera singer; here the writer's job was to have her subordinate her heterosexual desire to music. In addition, Cather introduced several non-sexualized friendships for Thea, thereby creating situations where Thea and the men instrumental in various ways in building her career—a role previously reserved for the female helpmeet or Muse in the male *Künstlerroman*—could figure in reciprocal relationships. Indeed, the physician Dr. Archie, the piano teacher Professor Wunsch, the railroad man Ray Kennedy, the pianist Andor Harsanyi, and even the Chicago voice teacher Madison Bowers seem to spark a balance in giving and receiving: ultimately, they manage to make the others' lives more meaningful.

No such obvious replacements would have been sufficient in *My Ántonia*. Here the male narrator and the female protagonist are representatives of some shared androgynous ideal. Jim and Ántonia are childhood friends on the Nebraska frontier; here, away from a society that constructs gender, they can afford to be neither, but have an androgynous self that precedes, as it were, this gendering. The frontier provides the setting for Cather's "*démeublé*" ideal, to use her word from her 1936 essay, "The Novel *Démeublé*," in which she discusses leaving "the scene bare for the play of emotions, great and little" (287). This is the "underfurnished" world *par excellence*, which gives rooms to androgyny, unspecified or "underfurnished" gender. Here "[t]here was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made" (*My Ántonia* 7).

Unlike in traditional texts relating the myth of origin of the frontier, here the prairie obliterates the men rather than the women: *Ántonia's* father commits suicide, while Jim first feels “erased, blotted out” (8), “dissolved into something complete and great” (*My Ántonia*.14), and then leaves for the city. Although it is Jim’s text, *Ántonia* does not get to be erased from it, but, against this background of bare material substance, and through the “process of simplification” described in the essay (286), she is given elemental presence. It is the androgynous woman who gets to be inscribed upon the blank page of the frontier. Her work, her passion for wide spaces, her tirelessness in “serving generous emotions” (*My Ántonia* 227), and her commitment to survival: these are the components of her androgynous identity that make her one with the land—help her feel at home as well as leave her mark here. Because her androgynous identity is “unfurnished” by the stylizations of gender, her premature aging, for example, seems unimportant to Jim.

I was thinking, as I watched her, how little it mattered—about her teeth, for instance. I know so many women who have kept all the things she has lost, but whose inner glow has faded. Whatever else was gone, *Ántonia* had not lost the fire of life. Her skin, so brown and hardened, had not that look of flabbiness, as if the sap beneath it had been secretly drawn away. (216)

For Jim, returning after several decades, *Ántonia* emerges as the most solid and elemental thing in life.

Ántonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade—that grew stronger with time. . . . She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. I had not been mistaken. She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one’s breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. (226–227)

Always remaining outside the heterosexual love plot, Cather celebrates the deep attachment of Jim and *Ántonia*, “the precious, the incommunicable past” (238), without nostalgia and sentimentalism because this Eden has not been lost, but rather inscribed upon the land as *Ántonia*: she appears for Jim as subject leaving images in the mind and firing the imagination by performing a new kind of womanhood which rests on revised presuppositions. Indeed, while the original frame assumption might be said to read as ‘the proper place for women is the home (in closed spaces); women are parts of love-and-marriage-plots; women are ornamental objects,’ the assumption revised by Cather’s performative will say, ‘women are at home in open spaces; they are subjects in their own life-stories, which they control; women are human beings too, whose bodies are thus allowed to resist the controlling regimes of beautification.’

Gender and sexual transgressions: Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

Djuna Barnes still remains one of the enigmatic figures of female modernism. In Barnes's most important novel, *Nightwood* (1936), critics have praised the "fantastical quality of her imagination" (Frank 26), its "quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy" (Eliot, xvi), its "radical narrative achievement" (Gerstenberger 129), and her "private and highly peculiar writing" in "eccentric, almost inverted forms" (Benstock 242). The protagonist Robin Vote has remained a mesmerizing mystery. She is one of those people "who must get permission to live" (117); at the same time, she is "beast turning human" (37), with "mysterious and shocking blue" eyes (37), having an "iris of the wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye" (37). A "tall girl with the body of a boy" (46), she is one of the memorable androgynes in modernist fiction: both quester and desired other, autonomous yet produced in sexual relationships, she transgresses whatever boundaries she encounters. As woman quester, seeker, and wanderer, she is after selfhood and knowledge that lie beyond the bounds of patriarchy; as the desired other, however, she fulfills the role cast for women in patriarchy.

All the characters of the novel transgress, in one way or another, familiar social categories and boundaries, and resist the homogenizing imperative of society. Felix, the son of the Italian Jewish Guido and the Viennese Hedvig, left with the legacy of a "remorseless homage to nobility" (2), the "wandering Jew" (7), who is always "tailored in part for the evening and in part for the day" (8) and develops an attraction for the "emotional spiral of the circus" (12), "knowing well that skill is never so amazing as when it seems inappropriate" (11). Dr. Matthew O'Connor, the Irish gynecologist, is the novel's other androgyne, who likes to dress up in women's clothes in order "to lie beside himself" (80); it is him that Felix comes to ask about Robin, the night, pain, and passion. Nora Flood, the "early Christian" (50), seems a transgressor in her dreams only, when she likes to visit the "chamber" of her Grandmother, who used to "dress as a man, wearing a billycock and a corked mustache" (63). Finally, there is Jenny Petherbridge, the "looter" (98) and "'squatter' by instinct," who "appropriated the most passionate love that she knew, Nora's for Robin" (68).

The narrative of this "non-temporal novel" (Martin 105) seems also to resist forms of realistic fiction, especially plot linearity. Rather, the eight chapters are, as Joseph Frank aptly puts it, "like searchlights probing the darkness each from a different direction, yet ultimately illuminating the same entanglement of the human spirit" (31–32). Other critics compare the structure to an "elegantly constructed maze" and identify the text as the "verbal facsimile of an androgyne" (Stephen-Paul Martin 106). The reader's first encounter with Robin happens during a doctor's visit: "in white flannel trousers" and "in a moment of threatened consciousness . . . lay the young woman, heavy and disheveled" (34).

The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one sensed a frame, broad, porous, and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface. About her head there was an effluence as of phosphorous glowing about the circumference of a body of water—as if her life lay through her in ungainly luminous deteriorations—the troubling structure of the born *somnambule*, who lives in two worlds—meet of child and desperado. (34–35)

She is indeed an unusual being: neither human nor beast really, she exhibits a plant-like existence and occupies a very peculiar dimension of consciousness. Being and not being at the same time, conscious and unconscious, in the elements of light, water, and earth, in the room as well as the jungle, predator as well as victim, Robin appears in all her contradictions. Not one cell of her body can be labeled as “feminine,” yet Felix, who accompanies the doctor, immediately falls in love with her because he recognizes her as a complete and sovereign being. Although Robin’s gender identity is incidental—or, one could say, her androgyny just happens to be masqueraded feminine—the desire of Felix is heterosexualized in such a way that its object is not a person with a socially produced gender but a part of plant, animal, and androgynous-human nature.

She closed her eyes, and Felix, who had been looking into them intently because of their mysterious and shocking blue, found himself seeing them still faintly clear and timeless behind the lids—the long unqualified range in the iris of the wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye.

The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a “picture” forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is a beast turning human. Such a person’s every moment will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory. (37)

Robin is a radically subversive creature, who refuses to re-perform existing scripts, but experiments instead with new identities that do not even echo old ones. Her subjectivity is not constructed by a heterosexual romance plot, rather by the author’s revision of our culture’s presuppositions concerning the stability of identity. The old presupposition, ‘women are feminine; they are objects of men’s desire; their femininity and desirability result from having unambiguous biological and social gender markers,’ is performatively revised by the new presupposition, ‘women can be both subjects and objects, desire by both men and women; female subjecthood does not correspond to unambiguous biological and social markers.’ While treated as a subject, she is being desired by just about all characters in the novel, thereby, she actually transcends all binarisms of gender and sexuality, subjecthood and objecthood. What Barnes seems to suggest is that gender identity has nothing to do with desire or eroticism; desire, indeed, transcends the categories of sex and gender. This thesis is supported by several

stories of the doctor, among them the one about the sailor falling in love with the French girl without legs—only because of the way the sun was shining over her back.

. . . which reminds me of Mademoiselle Basquette, who was damned from the waist down, a girl without legs, built like a medieval abuse. She used to wheel herself through the Pyrenees on a board. What there was of her was beautiful in a cheap traditional sort of way, the face that one sees on people who come to a racial, not a personal, amazement. . . . a sailor saw her one day and fell in love with her. She was going uphill and the sun was shining all over her back. . . . So he snatched her up, board and all, and took her away and had his will. . . . (26)

In the memorable final scene of the novel *Robin*, “in her boy’s trousers” (169), tames Nora’s dog by going down “on all fours, dragging her knees” and starting to bark. She appears again as the ultimate transgressor, who cuts through genders and even species, deconstructing a whole epistemology based on the rigid binarisms of human/animal, presence/absence, day/night, or life/death.

Ungendered and multisexual selfhood: H.D., *HERmione*

H.D.’s *HERmione*, written in 1927 but not published until 1981, is an intriguing novel, where the author probably went furthest among the experimentalist—the “sapphic expatriate set” (Jay 76)—in portraying a woman’s selfhood outside the bounds of both the heterosexual and the homosexual matrix. The story is highly autobiographical, presenting the two failed relationships of the young Hermione (Her) Gart of Pennsylvania: both the romance with the bohemian poet George Lowndes and the “sister-love” between Her and Fayne Rabb end in betrayals. Centered on the dichotomy of “Heterosexual love vs. Quest,” as DuPlessis pointedly claims in *The Pink Guitar* (33), the novel presents a protagonist who struggles, yet is unable to reconcile the two plots and proposes, as DuPlessis puts it elsewhere, a “bisexual love plot in place of the normative nineteenth-century pattern” (*Writing* 71). DuPlessis points out another revision of the traditional love plot: its “open ending in which the quest takes precedence” (71). This open-ended narrative allows for the continuation of the love between the two women. By the end, Her will find her autonomous self independent of either of these two relationships, and her selfhood will become scripted on the virginal snow.

As a young girl Hermione sees herself—in a recognition described as “dementia”—as an alien body within.

Her Gart went round in circles. “I am Her,” she said to herself; she repeated, “Her, Her, Her.” Her Gart tried to hold on to something; drowning she grasped, she caught at a smooth surface, her fingers slipped, she cried in her dementia, “I am Her, Her, Her.” (3)

Here at the beginning, however, she does not read her difference as self and knowledge yet, but as failure: “Hermione Gart could not then know that her precise reflection, her entire failure to conform to expectations was perhaps some subtle form of courage” (4).

Her “failure to conform” and to be regular is played out in the pun H.D. exploits all through, but especially in the first half of the novel. “Her” is at once grammatical subject and object: as homonym (or short version) of a subject’s proper name (HERmione) and the accusative/dative declension form of the third person personal pronoun, her name folds, as it were, in itself selfhood as both subject and object. However, with the pronoun constantly distanced and alienated into proper name, the identity of the accusative/dative and subjective forms defamiliarizes reference. Hermione experiences herself, as Shari Benstock puts it, as a “grammatical error,” recognizing in herself “a multiplicity of selves that language cannot simultaneously name” (337).

Neither of Hermione’s selves seems ever to conform to the norms of gender. She is never really “feminine” for George: “You never manage to look decently like other people. You look like a Greek goddess or a coal scuttle,” he tells her (64). In this heterosexual relationship, described as childishness and immaturity—“She wanted George as a child wants a doll, whose other dolls are broken. She wanted George as a little girl wants to put her hair up or to wear long skirts” (63)—her self is being obliterated:

Kisses forced her into soft moss. Her head lay marble weight in cushion of forest moss. Kisses obliterated trees, smudged out circles and concentric circle and the half-circle that was the arch . . . of a beach branch sweeping downward. The kisses of George smudged out her clear geometric thought. (73)

Her subjectivity emerges out of her identification with the trees of her home state, Pennsylvania, and its whole landscape. But this identification is based primarily on her self-perception as trace, map, or script—as readable as the landscape.

The woods parted to show a space of lawn, running level with branches that, in early summer, were white with flower. Dogwood blossom. Pennsylvania. Names are in people, people are in names. Sylvania. I was born here. People ought to think before they call a place Sylvania.

Pennsylvania. I am part of Sylvania. Trees. Trees. Trees. Dogwood, liriodendron with its green-yellow tulip blossoms. Trees are in people. People are in trees. Pennsylvania. (5)

George, however, does not prove to be the right man for a tree-woman (even though, incidentally, Pound memorialized this tree-woman in a major poem, “A Tree”). He “would never make a pear tree burst into blossom” (171), since he only desires a selfless Hermione, a kind of a generically gendered “Her” rather

than this particular person: “He wanted Her, but he wanted a Her that he called decorative” (172). In this relationship conforming to the norms of “romantic thralldom” (see DuPlessis 66), the man fails to see the multiplicity and fluidity of Hermione’s selfhood, or understand that the indeterminacy and instability of her gendering does in no way go counter to her own desire to assert her selfhood.

However appealing at first, the “concentric intimacy” (164) of Her Gart and Fayne Rabb also proves to be a threat to Her’s selfhood. At the end she frees herself from this bond too, only to find that she can now start to write her own text: “Her feet were pencils tracing a path through a forest” (223). Folding now, both in language and in her script on the snow, subject and object in an act of creativity, she starts to write her own text: “Now the creator was Her’s feet, narrow black crayon across the winter whiteness” (223).

The healed Hermione becomes the swift Hermes: “Feet pulsed forward, drove Her homeward, her feet were winged with the winged god’s sandal. Everything will be right” (234). Hermione attains autonomous selfhood in the form of Hermes, the winged and bisexual youth who always suggests, as Michel Foucault puts it, “hermaphroditism of the soul” (43). Hermaphroditos contains, we know from Carl Kerényi, “Hermes and Aphrodite rolled into one” (54), and exists “still in a completely undifferentiated state” (55). The nymph-like Hermione in H.D.’s narrative is similar to Hermaphroditos in both respects. For one, she contains multiple selves that can interact (auto)erotically: she will, as she decides at the end of the novel, marry herself, using her trousseau money, the money her grandmother had left for her marriage, for herself, saying, “this will be my marriage” (234). She will perform what as a strong performative her name (Hermione as Her + Me = One³) forecasts: that “Her” and “Me” become “One.” Two, she remains “undifferentiated” in her androgyny and multiple sexuality—only to script her autosocial self onto the snow. In other words, only when she comes out of herself as the winged hermaphrodite Hermes, that is, when she is ungendered and sexually undifferentiated, does she become text.

H.D.’s innovative *performative* targets the issue of the self’s multiplicity. Her performs acts of writing herself into being as she becomes both writer and text, of the page and of the snow. H.D. attacks the old presupposition that ‘women have single and stable selves; female sexuality is single; women without male partners are alone and incomplete,’ and revises it into ‘women have multiple and changing selves; female sexuality is multiple; single women are also complete beings.’ In presenting Her as a person with a wholeness onto herself, H.D. subverts the meaning of singleness, bringing it closer to the idea of creative celibacy.

³ I owe this insight to my student, Eszter Urbányi.

**The situational relativity of gender:
Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe***

Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* (1943) presents a complex case of gender performativity: here gender appears as fluid and mutable, multiple and transgressive, and in each case it is sexually negotiated, thereby dependent on the particular relationship and situation in which it is performed. Gender is only evoked here, as a relative term, as only one construction interlocking with, and dependent upon, projections of sexuality and power. This piece of short fiction serves as a laboratory for the hierarchical structure of heterosexuality where, as Catharine McKinnon observes, “[g]ender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women” (*Feminism Unmodified* 7). Formed, in each case, intersectionally out of a space of ambivalence which opens up differently in the three nexus relationships, gender has only vague suggestions of femininity and masculinity. Assigning feminine traits to the desired object and masculine traits to the desiring subject is really just an easy translation of the object-subject dynamics and of the perception of relationships between unequal partners. With the three main players taking different gender and sexual positions in each of the three combinations, both gender and sexuality emerge as relative terms, critiquing gender and sexual essentialisms.

The story centers on Miss Amelia Evans, a peculiar woman in her thirties, who—by her mere presence and then later by running a cafe in the small Southern town—brings life to the dreary place. She is a “manly” woman, brought up as a boy by her father, inheriting his wealth too. She is a hard worker, skilled in farming, carpentering, and other jobs fit for men; she operates a still in the swamp and serves liquor from her own house to men (the only people she associates with) in the evenings. Defying all biological and social norms of womanhood, she is built like a man, “somewhat queer of face” (206), with a height “not natural for a woman,” and is dressed in overalls and gum boots.

She was a dark, tall woman, with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cut short and brushed back from the forehead, and there was about her sunburned face a tense, haggard quality. She might have been a handsome woman is, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed. (198)

Not only does she not have a woman's looks in terms of her body and way of dressing, but even when she puts on a dress, as she does on Sundays, “that hung on her in a most peculiar fashion” (214). In other words, hers is not a “docile body,” in the Foucauldian sense (*Discipline* 138), which the techniques of gender stylization could convert; in her case, Virginia Woolf's contention about dresses wearing us (*Orlando* 171) seems to be refuted. (Unlike another “manly woman,” March in D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox*, a comparable story of shifting gender and sexual identities, who at one point starts wearing a green silk dress, and shocks

her lover Henry by her newly performed femininity.) Amelia has habits that are “manly” too, like tightening her first every now and then, especially after meals, to feel her muscles; or sitting with both elbows on the table and knees spread wide apart. Her manliness shows especially in the lack of interest in men: she “cared nothing for the love men” (198). A lonesome person, she lives by herself most of her life, except for the time of her “queer marriage” at the age of nineteen to the dandy of the town, Marvin Macy. But this too only lasted for ten days and, as we learn later, does not get consummated. Her life changes drastically, however, with the arrival of Lymon Willis, her second cousin: Cousin Lymon, a hunchback only half Miss Amelia’s height, is taken in by her, to be treated with fostering devotion by the woman. Their attachment seems complete already the first night: walking up the staircase, the odd couple throw “one great, twisted shadow” on the wall behind them (204).

This is the first relationship that gets heterosexualized in the story. More and more, the woman takes the place of the wooing (male) lover: in her eyes “fastened lonesomely on the hunchback,” there is a mixture of “pain, perplexity, and uncertain joy” in her expression, while her hands are often sweating (213). Their respective masculinization and feminization affect even their supposedly gendered manners of speech: while Amelia likes to talk about interminable, abstract subjects like “the stars, the reason why Negroes are black, the best treatment for cancer,” Lyman is a “great chatterer,” who likes to “interrupt her suddenly to pick up, magpie fashion,” some concrete, unimportant detail (224). Soon enough, he becomes an accomplished performer of (Southern) womanhood. Not only is he feminized in the position of the kept woman, but gets spoilt “to a point beyond reason” (214) by being presented with a piano, a car, and all kinds of other treats. In order to satisfy his “passionate delight in spectacles” (215), she takes him to picture-shows, fairs, and cockfights—wherever his whim demands. To top it all, he comes to perfect a staple instance of Southern womanhood, the art of descending the staircase; each night he “came down the stairs with the air of one who has a grand opinion of himself” (214). Having feminized himself into a spectacle, an object of the gaze, he will perform the role of the Southern belle, who graciously grants his (her?) presence to the townspeople.

Yet the heterosexualization of their relationship does not come about through simple gender reversal. Indeed, Amelia will be the lover subject doing the pursuing and Cousin Lyman will be the beloved object being pursued. Lyman’s feminization and Amelia’s masculinization seem to go counter to their respective empowerment and disempowerment: it is Lyman the beloved who controls this relationship. Of course, given the fact that gender reversal is necessary in both cases for this “heterosexual” game, heterosexuality is portrayed as an attachment of two “inverts.” This operation, as Clare Whatling has demonstrated, is not devoid of its homosexual associations (246–247); here homosexuality is evoked by the suggestion of a butch-femme performance, itself

a heterosexual conceptualization of gay relationships, on the part of Amelia and Lyman, respectively.

The truth is that gender is wholly irrelevant in the attachments evolving throughout McCullers' story. "Let it be added here," the narrator contends in the middle of a somewhat abstract discussion of love, "that this lover about whom we speak need not necessarily be a young man saving for a wedding ring—this lover can be man, woman, child, or indeed any human creature on this earth" (216). Indeed, while Amelia is positioned as the male lover in her relationship with Lyman, in her other relationship, the one with Marvin Macy, she takes the woman's object position: here she is the one desired and pursued by the man, who sees her as "[t]hat solitary, gangling, queer-eyed girl" (217) from whom he wants nothing but love. Here it is Macy who showers her with presents, "the whole of his worldly goods" (221) finally, but there is no way of winning her love. Unaware of the heterosexual contract of patriarchy demanding that the woman give in to pursuing man who has paid her, Amelia accepts his property. Refusing the object position, Miss Amelia throws him out. Macy returns years later to the house finding the hunchback cousin there too, with whom they really hit it off. Now Cousin Lyman becomes the wooing male lover, showering Macy with all kinds of favors. But Lyman's subjectivity comes primarily from his exercise of language: he talks himself into being, first into being noticed and loved, later into being the lover himself. Threatened by getting marginalized by both Lyman and Macy, Amelia will stand up to the exploitative Macy (who has now moved in with them) and decides to have a boxing fight with Macy—"man to man"—so that she could finally take him on equal terms and beat him at a manly game. A practiced fighter, boxing with her punching bag every morning in her yard, Amelia is sure to win the fight. Lyman however, who feels now he must support Macy from the impassioned lover's position, intervenes by jumping on Amelia's back and clutching her neck. Having victory over the woman, the two men disappear forever, leaving behind an utterly lonely, desolate, half-crazy Amelia.

McCullers seems to wholly ignore the presuppositions underlying our culture that there are two genders, two sexes, and two sexualities, and that these are all fixed and unchanging. New presuppositions are introduced, which will emphasize that genders, sexes, and sexualities are created differently in individual relationships, independent of biology or of earlier positions and markers.

All the three main characters are depicted as if they were not living in a world where sexual and gender roles were dramatically polarized. Gender relativity allows new entities to come about against or in the absence of existing conventions: all three subjectivities are unfixed and mutable, they all challenge the ruling ideology, producing new figurations and involving transgressions and category extensions. Subjectivity is indeed a shifting-moving process, where

gender positions vary in terms of what is being inscribed by discourse; they change roles and positions over and over, as if identities were wholly fluid, protean, and relative. They could go any way in the individual combinations.

Obviously, both agency and adherence to existing scripts are complex issues. Agency gets to be reproduced each time, as gender follows different norms in each interaction, leaving different a measure of control and initiative to the performer. As genders are performed against existing conventions, the subject positions that go with agency change. Moreover, as no one single script is being reiterated, genders will become multiple, unpredictable and, most of all, unintelligible. Indeed, the gender of Miss Amelia as the wooing male lover, of Cousin Lyman as the Southern belle, or of Marvin Macy as the beloved of Cousin Lyman—these are constructions illegible from the perspective of sex/gender and male/female binaries. Such genders will be unfixated, changing, and relative because the norms themselves will be created for each instance (instead of being ideologically given). Neither character will appear as having a once and single subjectivity; rather, subjectivity markers will be shown as relative, depending on particular interactions and relationships.

* * *

In conclusion to these two chapters on gender *performances* and *performative* genders, I would like to reiterate the following points.

First, neither of them seems to argue in support of the essentialist position. Nowhere do these texts refer to any kind of female essence or principle; even those authors who present gender as performance pursue processes in which womanhood is created. Gender is shown as construct, social and linguistic.

Second, in spite of these similarities, the processes of naturalization are very different in the two types of texts. These processes involve presuppositions and other cultural assumptions, all parts of the social scripts replayed in *performances* and challenged in *performative* processes. Thus, the “natural” position for a woman is to be the other, the object, the body. This claim can be supported by reversing the gender assignment in the examples discussed. How would we “know” M. Pontellier, for example, if he was portrayed through a similarly detailed attention to dressing? Or, in what way would the author uncover the underside of masculinity if an old satire was portrayed through his undressing ceremony while taking out his glass eye and false teeth, or taking off his corset, garters, and wig? Since most probably M. Pontellier had his own morning dressing ritual, and men wear artificial body parts too, our surprise would not stem from the signified but from the signifier. Therefore, the conclusion is at hand. While the texts of James, Dreiser, Chopin, Wharton, as well as Faulkner, Williams, and O’Connor, Swift and Eliot naturalize the woman in the object position as fixed by ideology, the texts written by Stein, Barnes,

H.D., Cather, and McCullers de-naturalize womanhood by putting her into the subject position and stripping her of her being interpellated by the normative ideologies of patriarchy.

Third, gender is presented in a very different way in the *performance* texts written from the male narrative position and the *performative* texts written from the position of woman narrators. (As I tried to elaborate earlier, this gender distinction between the authors of *performance* and *performative* texts is somewhat incidental, more expressive of narrative position than anything else, and certainly not tied to anything given or determined in authorial vision.)

In the *performance* texts woman is being repeatedly constituted according to existing norms. While giving an impeccable *performance* of scripted norms, her position will be fixed in that of the otherized object, the complex of object-other-body. She will be the Other with relation to the man with selfhood and subjectivity; she will be constructed while experiencing the subjugation or subjection to norms otherwise producing male subjectivity. Moreover, she is constructed mostly by others, who will participate in the complex ritual and help her replay existing social scripts.

The new constructions of womanhood, on the other hand, will be *performative* creations based on very different assumptions. These texts, typically written from the narratorial position of the woman, will allow subjectivity and agency for the woman speaking and acting from the subject position. This new womanhood will follow different norms each time—in fact, the norms themselves will be created for each instance—and woman will not appear as having a once and single subjectivity. The deviation from and challenging of norms will break the uniformity that came about through the iterative replaying of the scripts in *performances*.

To apply Tolstoy's apt distinction between happy and unhappy families to gender *performances* and *performativities*, one could say that all "happy *performances*" of gender—those "felicitous" *performances* which replay the existing scripts, fixing gender constructions in the realm of the intelligible—are all alike. The "unhappy" versions of gender construction, on the other hand—where "new" genders are performed beyond the fixed binaries, and where performativity challenges the normative rules of gender in an "infelicitous" way—are each different: they differ in their infelicities.

