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Cultural Contexts and Masculinity Shifts

Florian-Andrei VLAD*

Abstract
Masculinity and men's studies, initially seen as one particular section of explorations of what it means to be a man, appeared as a secondary field, even if linked to Simone de Beauvoir's "the first sex." In de Beauvoir's feminist manifesto of the second wave, "woman" apparently had an identity of her own, but was only defined as being the absence, the "lack," the Other, against which man defined himself. The current essay examines the historicity of gender roles and the developing contexts in which perceptions of them and theories about them are largely defined by new contexts for which the activation of hegemonic or feminine masculinities, for example, is more than a reasonable choice. The last section engages with literary responses to masculinity as articulated by Lowell, Vonnegut, and Heller in a less-than-heroic age where significant masculinity shifts emerged in American fiction as well.

Keywords: *Hegemonic masculinity, female masculinity, patriarchy, men's studies, the masculine mystique*

The historicity of men's and masculinity studies

In gender studies, part of the interdisciplinary field of identity studies, with a focus on identity politics, men's studies is usually considered a complement to women's studies. Women's studies assumed primacy in the 1960s and went on to deconstruct gender and sex's prevailing cultural certainties. Men's studies and masculinities followed suit from the 1970s onward. If men's studies and masculinity studies as a whole, for the time being, is a complement to women's studies, where should one start its examination of specific identities, since feminism and women's studies is such a bewildering, puzzling and diverse constellation of attitudes, views and orientations?

Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (1998) may be considered a starting theoretical landmark for masculinity studies in this context, as her book highlighted new perspectives on masculine patterns of behavior and identity, indicating new paths in the development of what would be queer scholarship. In Halberstam's opinion, female masculinity is not an imitation of virility, but a vivid and dramatic performance of hybrid and minority genders.

* "Ovidius" University of Constanta, Romania. af_vlad@yahoo.com

The "female masculinist" scholar addresses a repertoire of female masculinities, centring on queer examples, from *tomboys, butches, femmes*, to *drag kings*. In her approach, masculinity is no longer hegemonic masculinity, but a multitude of masculinities. Apart from some "masculine masculinities," so to speak, many of these are… female masculinities. Halberstam is quick to state her goal, seeing how female masculinity sheds light on how masculinity is articulated as masculinity. She deals with how "female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing" (Halberstam 1998: 1).

One might think that Halberstam's idea of masculine femininities was inspired by such challenging cultural products as the previously aired (1995) TV series *Xena: Warrior Princess*, promoting a strong female protagonist, and creating both a wide fanship and a number of similar "female masculinist" narratives, including video games for internet-addicted young audiences, such as PlayStation Xena.

Alternatively, the roots of masculinity studies may be traced to other female writers as Gail Bederman in a book whose title reminds one of Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, while also examining the patriarchal dimension of "civilization" and its contribution to what would be called hegemonic masculinity. Bederman's critical response to hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy in general may be seen as starting from an undeclared challenge of her full name. If the surname *Bederman* clearly indicates a man's mark, *Gail* is a Hebrew name whose meaning is "my father rejoices." Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization* (1995) is an account of the emergence and development of a very influential identity narrative that the majority of Americans took for granted in the period from the end of the Civil War to World War I. This narrative claimed that identities, including sex and gender identities, are historically constructed and liable to change under specific circumstances. The aim was to promote an ideal, white masculine identity, the best expression of human progress. Set to illustrate the social Darwinism of the survival of the fittest, this ideal man was bound to control the world, foreshadowing the rise in Europe of the post-Nietzschean, Nazi *Übermensch*.

In the volume, Bederman acknowledges the contribution of four critical voices that challenged the myth of white male supremacy, some for the better – Ida B. Wells, the militant African-American journalist, who fought for racial justice, others for the worse. Among the latter voices, Bederman singles out the figure of Theodore Roosevelt, who, under the flag of *manhood, nation* and *civilization*, afraid of racial alterity as a challenge to what R. W. Connell will call *hegemonic masculinity*, viewed Native American men as demons, Blacks as inferior people, and the Japanese as dangerous rivals and competitors on the global stage. Another male voice following in Teddy Roosevelt's hegemonic

masculinist footsteps and mentioned in Bederman's volume belongs to G. Stanley Hall, another "patriarch." Hall, like T. Roosevelt, advocated the benefits of civilization "to assert the power of white manhood" (Bederman 1996: 217).

It comes as no surprise to many that even male authors have contributed to the rise and institutionalization of Men's Studies. One of the important voices is that of Michael S. Kimmel, who examines manhood over the whole history of America. Kimmel has been instrumental in the establishment of *Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities* in the examination of identities in Gender Studies, in the company of such theorists as Harry Brod, Bob Connell, Jeff Hearn, Joe Pleck and others.

Kimmel's second edition (2006) of *Manhood in America* provides an intellectual history of constructions of gender, while also acknowledging a significant realization of an important increase in a gradual shift in the field. This trend which, since the first edition, had become prevailing, was and still is from *anxiety* to *anger*, a shift that Kimmel goes on to describe in what he maps out as four distinct, historical developments of the masculinity identity narrative in America.

According to Kimmel, the construction of the masculinity identity stereotype of the "self-made man" – a phrase so much entrenched in hegemonic masculinist ideology that an alternative "self-made person" has never been used, at least to my knowledge - took place in the historical space of time from the Revolutionary War to the end of the Civil War. The various avatars of the Self-Made Man contributed to the construction of the two competing identities for the "soul" of American manhood, according to Kimmel.

Its first notable reflection in artistic identity narratives was, Kimmel notes, in a "very American" play premiered in New York in 1787. Denouements of artistic texts might bring conclusions, but this play's drift may be guessed from the very title: *The Contrast*. The play contrasts a "manly" American officer – the name of the character is… Manly – and an effeminate, anglophile, womanizing *fop* or *dandy* whose name, in the same *avant-la-lettre* Dickensian fashion, says it all: Dimple. Colonel Manly and Billy Dimple are rivals for the hand of the same American young woman, and it is not difficult to guess what the ideological message is, and what kind of masculine American identity is promoted, at the expense of an imagined, and imaginary, British identity.

This is just one more illustration of the fact that intersections of gender with other types of group identities are always possible and probable. Here, the *manly* vs. the *effeminate* is meant to contrast not only a very masculine individual and his opposite, but also American and British national identities, and even New World vs. Old World, distinctly geopolitical identities.

Masculinity and class at the time of the age of the American Revolution displayed other distinctions and identity oppositions apart from those noted by Kimmel in the shape of the opposite characters of Colonel Manly and Billy Dimple. In his essay on compromised manhood and provincialism that focuses on the 1740–1781 time span in (pre- and) Revolutionary America, starting from the lyrics of the "Yankee Doodle" song, Eran Zelnik singles out and deals with such "compromised" identity types as the Yankee, the Doodle, the Fop, and the Provincial. He goes on to examine how masculinity and social status were loose, yet key forms of cultural capital in power games played between centre and periphery and between gentlemen and commoners in pre-Revolutionary America, how these came to amount to more than gender and class distinctions, to an American vs. British identity power game:

> "Yankee Doodle" stood at the centre of a contested cultural conflict over manhood and class status in the North American British colonies leading up to and during the American Revolution. Although both sides over these years of colonial struggle between American insurgents and the British reveled in the song as they hurled rhetorical shafts at their foes, its references to compromised manhood proved more potent in the hands of Patriot rebels than in the hands of British troops and Loyalists (Zelnik 2018: 514).

Gender identity constructions are always relational, often oppositional. In Post-Revolutionary America, the masculinity contrast represented in… *The Contrast*, gradually took the form of the opposition between the tough Heroic Artisan and the Genteel Patriarch, with "exquisite tastes and manners and refined sensibilities" (Kimmel 1994: 13). But these constructions and oppositions would soon define the Heroic Artisan masculinity stereotype of the Self-Made Man against women, immigrants and black slaves as well.

This first stage in the construction of American Manhood may be contrasted to previous developments back in England (turning into Britain at the beginning of the 18th century). Alexandra Shepard undertakes her own outline of British masculinities extending over the previous centuries in her "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500–1700." In it, she surveys the transition from the first to the second masculinity identity evoked by her essay's title in terms of "a profound change in the meanings of manhood" (Shepard 2005: 281) within the above-mentioned historical interval. This goes on to show that masculinities had a tendency to change throughout history, not only during the revolutionary years of modern identity politics.

The second out of the four stages in the development of American manhood in Kimmel's narrative takes place in the Reconstruction, post-Civil War age, when America moved from an agrarian to an increasingly industrial nation. The self-made man, who was largely self-employed at the beginning of

the 19th century, tended to become the "organization man" in what Alan Trachtenberg called "the incorporation of America" in his eponymous volume. This second stage is called by Kimmel "the unmaking of the self-made man" (Kimmel 1994: 57-126), but, far from the disappearance of the hegemonic masculinity identity, it branches out into the competitive captain of industry, of which Carnegie, Morgan or Rockefeller became emblematic. These captains of industry were alternatively seen by less sympathetic people to their remarkable business in the Gilded Age as *robber barons*. In addition to the captain-of-industry variant of the self-made man, the spectrum of turn-of-the-century masculinities also featured the white-collar and the faceless crowd.

"Muscles, Money and the M-F Test" is the title of the first section of the next episode in the story of American manhood. The "M-F" in the title is what Hemingway used as abbreviation for his *Men Without Women* short story collection in a letter to Maxwell Perkins, and a short passage from it shows young Hemingway's fascination with rough and tough masculinity: "Want to call it Men Without Women [because] in all of these [stories], almost, the softening feminine influence through training, discipline, death or other causes [is] absent" (qtd. Kimmel 1994: 127).

There follows a description of postwar developments, in which Kimmel casts as significant characters the equivalent of the male types of what Trachtenberg had associated with the incorporation of America in the Gilded Age at the end of the 19th century, in the context of "the shift from one form of capitalism to another, from predominantly self-employed proprietors to corporations run by salaried managers" (Trachtenberg 2007: ix), from initial initiative to mindless subordination, thus undermining the myth of American individualism.

The employees in the rising American corporation of the age are the white-collar conformists, having forgotten about the rugged individualism of the self-made ancestors, choosing to follow the directions of the Power Elite, the famous group that C. W. Mills defines as the post-war ruling class in corporate America. One of the singular figures of the age of the postwar incorporation of America is that of Willy Loman, a figure that stands for, in Kimmel's opinion, "the most compelling portrait in literary history of the pathos of middle-class manhood and its consequences" (Kimmel 1994: 154).

Other authors, such as Cynthia S. Hamilton, had particularly focused on the period between the closing of the Western frontier at the end of the 19th century and World War II for the emergence of the Western and of the hard-boiled novel, with Hamilton noting that the two genres take shape "around the testing and confirmation of key American values, especially individualism, and are closely tied to the myth of the American dream" (Hamilton 1987: 1).

Kimmel uses the increased popularity of the Western in the 1950s in relation to one particular expression of redefinitions of American masculinities

at a time of stifling conformism. At that particular time, middle-class white men turned to what Kimmel calls "fantasies of escape" from their conventional, boring, "unmanly" routines in Corporate America. Westerns, both fictional and filmic representations, set at the boundary between civilization and savagery, promoted the rugged identity of "real men, men who were good with a horse and a gun," and who "triumphed over unscrupulous bankers and other rogue versions of Self-Made Manhood" (Kimmel 1994: 165). The most influential masculinity icon of the age is linked to an American called Marion Michael Morrison. As the name Marion had too many syllables and did not look and sound "masculine" enough, the icon was marketed under the much more glamorous name of John Wayne. Thus, Westerns transformed both Mr. Marion Morrison's identity and the identity of the conformist employees, dutifully doing their office work and then engaging in fantasies of escape in their viewing of heroic narratives featuring representations of American male individualism.

In an age of affluence and conformism, among the diversity of masculinity figures, apart from the macho Western icon, Kimmel also identifies the Suburban Playboys, the suburbs having become the new arena for proving the "American manhood" at that particular time, and *Playboy* magazine one of the most important contributions to flights of sexual fantasies in redefinitions of postwar masculinity. American males had now another distinction to make in the ways in which they viewed women: apart from wives and mothers, necessary evils in a society in which "wife-beating was an American tradition" (Peterson 1992: 97-118), now they had the *Playboy* fantasy women. Kimmel duly acknowledges the revolutionary and historic impact of the magazine's appearance in December 1953, soon becoming "the Bible for the beleaguered male" (Kimmel 1994: 167).

In addition to the above-mentioned historic and historical development, the acceptance of gay culture as part of the story of masculinity in the postwar age is another important development. The male Beats' fantasy of escape paralleled the one of the Suburban Playboys, although their special gay identity was based less on luxury and consumption and more on "a romantic notion of the free hobo, unencumbered by possessions – a free spirit roaming the road" (McDowell 1996: 413).

Today, in an age in which LGBTQ has become an established part of identity studies, the particular impact of the Beats and of the Beatniks on the reshaping of masculinity from the gay perspective of the "best minds of Ginsberg's generation" is also to be taken into account.

The contemporary crisis of masculinity is dealt with in the last section of Kimmel's seminal volume, beginning with a response to Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in the shape of … "the Masculine Mystique" (Kimmel 1994: 173 – 191). Kimmel claims that constructions of masculinity have always been

problematic or in some sort of crisis.

In her *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000), Robinson completes the picture of the masculinity crisis, claiming that white men are attracted by the possibilities of pain and grief and the unexpectedly thrilling tensions that come from living in crisis, and her illustrations come from both popular culture and from such well-established fiction authors as Philip Roth, John Irving, John Updike, somehow appearing to be unaware that good fiction has never attempted to confirm stereotypes and identities, preferring to represent characters in conflicted and conflicting situations. In a way, most fiction writers are "marked men or women" writing about "marked characters" in difficult situations, one might be tempted to believe. Nevertheless, Robinson specifically deals with such issues as the pains "suffered by ordinary Middle American men attempting to come to terms with the radical changes wrought by the civil rights and sexual liberation movement" (Robinson 2000: 23).

In his account of the contemporary crisis of masculinity, Kimmel also mentions the collective trauma linked to the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The aura of energetic and youthful masculinity created around his personal identity was quick to turn into myth. That tragic end appears to have relegated to the background of history the failed Bay of Pigs invasion or the early stages of America's escalation of the Vietnam War.

All in all, the last decades of the 20th century witnessed middle-class masculinity becoming the object of derision, rather than a hegemonic and awe-inspiring identity construction. Among the more influential representations of the masculinity crisis features the *Star Trek* TV show, while a new vision of fatherhood announcing some sort of masculine redemption, although somewhat "feminized," is due to Dustin Hoffman's portrayal of Ted Kramer (*Kramer vs Kramer*, 1979).

The prominent political figure of the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan, apparently redeemed masculinity in his confrontation with the "Evil Empire," in the imagination of many Americans, much in the same way in which the illustration of the female masculinity of the Iron Lady across the Atlantic completed the duo of the special relationship between the U.S. and the U.K. in the final stages of the Cold War. Nevertheless, Kimmel is not impressed, seeing in the masculinity recovered by Reagan "the compulsive masculinity of the schoolyard bully" (Kimmel 1994: 192). He claims that at that particular time, in the 1980s, masculinities were even more confused than before, which, one may already anticipate, led to the emergence of masculinity studies as a response to this uncertainty, crisis, and confusion, in which wimps, whiners and weekend warriors, as Kimmel describes some of these special masculinities, proliferate. In this context, Bryce Traister notes

> […] a two-pronged "crisis theory" of American masculinity: one is rooted in a new historiography of American masculinity that locates instability at the base

> of all masculine identities constructed within American cultural matrices; the second is derived from Judith Butler's influential theoretical account of gender as always performative and contingent (Traister 2000: 276).

If the second trend follows the orientation pursued by Judith Butler, the first is obviously the one promoted by Kimmel, whose work may safely be taken as a reference historical account of the metamorphoses of American masculinities.

Raewyn Connell is one of the most authoritative voices in the field under examination here. In the 1994 volume, *Theorizing Masculinities*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, Connell contributed his own essay, taking pride of place, "Psychoanalysis on Masculinity," at that time still using the singular of the central concept under investigation (compare it with his own first edition of *Masculinities* (1995), whose second, updated edition was published ten years later. Connell first notes the paradoxical situation occasioned by discussions of masculinity at that particular time: "Psychoanalysis was the product of an incisive intelligence and a profound commitment to science. Yet psychoanalysis gave birth to the confused irrationalism that now shoulders aside all claims of science in popular discussions of the 'deep masculine'" (Connell 1994:11). Connell goes on to claim that, although psychoanalysis had provided new insights for Marxism, surrealism, existentialism, feminism (and numerous other –isms), it had also turned into an instrument promoting surveillance and conformity, "acting as a gender police and a bulwark of conservative gender ideology" (Connell 1994: 11).

Connell refers to Freud's 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* as the classic of modern sexology, as the texts claimed that individuals had tendencies to be bisexual, as a way of thinking about sexual inversion. Homosexuals called "male inverts" retain the mental quality of masculinity. Freud is shown to note the distinction between the choice of a sexual object, which amounts to the pattern of an individual's emotional attachments, and the respective individual's own character traits. Connell notes how Freud comes up with an identity narrative of psychodynamic sexual growth from early childhood to adulthood, claiming that the distinction between boys' sexuality and that of girls is clearly demarcated only in their teen years. Choice and constructedness are thus anticipated by Freud from his early theories of sexuality, with masculinity included. The three essays assert that adult sexuality is shaped by a prolonged and conflict-ridden series of processes, original features undergoing combination and transformations in an apparently unexpected manner. These processes may show sudden, unexpected shifts (perversion), as well as featuring possible forms of fixation or regression at any stage in their "sexual identity itinerary," so to speak. One of the conclusions that Connell draws underlines subsequent views on developmental constructions of sexuality in general, of masculinity identity in particular: "It follows that adult

masculinity, as an organization of character around sexual desire, must be a complex, and in some ways precarious, developmental construction. It is not given a priori in the nature of men, as European culture generally assumed" (Connell 1994:13).

The second 2005 edition of Connell's previous, book-length study *Masculinities* offers an informed comprehensive perspective and an update of the author's original edition with the significant changes that occurred since then. The volume in turn offers an outline of the modern investigation of masculinity, going on to present the author's own theory which relies on a social theory of gender identity.

In addition to summing up the history of masculinities and their political expressions in the Western world, Connell promotes the politics of gender equality, while starting from the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, introduced previously, used in the first edition as well. The concept refers to the practices that confirm men's hegemonic position, thereby legitimizing the subordination of women, but also of other marginalized masculinities.

Within the broader framework of gender as a structure of social practice, as already assumed by Connell in previous works, masculinities are seen as displaying a complex set of relations, in which hegemonic masculinity is only one practice, the other ones involving subordination, complicity and marginalization. Violence and critical tendencies have marked the historical dynamics of these relations. Connell is interested in exploring the roles of men and masculinities in what is considered to be the politics of violence, placing the research of masculinity power relations within the framework of global developments.

The Australian author's own identity narrative illustrates the fluidity and constructedness of gender coordinates in general, of masculinity in particular, showing that gender identity is a large-scale social structure, but also a matter of personal choice, involving agency. Connell chose to become a *trans woman* late in her life and career, after the death of her partner, a prominent feminist activist, Pam Benton.

The most stable, until very recently, at least, features of the sexual division of labor have been confirmed and legitimated through the gendered associations of war and military action. In terms of this gendered division of labor, specific expectations, Morgan believes, "define not only who does what but who is what; the very nature of gender itself seems to be forged and reproduced in such socially constructed but very widespread and deeply pervasive divisions" (Morgan 1994: 166).

Images of the brave soldier leaving for war, saying farewell, not to arms, but to a crying wife and children consolidate the gendered division between strong, protective masculinity and protected femininity. Apart from such touchingly pathetic scenes, rape and sexual aggression in times of war also

confirm other well-entrenched gendered divisions between aggressive masculine animality and female vulnerability. What is more, homophobia has also been usually added to this gendered distinction of masculinity vs. femininity in the context of systemic and systematic violence, almost replicating the systemic sexism of hegemonic masculinity in patriarchal societies: "aggressive heterosexism and homophobia seem to lend support to the argument that masculine group solidarities organized around violence (legitimized or otherwise) serve as a defense against homosexuality" (Morgan 1994: 167).

A variety of long-term trends contributed to the deterioration of the masculinity image of the warrior and the heroic qualities going with it. Such trends, Morgan thinks, include the rationalization of warfare mechanisms, with technology creating a greater distance between the warrior and the means of destruction. What is more, trench warfare and close combat on a large scale have been replaced by small elite groups acting in surprise operations, their actions usually being kept secret, the stuff some audiences might be interested in as part of popular entertainment through viewing action-packed TV series and movies.

Apart from technology and cultural industries removing the authentic glamor of masculinity, such terrible historical episodes as World War II featuring incredible amounts of rationalized human slaughtering through weapons of mass destruction and such death factories as the German concentration camps, as well as the unpopularity of certain military operations, such as the involvement in the Vietnam War, led large sections of society, men and women alike, to develop increasingly powerful negative perceptions of war and heroic masculinity.

Some negative artistic responses to the problematic of heroic masculinity

Robert Lowell's "Memories of West Street and Lepke," in *Life Studies* is usually read as confessional poetry, with readers generally assuming that the persona at the centre of the text bears a strong resemblance to, if it does not faithfully represent, the identity of the author, very much like in the Romantic poetry of previous times. The speaker appears to be Robert Lowell himself, reminiscing about his time in prison during World War II as a conscientious objector. Some conscientious objectors might cut just as heroic, masculinist a figure as hardened warriors if they staunchly defend their principles. However, in the poem, the figure of the protagonist in his youth appears as the pathetic image of a "fire-breathing Catholic C.O" (Lowell 1970: 85) who, in prison, "yammers metaphysics with another equally "unmasculine" figure, Abramovitz, "a fly-weight pacifist, / so vegetarian, / he wore rope shoes and preferred fallen fruit" (Lowell 1970: 86) The text of the poem consistently represents both the

speaker and Abramovitz as far from manly creatures. Images of weakness and vulnerability abound in the poem, a good illustration of confessional poetry "at its worst," showing, in the opinion of M.L. Rosenthal, "the inventor" of the concept of confessionalism: "a series of confidences, rather shameful, that one is honor-bound not to reveal" (Rosenthal 1965: 231).

That war that was perceived by many Americans and most Europeans alike as a just, heroic war shows the persona as deficient in the martial attributes of heroic masculinity, but Lowell will soon change the perspective in a subsequent poem, "For the Union Dead," dedicated to a figure closely related to his forebears, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, one of the heroes of the Civil War.

The figures of the white colonel and of his black soldiers represented on the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial in the center of Boston, Massachusetts and Robert Lowell's poem's depiction of the Civil War officer are memorable illustrations of heroic masculinity. The poet contrasts the heroism represented by the tragic story that the monument commemorates with what he sees as the unheroic, corrupted Boston of the 1950s (the city appears to "slide by on grease"). On the monument, Colonel Shaw is shown, with admiration, as he "rejoices in man's lovely, peculiar power to choose life and die" (Lowell 1970: 71), while he leads his soldiers to an attack spelling certain death. If one person's perception of martial (not *marital*, as those who have read *Life Studies* know) masculinity can be as flexible, and attitudes to it can be so diverse, it comes as no surprise that masculinities, including heroic, *macho* masculinities are culturally constructed and subject to change, depending on circumstances.

In the 1960s, as the Vietnam experience had seriously affected the perceptions of many Americans on "just wars" and their glamorous heroes, the publication and success of such war novels as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse–Five* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* were made possible.

The beginning of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s long subtitle ("The Children's Crusade") and the dedication of the novel to Mary O'Hare foreshadow the deconstruction of heroic masculinity in what is to follow. In the first, autobiographical section of the book predating the bewildering combination of war situations and science-fiction adventures, Vonnegut visits a former war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare. He is planning to write his "war novel." O'Hare's wife cannot hide her hostility. She believes that Vonnegut will create a book that will feature manly characters, thus glamorizing war, leading to film versions with such masculinity icons of the time as John Wayne and Frank Sinatra. But Vonnegut makes a promise to Mary O'Hare and he keeps his word. His book will portray unheroic characters, and will represent a "children's crusade," not meant to make other younger children fantasize about martial masculinity and future opportunities to show their manhood in wars (Vonnegut 1981: 13).

Again, in Heller's *Catch-22,* the links between masculinity and war may

be seen as being called into question in America specifically at the time when the image of the good war, World War II, waged by America and its allies, was being replaced by more unpopular war conflicts, from Korea to Vietnam.

Masculinity is dealt a mortal blow here, although not in the same way as in Vonnegut's novel, where the warriors were seen as innocent children, sent to wage war away from their moms' homes. *Catch-22*, like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, does not have tough men fighting in deadly combat with equally tough enemies on the other side of the no man's land. The enemy appears to be on "our" side, not on "their" side, with officers like Colonel Cathcart being more dangerous than the invisible Germans.

Another blow to masculinity here is to be seen starting from Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity as central to patriarchy. Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell, asserts its centrality "by its claim to embody the power of reason" (Connell 2005: 164). In Heller's novel, apparently, the insanity of war deprives men of their manhood, turning most of them into figures of fun, unlike "the men of reason" representing hegemonic masculinity.

Nevertheless, a significant "masculinity shift" occurs in the novel. If initially Captain Yossarian is shown to be hysterical, telling everyone that the Germans are trying to kill him, which is understandable in a war in which the Germans stand for the enemy. He is also shown feigning an absurd illness to stay in the hospital and avoid getting killed in combat (therefore displaying cowardice, which amounts to a lack of manhood). Nevertheless, the plot comes up with an unexpected twist, the novel ending with the protagonist openly defying the "enemy" (his superiors) who only want him to "like" them and then be honourably discharged. That would mean Yossarian becoming an accomplice of his superiors who will keep raising the number of missions his other war comrades will have to fly after they have done their normal share. That would mean life for him and almost certain death for them. Instead of choosing safety, saying a farewell to arms the way his superiors want him to, he defies them, runs away from his Air Squadron in the middle of the Mediterranean, in an otherwise foolish attempt to sail in a rowboat all the way to … Sweden and to the attractive women there. It takes guts to do that, even in an absurd fictional world, and the expression of masculinity finally takes shape in the novel, not to be challenged again.

Conclusion

This essay started from significant female voices critically examining masculinity constructions, exposing power inequalities but also vulnerabilities and crises that displayed the diversity of the power dynamics of the field. Masculinities may also be approached from such dramatic contexts as war, combat, and the military, where the warrior is seen as a symbol of masculinity,

thus highlighting the violence involved in this gender identity area.

In his essay, "Theater of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities," David D.J. Morgan starts from this obvious realization: "Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct" (Morgan 1994: 165). The gendered connotations of this are all too obvious in war movies, paintings, and monuments, including equestrian statues of male heroes (Joan of Arc might be one of the few exceptions, but she would illustrate Halberstam's idea of *female masculinity*). The masculine postures, expressions, the carried weapons, and the military uniforms stressing group identity, absorbing individualities "into a generalized and timeless masculinity" (Morgan 166) stand for indomitable courage, aggression, willingness to fight to the end for an ideal usually associated with national identity. There are times in history when such identities, otherwise left to lie dormant in increasingly gender-sensitive contexts, regain particular prominence, and the war raging in Ukraine these days provides good illustrations. This confirms, once more, the realization that gender is differently experienced at different times and in different socio-cultural and political contexts making specific statements about specific episodes and chapters in a community's identity narrative.

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