

Marianne Østensen

**The SILENCING of WOMEN in WESTERNS**  
**A Psychoanalytic, Lacanian, and Feminist Approach**

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# The Silencing of Women in Westerns

## A Psychoanalytic, Lacanian, and Feminist Approach

### 1.0.0 Introduction

Today a woman is running to become the next president of the USA. If Hillary Clinton wins the democratic nomination and ultimately wins the presidential election, she will make history by becoming the very first female Commander in Chief of the United States. Whatever the outfall, Hillary Clinton has already proven herself as a role model for future generations of women. On the website pages promulgating her as candidate for the position as Commander in Chief, she is as a lawyer, advocate, First Lady, and senator, portrayed as a woman recognized for her efforts to induce social reforms. When her husband Bill Clinton was elected President in 1992, 'Hillary's work as a champion for women was recognized and admired around the world.'<sup>1</sup> In 1995 she held a speech at the United Nations Conference on Women. Richard Wolffe, referring to Hillary's communications director, writes in a Newsweek article that Hillary electrified the world when she declared that 'women's rights are human rights.'<sup>2</sup>

Hillary Clinton has continued to electrify the world. Travelling around the globe, she has spoken out against the degradation and abuse of women. Already in 1983 Hillary Clinton was named Arkansas Woman of the Year. The year after, she was named Arkansas Mother of the Year.<sup>3</sup> She has thus emerged also as a moral authority enhanced by her role of motherhood. Clinton has used considerable time to speak out for unfortunate groups in society and has in particular used time being a spokeswoman for children. One of her achievements was instrumental as she designed an insurance program, which has provided millions of children with health insurance.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, part of her campaign focuses on being spokeswoman for a

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<sup>1</sup> "First Lady", <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/about/firstlady/>

<sup>2</sup> Wolffe, Richard, August 6, 2007, Newsweek article: "Well, What Do You Know?" pp 30, 31.

<sup>3</sup> "Hillary Rodham Clinton", <http://www.wic.org/bio/hclinton.htm>

<sup>4</sup> "First Lady", <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/about/firstlady/>

group of people frequently identified as the “colonized Others”, a concept essential for my thesis. Enslaved Africans more than any other group signify the image of the colonized Other. In fact, a video, “African American Men for Hillary,”<sup>5</sup> is produced by the Clinton campaign. Several African American men are interviewed including Bishop Grant of Chicago:

“She carries the competence and the capability, but coupled with a consciousness, a passion, and a purpose, to understand the needs of people...She has lived the life of a public servant who has now matured to rise to the occasion, to without question be capable and qualify to lead our nation.”<sup>6</sup>

Another African American, Willie Gray, believes she is “this giant of a lady.”<sup>7</sup> Hillary Clinton is portrayed as being intelligent, well educated, mature, compassionate, and strong and emerges as a *female knowing speaking subject of mastery*, a term essential to my thesis.

Hillary Clinton sheds light on my thesis, as she is an antithesis to women of the traditional Western genre. Women in Westerns are frequently shoved aside and marginalised. Westerns, being narratives or films of the twentieth century, portray the strenuous life on the frontier and depict the cowboy hero as master of his environment. The Western genre engages in elaborating the question of manhood. A Western is by some considered a narrative or film portraying male violence. Women are often staged in the genre to enhance the brilliance of the male protagonist. By letting the male protagonist be the centre of attention, Westerns have contributed to the silencing of the female sex. Hillary Clinton becomes an incarnation of a woman breaking the silence of women. She stands forth as an incarnation of the New Woman image, signifying a strong, compassionate woman who in a sense is both a woman and a man rolled into one. Hillary Clinton represents how a woman breaks the silence of women by attempting to position herself in a “Master position” traditionally reserved for the male sex. A really interesting feature essential to my thesis, is observing how her husband is handling the situation. Hillary’s running for the Presidency does not represent a threat to his manhood.

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<sup>5</sup> Video: “African American Men for Hillary”, <http://www.hillaryclinton.com>

<sup>6</sup> Video: “African American Men for Hillary.”

<sup>7</sup> Video: “African American Men for Hillary.”

Having already served two terms as President, Bill Clinton steps aside and supports his wife to have a go at positioning herself in the “Master position” of Commander in Chief.

Literary critics have questions concerning the effects Westerns have on its audience. Questions of how the cowboy hero’s aspirations have blended with his audience and how his story has influenced people are relevant. Literary critics believe Westerns have shaped people’s attitudes and behaviour. Furthermore, critics believe Westerns have contributed to the marginalization and suppression of the female sex. Women were not men’s equals. Just like the Indians, women were shoved aside and assigned minor roles. They were there but not there. My thesis will explore the following questions: How have Westerns contributed to the silencing of women? What are the underlying and unconscious motives for doing so? Furthermore, have women in Westerns at any time managed to break the silence of women and thus managed to recapture the voice of their sex?

I have so far used terms that signify different nuances of the term *silencing*. When subjects are marginalized, suppressed, subdued, dominated, abused, pacified, pushed or shoved aside, undermined, mocked, ridiculed, belittled, and denigrated, they are either *silenced* or in the process of *being silenced*. It is essential to comprehend that *being silenced* does not only signify lack of speech. Human beings communicate not only through oral utterances. Interpreting the body language of a subject is equally if not of more importance when attempting to grasp the truth of what is being communicated. Even though a subject does not use words to communicate, the subject’s body language might tell a story of fear, control, and domination, which has the effect of subduing, quieting, or *silencing* the subject. The *silencing* of a subject can be achieved by physical force and/or by persuasion. Moreover, a subject’s position of social standing in relation to other subjects might also tell a story of domination and control, which in turn tells a story of *silencing*.

My thesis is given a subtitle, which implies that I will be using different insights of theory to illuminate my text. A psychoanalytic, a Lacanian, and a feminist approach imply that I will be giving insights from three different branches of theoretical work. As the three branches overlap encompassing derivational aspects, they are closely linked and intertwined.

A widely recognised branch draws on Freudian psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic critics give importance to the conscious and unconscious mind. ‘Overt’ and ‘covert’ contents of the narrative are essential. A psychoanalytic critic will privilege the ‘covert’ contents of a text being what the work is really all about. The critic will be searching for unconscious motives or feelings of the author or the characters of the narrative.<sup>8</sup> Jane Tompkins with *West of Everything*<sup>9</sup> represents a Freudian psychoanalytic<sup>9</sup> approach. Like wise, Annette Kolodny in *Lay of the Land*<sup>10</sup> represents a psychoanalytic approach when she speaks of a gendered feminine landscape being a projection of unconscious motives or feelings of the male sex.

The second branch of insights is concerned with Jacques Lacan, a French physician and psychiatrist, who was preoccupied with Freud and his practise of psychoanalysis. Lacan has contributed to give psychoanalysis a new dimension by situating psychoanalysis within the field of language. His thesis, that the unconscious is structured like a language is revolutionary in the sense that mechanisms of repression and the return of the repressed must be linguistic in nature. In *Écrits* (1966),<sup>11</sup> Lacan lays down the conceptual foundation of his theory and explores the questions of the unconscious, language, and subjectivity. Lacanian concepts have proven useful in cultural, gender, and woman studies. Like Freudian critics, Lacanians look for unconscious motives and feelings. Instead of searching for unconscious motives of an author or a character, Lacanians attempt to deconstruct ‘contradictory under-

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<sup>8</sup> Barry, Peter, *Beginning Theory*, p 105.

<sup>9</sup> Tompkins, Jane, 1992, *West of Everything*.

<sup>10</sup> Kolodny, Annette, 1975, *Lay of the Land*.

<sup>11</sup> Published seminars and the seminal Lacanian text.

currents of meaning lying like a subconscious beneath the ‘conscious’ of the text.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Lacanians treat the text in terms of a series of broader Lacanian orientations.<sup>13</sup>

Jacques Lacan develops his ideas and concepts throughout life and has rightfully been called a philosopher of psychoanalysis. However, the philosophical aspect of Lacan is part of what constitutes the incompleteness of the Lacanian project. Thus, I have chosen to rely on experts who have helped to clarify Lacan. Professor Dany Nobus with his *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*<sup>14</sup> sheds light on key concepts making them definitive. Toril Moi has a useful summary of Lacan in *Sexual, Textual Politics*.<sup>15</sup> Kirsten Campbell with her *Jacque Lacan and Feminist Epistemology*<sup>16</sup> is also essential when dealing with Lacanian concepts.

Lacan’s description of subject formation draws on Freudian psychoanalysis, but introduces and develops concepts that I will employ in my analysis: *jouissance*, *lack* and *desire*, the *Name-of-the-Father*, and the registers of the *Imaginary*, *Symbolic*, and the *Mirror Stage*, are all significant in his theory of subject formation. Before the child becomes conscious of its own self as separated from its environment, it exists in the *Imaginary* realm. The infant experiences a sense of unity, plenitude, completeness, and harmony with the mother’s body. Lacan in his later writing coins this sensation of pleasure as *jouissance*. Various nuances of *jouissance* emerge in Lacan’s writing and seminars, which complicate comprehension. Dany Nobus underlines that there is not a shift in meaning as such. Rather, new meanings of the term coexist. In the above case Lacan refers to a superabundant *jouissance* of complete happiness of the mother. ‘The memory of the first impression of the mother’s complete *jouissance* will persist in the illusion of a superabundant *jouissance* accessible only to the Other.’<sup>17</sup> This Other is the primordial Other, the mother.

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<sup>12</sup> Barry, Peter, p 115.

<sup>13</sup> Barry, Peter, p 115.

<sup>14</sup> Nobus, Dany, 1998, *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>15</sup> Moi, Toril, 1985, *Sexual, Textual Politics*, pp 99-101.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell, Kirsten, 2004, *Jacque Lacan and Feminist Epistemology*.

<sup>17</sup> Nobus, Dany, p 9.



Kirsten Campbell comments on Lacan's theory of signification. Lacan draws on the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure who underlines 'the arbitrary nature of the elements of the sign...bearing only a contingent relation to the object it appears to represent.'<sup>18</sup> For Lacan 'speech is not a neutral act of representation which allows us to say what we want, but is an overdetermined combination of signifying elements in which we always say more than we intend.'<sup>19</sup> Lacan posits a more radical view than Saussure. Not only is there an arbitrary relation, but a shifting and unstable one. For Lacan, desire behaves in the same way as language. It 'moves ceaselessly on from object to object or from signifier to signifier, and will never find full and present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized as full presence.'<sup>20</sup> By inflecting a psychoanalytic reading on the apparently stable relation between the signifier and the signified, concepts start to unravel. This poses an invaluable insight, which equips the literary critique with an analyst position of unravelling the unconscious elements of a narrative. I will be looking for other and unconscious meanings of the apparently fixed concept of the signified. I will do so drawing on the Lacanian model of knowledge, which claims that there cannot be a neutral representation of reality.

My feminist approach will include Judith Butler who draws on Lacan's theory of signification. Butler underlines how gender identity is socially constructed and reinforced through repetitions of everyday activities. She also points to the hegemony of the symbolic language of men. She emphasises the need for women to recapture their female voice and speaks of the cost of identity's straitjacket. The role of women is socially constructed. She believes that:

...identity is a trap, a hardening into rigid, binarized categories of much fluid and heterogeneous possibilities. She calls for actions that will "resignify" our received meanings – actions that will lead to a "proliferation" of the "constitutive categories" into which all selves are now constrained to fit.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Campbell, Kirsten, p 33.

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, Kirstin, p 34.

<sup>20</sup> Moi, Toril, p 101.

<sup>21</sup> Leitch, Cain, Finke, Johnson, McGowen, Williams, *The Norton Anthology, Theory and Criticism*, p 2486.

Because of naturalised notions of gender that support masculine hegemony, it is essential for women to start reprogramming themselves, to initiate a *resignification* process. She calls for a loosening of the categories of gender. Kirsten Campbell refers to Judith Butler in her *Jacques Lacan and Feminist Epistemology*. They both believe that it is necessary to reconfigure structures of signifiers, which eventually will produce new meaning and knowledge.

Both Kirsten Campbell and Judith Butler represent a feminist approach of my thesis and are both inspired by Lacan. Like Lacan is a philosopher of psychoanalysis, Campbell in a sense is a philosopher of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Campbell's *Jacque Lacan and Feminist Epistemology* is groundbreaking as Campbell uses Lacanian psychoanalysis with feminist epistemology and posits a psychoanalytic social theory, which offers possibilities of change for women. Campbell underlines that Lacan's:

...theory of the four foundational discourses of the master, the university, the hysteric, the analyst, presents an account of knowledge as a symbolic and social network. It describes the fundamental structures of symbolic networks that form subjects and produce their understanding of their world. From my elaboration of that account, I develop a theory of the knowing subject as discursive subject and of knowledge as a product of discourse, which I describe as the 'later Lacanian epistemology'.<sup>22</sup>

Lacan's later seminars<sup>23</sup> establish and develop the Lacanian theory of discourse.<sup>24</sup> Campbell posits that situating a Lacanian model of knowledge within the feminist field indicates a commitment to a politics of social change. The four foundational discourses of the "master", the "university", the "hysteric", and the "analyst" present an account of knowledge as a symbolic and social network. Lacan identifies four foundational types of social bonds of speaking subjects that take up different positions in the discourses. The positions of the four discourses can be designated as follows:

|       |      |              |
|-------|------|--------------|
| agent | ---> | other        |
| truth |      | product/loss |

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<sup>22</sup> Campbell, Kirsten, p 47.

<sup>23</sup> *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 1969-1970 and *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, 1972-1973.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, Kirsten, p 47.

‘Whichever matheme ( $S_1$ ,  $S_2$ ,  $\$$ , or  $a$ ) Lacan places in one of these four positions, it takes on the role ascribed to that position.’<sup>25</sup> Using the master’s discourse as a sort of primary discourse, the three other ‘derivative’ discourses are generated by rotating each element one quarter of a turn:

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| $\underline{S_1} \dashrightarrow \underline{S_2}$ | $\underline{\$} \dashrightarrow \underline{S_1}$ | $\underline{a} \dashrightarrow \underline{\$}$ | $\underline{S_2} \dashrightarrow \underline{a}$ |
| $\$ \quad a$                                      | $a \quad S_2$                                    | $S_2 \quad S_1$                                | $S_1 \quad \$$                                  |
| The master’s discourse                            | The hysteric’s discourse                         | The analyst’s discourse                        | The university discourse                        |

There are of course other discourses, but as ‘Lacan only mentions four discourses suggests that he finds something particularly important about the *order* of the elements.’<sup>26</sup> The four discourses are closely linked as they produce each other. These four positions allow Lacan to account for a structure of the social link. Lacan has been given keen insights since some the discourses also emerge in the therapeutic situation between patient and psychiatrist. He is thus an expert on communicative interaction that goes on between people in real life. These insights will prove important when it comes to understand the popular literature of Westerns.

Women in Westerns are often positioned as the Other in the discourse of the Master. The Master’s discourse produces a masculine ‘subject who wishes to master its self, its other, its desire, and its unconscious. For Lacan, the Master wishes to dominate that which it excludes from its discourse.’<sup>27</sup> The discourse of the Master tells a story of domination and a desire to silence the Other. It is crucial for the cowboy hero to dominate, control and master his environment. My opening pages on Hillary Clinton introduce the concept of the *colonized Other*. Women have often been treated as images of the oppressed Others in literature. Following Lacan, the concept of the Other involves the elements of something beyond us as well as something within our own being. The silencing and marginalization of the oppressed Others are reoccurring themes in different genres. Westerns have in particular contributed to

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<sup>25</sup> Nobus, Dany, p 32.

<sup>26</sup> Nobus, Dany, p 32.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell, Kirstin, p 65.

the suppression and silencing of the Other. The position of the Other is frequently assigned to women. Post-colonial readings of literature emphasize the image of the *colonized subject* as a prevailing concept. Women are often identified as analogous to that of the *colonized Other*. My interpretation of a *colonized subject* thus also includes women. The influential work of feminists of colour has in fact linked antiracism with feminism.<sup>28</sup>

I have chosen to analyse three Westerns, two novels, *The Virginian* by Owen Wister and *Riders of the Purple Sage* by Zane Grey, and the television series *Dr. Quinn* executive produced by Beth Sullivan. Jane Tompkins in *West of Everything* has done a considerable piece of work exploring how Westerns have shaped peoples attitudes and behaviour.<sup>29</sup> Tompkins's feminist psychoanalytic approach elaborates how Westerns have contributed to the marginalization and suppression of the female sex. She goes so far as to speak of a gender war going on between the male and female sex. To understand this power struggle one must go back in time and take a closer view of the domestic American narratives of the nineteenth century written by women. These sentimental novels always had a woman as its main character. The place of action was often in the private domestic sphere. The heroine would undergo an interior struggle to live up to an ideal of Christian virtue by dedicating her life to God through serving others. 'Culturally and politically, the effect of these novels is to establish women at the centre of the world's most important work (saving souls) and to assert that in the end spiritual power is always superior to worldly might.'<sup>30</sup> The female sex is traditionally associated with religion, culture, class distinction, a world of fancy words, and pretty actions. The Western is an antithesis to the domesticity of the American Victorian novel and undermines the values of women.

For the Western is secular, materialist, and antifeminist; it focuses on conflict in the public

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<sup>28</sup> Dow, Bonnie J, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and Women's Movement since 1970*, p 176.

<sup>29</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 6.

<sup>30</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 38.

space, it is obsessed by death, and worships the phallus...this kind of explanation does not account for the most salient fact about the Western—that it is a narrative of male violence.<sup>31</sup>

When life itself is at stake, nothing else matters. The Western draws attention to men being where significant change is taking place. Women are often omitted from the historical scene. Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation*<sup>32</sup> draws attention to Theodore Roosevelt who wrote *The Winning of the West*. Roosevelt as an advocator of violence believed that ‘the most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages.’<sup>33</sup> Extinguishing the Indians and civilizing the continent was a service to all mankind. Theodore Roosevelt believed that through violence man was regenerated, promoted and sublimated into a finer human being.

They were the pick of the most vigorous elements of a British race that was itself the pick of the German racial stocks: the cream of the cream of the conquering race. Their characteristics anticipate the virtues of the “strenuous life,” which Roosevelt would later preach to his own class. They were “fighters and breeders,” with a simple and ideal family government. “The man was the armed protector and provider, the bread-winner; the woman was the housewife and child-bearer...”<sup>34</sup>

Historical evidence shows that a man like Theodore Roosevelt had a significant impact on Westerns and the role of the male protagonist. His perspective serves as a reinforcement of the notion of women occupying a minor role in the Western genre. If they were there at all, they were there to justify the violence executed by the men of the frontier. Women and children were there to be saved and rescued, thus giving violence heroic status.

The Western, being an answer to the domesticity of the American Victorian novel, was normally written by men. The main protagonist was in most cases male. Westerns can be said to be narratives or films portraying the heroic deeds of men building the nation. The strenuous life in the wilderness was not fit for women and they were thus marginalized and shoved aside. With a few exceptions, women characters of the Western, if present at all, were there mainly serving as an extension of the male protagonist and assigned roles of serving his needs. The setting was often outdoors far from women and private spaces. The element of

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<sup>31</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 29.

<sup>32</sup> Slotkin, Richard, *Gunfighter Nation. The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*.

<sup>33</sup> Roosevelt, Theodore, *The Winning of the West*, Volume: 3, p 45.

<sup>34</sup> Slotkin, Richard, *Gunfighter Nation*, p 49.

death and violence was in stark contrast to the virtuous ideals of women who were opposed to violence. Jane Tompkins underlines the contrast between the two narratives.

The Western answers the domestic novel. It is an antithesis of the cult of domesticity that dominated American Victorian culture. The Western hero...comes riding in out of the nineteenth century. And every piece of bag he doesn't have, every word he doesn't say, every creed he doesn't believe is absent for a reason. What isn't there in the Western hasn't disappeared by accident; It's been deliberately jettisoned...If the Western deliberately rejects evangelical Protestantism and pointedly repudiates the cult of domesticity, it is because it seeks to marginalize and suppress the figure who stood for those ideals.<sup>35</sup>

The Western silences women by ridding itself of the cult of domesticity normally associated with the role of motherhood. In short, the Western silences women by repudiating the virtues and ideals women stood for.

The two novels I have chosen demonstrate how the female sex is silenced. Both heroines in *The Virginian* and *Riders of the Purple Sage*, dramatize how the female authorities of Molly Stark Wood and Jane Withersteen are destroyed. Both heroines are unusual for the Western genre since they both are representatives of the New Woman image, being both a woman and a man rolled into one. Both Wister and Grey give their heroines a more significant role than is true of later Western pulp fiction and dime novels. Both Molly and Jane eventually accept their cowboy heroes as Master. In both novels the heroines are given important roles in naturalizing and reinforcing a masculine dominant worldview. Westerns repeat endlessly the heroic scenes of violence in the name of saving women and children. Although women's voices are introduced, they are of less importance. Jane Tompkins reinforces this notion when stating that 'the viewpoint women represent is introduced in order to be swept aside, crushed, or dramatically invalidated.'<sup>36</sup> Tompkins uses a whole chapter of her book to focus on women and the language of men. The cowboy hero is a man of few words. Tompkins asserts that the Western is impatient with words and ridicules the language

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<sup>35</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 39.

<sup>36</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 49.

of women. The Western has numerous examples of how the voices of women are silenced by being undermined and devalued.

When women told their story of the West a completely different story was told. The scholar, Annette Kolodny in her book *The Land Before Her*,<sup>37</sup> has focused on unravelling how women created their own mythology of the frontier. The fantasies of men that she elaborates in her book *The Lay of the Land*,<sup>38</sup> had little space for women in the myth of the frontier. Kolodny shows how women through their own writing created their own myth of the West:

Women seem not to have reacted against the land with violence not simply because they never dreamed of it as an object of sexual conquest, nor simply because they had evaded the frustrations of irreconcilable desires. They had, in addition, taken on a set of images that limited the very contexts of imaginative possibility. Thus, women avoided male anguish at lost Edens and male guilt in the face of the raping of the continent by confining themselves, instead, to the “innocent . . . amusement” of a garden’s narrow space.<sup>39</sup>

Kolodny reinforces through this passage the notion of the male connection with the virginal paradise image of the New World. In literature there are numerous examples of imagery used where the wilderness is feminized. The historian, Fredrick Jackson Turner, portrays the New World landscape applying feminized phrases like: ‘took them to *her bosom*... in *her most distant domains* with *her materiel treasures*.’<sup>40</sup> The subconscious sexual desires are apparent and an intermingling of maternal and erotic elements go hand in hand. Unravelling these subconscious desires will be essential for my thesis when attempting to give answers to why it is of utmost importance for the male sex to conquer and master his environment.

After my treatment of *The Virginian* and *Riders of the Purple Sage*, I have chosen to analyse the *Dr. Quinn* series, which represents a feminist approach. The heroine Dr. Michaela Quinn exemplifies how a female protagonist in a Western manages to break the silence of women. In my treatment of *Dr. Quinn*, Bonnie J. Dow and her *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and Women’s Movement since 1970* will be essential.

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<sup>37</sup> Kolodny, Annette, 1984, *The Land Before Her*.

<sup>38</sup> Kolodny, Annette, 1975, *The Lay of the Land*.

<sup>39</sup> Kolodny, Annette, *The Land Before Her*, p 7.

<sup>40</sup> Kolodny, Annette, *The Land Before Her*, p 4.

My thesis will deal with two famous American writers that have contributed immensely in creating a model for numerous Westerns. Both have lived lives that shed light on my thesis and I will therefore include biographical notes on both. In both novels the heroines are given significant space. I will demonstrate how both heroines are subdued to the position of the Other in the discourse of the Master and thus silenced. Dealing with both novels, I will seek to look for evidence of feminized and sexual imagery of the landscape, which will help to substantiate why it is of utmost importance for the cowboy hero to master his environment. I will be searching for evidence of repressed desire of the superabundant jouissance of the (m)Other, which has been projected onto the landscape. When dealing with Zane Grey and *Riders of the Purple Sage*, I will give special attention to the Mormon community and focus on how Mormon women occupy the position of the Other in the discourse of the Master. I will show that they are silenced and bear the Hysteric's symptom of mute victimhood giving associations to the colonized Other. Drawing on Campbell's elaboration of the discourse of the Analyst, I will show how Jane Withersteen escapes the master clutches of the Mormon church and still repositions herself as the Other in the discourse of the Master. Last but not the least; I will turn to *Dr. Quinn*, a melodrama television series furnishing Dr. Michaela Quinn with heroic status. Beth Sullivan is herself an image of a female breaking the silence of women and I will thus be giving biographical notes on her as well. In my treatment of *Dr. Quinn*, I will show how the categories of gender are aloof and in a sense reversed, instigating a resignification process. Significantly, I will discuss how and why Dr. Michaela Quinn, being a spokeswoman for the less fortunate and the colonized Others, emerges as a moral authority of Colorado Springs and becomes an image of a *female knowing speaking subject of mastery*. Finally, I will concentrate on demonstrating how *Dr. Quinn* succeeds in invoking women to not give up on their dreams in a world of patriarchy and to grasp the necessity of initiating new discourses for women.



## 2.0.0 The Silencing of Molly

### 2.1.0 Owen Wister

Owen Wister (1860-1938) was raised in a privileged environment. His father was a successful doctor and his mother was a musician, translator, and contributor of anonymous articles and reviews.<sup>41</sup> By birth and as an only child Wister was given an intellectual and creative inheritance. Both his parents were concerned with his education. Wister was intelligent and emotional and proved to be extremely talented in music. His father was worried about Wister's preoccupation with music. Wister reassured his father that music for him was an avocation. Nevertheless, he decided to pursue a career in music and took private composition lessons paid by his father. Eventually his father refused to pay for more lessons. Jane Tompkins believes that what Wister did next affected him for the rest of his life.

Wister turns his back on his talents, his achievements, his dreams, his desires, and does what his father wishes. More than that, he tries to become his father: "I have not only merely accepted what you wish, but I *wish it myself*."<sup>42</sup>

While working in finance in Boston he suffers his first attack of facial paralysis, eye trouble, and eventually a complete nervous breakdown. Even though Wister had faced the reality of a nervous collapse, he went on pursuing a life pleasing his father by attending Harvard Law School. He never actually practised law, but used his 'practise' as a cover for his literary accomplishments. Wister suffers reoccurring attacks of mental problems. The Norwegian Chief Psychiatrist Dag Brendefur verifies that 'when a person is ridden with deep, severe unresolved conflicts the human body might convey symptoms as those experienced by Wister to signal out that something is terribly wrong.' Wister's doctor advised him to go west, and he spent the summer in Wyoming where he gradually recovered. Wister continued to return to the West. For Wister the West was the site of physical well-being and emotional rebirth, a

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<sup>41</sup> Wister, Owen, p xxxiv.

<sup>42</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 136.

place where those who had remained boys could become men, a place of self-transformation.<sup>43</sup>

Sarah Butler Wister more than anyone contributed to the shaping of her son's life. Having a troubled marriage, she was repeatedly confronted with depressions. Sarah is described as having a strong intellect with no place to put it. 'She sprang from a troubled marriage herself and a mother who was not the nurturing type. She was a most intriguing character, worthy herself a book.'<sup>44</sup> Sarah Wister turned out to have a severe impact on Owen Wister emotionally. She was intensely and unsoundly focused on her only child. Sarah fled into a world of poetry and music instead of performing her duties of daily life involving the upbringing of her son. Instead, the attention Wister would receive was that of the critical voice. Jane Tompkins writes that she criticized nearly everything he did and was installed in his mind forever as sitting judge and internal censor.<sup>45</sup> Tompkins writes that Sarah's psychological distress was too much for Owen.<sup>46</sup> By going West, Wister rebels and experiences things that his mother would never accept. He tries to free himself from the grip of his mother's over-protectiveness.

### **2.2.0 Em'ly**

*The Virginian* by Owen Wister is frequently perceived by its readers as a narrative of romance depicting the perfect relationship between ideal man and ideal woman who meet, fall in love, and get married. The male protagonist, the Virginian, goes on having a successful career whereas the female protagonist, Molly, goes on having a lot of children. Jane Tompkins in *West of Everything* emphasizes that the story of Molly and the Virginian, the story of hetero-

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<sup>43</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 137.

<sup>44</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 134.

<sup>45</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 134.

<sup>46</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 135.

sexual paradise, is the story that ‘Wister wants to believe in. The reality is another matter.’<sup>47</sup>

In fact, Wister has dedicated a whole chapter to the denigrating portrayal of the female sex personified by the hen Em’ly. Almost from the very start Wister, through the voice of the narrator and the Virginian, ridicules and denigrates the female sex.

The chapter seems to have little to do with anything—to be just a little *jeu d’esprit*, put in for amusement’s sake. What it has to do with...are Wister’s feelings toward the female sex...these feelings are so hostile and twisted that they cannot be expressed in any but an oblique and displaced form, perhaps because Wister was never able to express them directly in his own life—or even acknowledge their existence.<sup>48</sup>

Keeping Tompkins’s keen insights in mind I will explore the chapter of *Em’ly* and show how Wister consciously or unconsciously succeeds in denigrating the female sex.

In the opening section of *Em’ly*, the Virginian himself is assigned the role of nursing Tenderfoot, the narrator of the novel. Wister underlines the humiliating situation:

The poor Virginian was taken from his work and his comrades and set to playing nurse for me. And for a while this humiliation ate into his untamed soul.<sup>49</sup>

By applying the phrase, ‘playing nurse’, Wister indicates that domestic work is not real work. The phrase, ‘The poor Virginian’, suggests that Wister through the narrator identifies with the male protagonist feeling sorry for the man. Wister suggests that it is below the dignity of men to partake in female domestic activities. This passage is one of the first instances, which verify Wister’s hostile and twisted feelings<sup>50</sup> toward the female sex. Another passage on the same page reinforces this very notion. ‘This tame nursery business was assuredly gall to him.’<sup>51</sup> Wister through the narrator suggests that the degradation of being a nurse bothers the Virginian to such a degree that it eats into his soul.

In the chapter of *Em’ly* there are other examples that show how Wister ridicules and denigrates domestic female virtues. Significantly, he attacks feminine behaviour, which parts from the traditional norms of motherhood. Early on in the chapter, a red female setter is

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<sup>47</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 139.

<sup>48</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 140.

<sup>49</sup> Wister, Owen, p 52.

<sup>50</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 140.

<sup>51</sup> Wister, Owen, p 53.

denigrated because of her being pregnant. After giving birth, the setter gives her puppies to the hen Em'ly. The narrator describes the setter's irresponsible behaviour by explaining that the setter 'had developed her dog intelligence above its natural level, and turned her into an unnatural mother, who was constantly forgetting her nursery for worldly pleasures.'<sup>52</sup> Wister goes on depicting the arrangement between Em'ly and the setter as 'so civilized and so perverted.'<sup>53</sup> In the portrayal of the setter, Wister is attacking women and perhaps even his own mother. Women should acknowledge their position in life and not part from traditional norms of motherhood. There are more passages in *Em'ly* that reinforce this notion.

The main focus in the chapter is on Em'ly herself. She is obsessed with carrying out the maternal roles of bearing and rearing children. On the same page as Wister portrays the male protagonist as a man of few words, he ridicules and juxtaposes the female sex by introducing Em'ly trying to hatch potatoes:

...and for the third time I had kicked Em'ly off seven potatoes she had rolled together and was determined to raise I know not what sort of family from. She was shrieking about the hen-house...<sup>54</sup>

Wister through the image of Em'ly portrays domestic women as hysterical and cackling as a hen. Portraying women as shrieking and thus being hysterical, gives associations to Kirsten Campbell and her treatment of the four discourses developed by Jacques Lacan. Lacan claims that the Hysteric in the discourse of the Hysteric is a position frequently assigned to women. The narrator's descriptions of the Virginian are in stark contrast to the Hysteric and Em'ly. Tenderfoot is impressed by the Virginian who is in control and who 'never once did lose his patience,'<sup>55</sup> The Virginian is depicted as having 'a gentle, slow voice',<sup>56</sup> which contrasts with Em'ly's shrieking voice. Moreover, Tenderfoot experiences that the Virginian is a man of few words. The time they spend together is often marked by silence. Tenderfoot's liking for the

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<sup>52</sup> Wister, Owen, p 59.

<sup>53</sup> Wister, Owen, p 59.

<sup>54</sup> Wister, Owen, p 54.

<sup>55</sup> Wister, Owen, p 53.

<sup>56</sup> Wister, Owen, p 53.

Virginian grows and he 'found his silent company more and more agreeable.'<sup>57</sup> This aspect of silence of the male sex is reinforced also in the next passage:

He expressed nothing as usual...We rode home in our usual silence.<sup>58</sup>

The female sex on the other hand is repeatedly depicted in a negatively manner. Not only does she shriek and make a lot of noise, but also there seems to be something wrong with her appearance, which also contrasts to the appearance of the Virginian. 'His tiger limberness and his beauty were rich with unabated youth.'<sup>59</sup> Em'ly is far from being elegant and beautiful. She is quite the contrary. There is something wrong with her tail, and the feathers on her breast are worn off from sitting on strange objects. She tries to act responsibly. The Virginian is puzzled by her and says "'she came near being a rooster"...'she's sure manly-lookin'.'<sup>60</sup>

Wister wrote this novel at a time when women were rising to partake in important social issues. Women were dislodging themselves from their domestic sphere and taking on more masculine roles. One of the very first significant uprisings can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention of 1848. At this convention a Declaration of Sentiments was written and signed. The USA had adopted the Marital Laws of England that deprived women of all rights. The Declaration of Sentiments proves how the language of men and the Symbolic order of patriarchy resulted in 'the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.'<sup>61</sup> The female sex was deprived of 'her inalienable right to the elective franchise.'<sup>62</sup> The document is depressive reading and verifies how women through history have been positioned as the Other in the discourse of the Master. In marriage, she was compelled to promise obedience to her husband and 'master...the law giving him power to administer chastisement.'<sup>63</sup> The period of Wister and the publishing of *The Virginian* occurred

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<sup>57</sup> Wister, Owen, p 53.

<sup>58</sup> Wister, Owen, p 54.

<sup>59</sup> Wister, Owen, p 53.

<sup>60</sup> Wister, Owen, p 55.

<sup>61</sup> Stanton, Elizabeth, *A History of Woman Suffrage*, pp 70, 71.

<sup>62</sup> Stanton, Elizabeth, pp 70, 71.

<sup>63</sup> Stanton, Elizabeth, pp 70, 71.

at a time when traditional gender distinctions and boundaries were afloat signifying attempts of resignification. The uprising of women collides with and contrasts to the American Victorian image of women of the nineteenth century. True woman of this era was portrayed as a person sacrificing and committing herself to her home, reinforcing a notion of the domesticity of the true American female sex.

Emily is described as having long blue legs and being remarkably stout. Jane Tompkins suggests that the uprising of the bluestockings is a target:

”Her legs were blue”...one detail in a series of stereotypes about bluestockings, intellectual or reformist women who were caricatured as manhating old maids who dressed like men, whose sexuality was askew, and who violated the central imperative of the nineteenth-century ‘true woman’, her self-sacrificing commitment to her children and her husband. Jane Tompkins proposes Wister’s intellectual mother, Sara Butler Wister, as an immediate target and his civic-activist wife, Mary Channing Wister, as a secondary one...<sup>64</sup>

The underlying power struggle between the sexes is a plausible explanation. According to Tompkins, Wister had a complicated and unresolved relationship with his mother. She was an intellectual woman as was Molly, the heroine of the novel. Molly moved from the East to become the schoolmarm of the area. Wister through the *Virginian* draws parallels between Em’ly and Molly by comparing Em’ly with a schoolmarm. “”Taylor ought to see her. She’d be just the schoolmarm for Bear Creek!””<sup>65</sup> Comparing a schoolmarm with the hen Em’ly is a mode of mocking and ridiculing the intellectual female. This attitude contributes to keeping women in their place and reinforces the notion of the suppressed Others. Furthermore, the narrator suspects Em’ly of being demented.<sup>66</sup> The underlying implications are depressing.

Intellectual women of the era were caricatured as man-hating old maids. The *Virginian* explicitly expresses Em’ly’s hatred of roosters when he tells Tenderfoot that she does hate the rooster so.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the *Virginian* tells that when a woman moved in, they “”lost their

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<sup>64</sup> Wister, Owen, pp 345, 346.

<sup>65</sup> Wister, Owen, p 56.

<sup>66</sup> Wister, Owen, p 58.

<sup>67</sup> Wister, Owen, p 57.

(our) best rooster...”<sup>68</sup> Wister through the voice of the male protagonist continues to reveal his distrust of the female sex. A puzzling development in the dialogue between the narrator and the Virginian occurs when he reveals that it is not only Em’ly that hates the rooster, but the same is true vice versa. “That runaway rooster, he hated her. And she hated him as she hates ‘em all.”<sup>69</sup> One might very well contemplate who hates whom. Nevertheless, this last citation verifies the underlying power struggle existing between the sexes and verifies Wister’s feelings toward the female sex that are so hostile and twisted that they cannot be expressed in any but a displaced form.<sup>70</sup>

Man’s unconscious fear of dealing with his repressed self and his own emotions is a plausible explanation. Women are considered more emotional and thus the weaker sex. Being a man of few words and also showing disgust for women and their cackling and hysterical ways, the male protagonist protects himself from inspection and having to deal with his unconscious desires. The pain involved is too hard to bear. By keeping women in their place as the Other in the discourse of the Master and in this sense silencing them, he is protecting himself. A psychoanalytic and Lacanian reading concludes that in the dimension of unfulfilled lack that can be traced back to early childhood experiences, one finds the subconscious reasons for male behaviour towards women. The passage below reveals this very notion of lack and separation. We sense a longing and yearning to be reunited with the maternal parent. However, Owen Wister conveys something else as well.

She continued to scour the premises, her slant tail and its one preposterous feather waving as she went, her stout legs stepping high with an unnatural motion, her head lifted nearly off her neck, and in her brilliant yellow eye an expression of more than outrage at this overturning of a natural law. Behind her, entirely ignored and neglected, trailed the little progeny. She never looked at it... Below the tree stood the bewildered little chicken, cheeping, and making the jumps to reach its mother.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Wister, Owen, p 54.

<sup>69</sup> Wister, Owen, p 55.

<sup>70</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 140.

<sup>71</sup> Wister, Owen, pp 61, 62.

The neglected chicken is Wister himself. Moreover, Wister here demonstrates his disapproval of the lack of natural maternal impulses of Bluestocking reformers. By overturning ‘natural law’ engaging in feminist discourses, the female sex neglects the role of motherhood. Wister himself is a victim of maternal neglect. The image of the bewildered little chicken attempting ‘to reach its mother’, manages to evoke the reader by giving the reader felt sensations of being lost, of yearning, and of desire to be recognized. The psychological implications are touching and sad. What the little chicken desires is to crawl into the bosom of its own mother. After Em’ly died the Virginian said that he would never forget her because she was “‘just one o’ them parables...”<sup>72</sup>

### **2.3.0 Balaam and Pedro**

The link between the hen Em’ly and the female sex is easily recognized and underlying connotations are easily grasped. The imagery surrounding the relationship between man and his horse is of a more covert nature and deserves special attention. Horses have a special purpose in Westerns as they spark our emotions. Owen Wister has dedicated a whole chapter to the portrayal of the relationship between man and his horse. Jane Tompkins emphasizes how the genre manages to bring life to nature, animals, and human beings by actually breaking down the boundaries, which normally separate the different spheres. Tompkins explicitly spells out that ‘horses are there to galvanize us.’<sup>73</sup> When Wister portrays the suffering horse, Pedro, he succeeds in evoking our emotions, which gives associations to felt experiences of human life. Wister in his chapter of *Balaam and Pedro* consciously or unconsciously hints to the analogy of felt experiences between horses, men, and women. Both women and horses experience to be treated like a colonized Other.

...men in Westerns use horses to prove their manhood—both in the sense of their superiority to other animals and in the sense of their difference from and superiority to women and lower-

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<sup>72</sup> Wister, Owen, p 62.

<sup>73</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 94.



order males...The horse, like a colonized subject, makes a man a master...Each time the figure of a horseman appears against the horizon, it celebrates the possibility of mastery, of self, of others, of the land, of circumstance.<sup>74</sup>

When Tompkins writes, 'The horse, like a colonized subject', that also includes women. Wister employs imagery of mastery when he portrays the relationship between horse and his Master. Applying this language also to the relationship between the hero and his heroine definitely suggests there is a connotation linked to the imagery surrounding the relationship of that between man and horse. In fact, Wister gives horses significant space in his novel. Even the title page includes the horse and thus the imagery of dominance and mastery:

THE VIRGINIAN  
A Horseman of the Plains

Instead of writing 'Horseman' Wister could have inserted 'Master'. The very first page is in fact dedicated to the imagery of mastery. The Virginian excels in roping a horse. When he rides out of town to head for Judge Henry's ranch, he drives 'with the same mastering ease that he had roped the wild pony yesterday.'<sup>75</sup> In the background the hotelkeeper, having an affair with the Virginian, is watching from her window. 'Her lips were faintly parted, and no woman's eyes ever said more plainly: "I am one of your possessions."<sup>76</sup> Not only is he Master of horse and rope. The notion of mastery also includes his woman.

In the chapter *Progress of the Lost Dog* the relationship between the 'lower male' cowboy Shorty and his horse is depicted as that of Master and his subordinate. Shorty is forced to part with his horse because of financial difficulties and sells his horse to Balaam. On leaving, Shorty walks over to his horse Pedro. 'And the master petted his pony...'<sup>77</sup> Once again imagery of mastery is used in portraying Shorty as 'the master sitting in the wagon.'<sup>78</sup> Wister in his portrayals of the relationship between man and his horse uses the same imagery

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<sup>74</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 101.

<sup>75</sup> Wister, Owen, p 42.

<sup>76</sup> Wister, Owen, p 42.

<sup>77</sup> Wister, Owen, p 194.

<sup>78</sup> Wister, Owen, p 196.

as when depicting the relationship between man and his woman. On reading the passage where Balaam abuses Pedro our emotions are evoked and stirred by the disgusting treatment Pedro receives by Balaam, Pedro's new Master.

“Ah, rubbish!” said Balaam. “They're all the same. Not a bastard one but's laying for his chance to do for you. Some'll buck you off, and some'll roll with you, and some'll fight you with their forefeet... You've got to keep them afraid of you.”<sup>79</sup>

The lips of a dominant and abusive male recollecting his encounters with the female sex are pronouncing these words. The whole passage is a metonymical displacement also giving associations of women being depicted as whores. ‘Some'll buck you off’ can be applied to describe a situation when the male sex is denied sex. ‘Some'll roll with you, and some'll fight you with their forefeet’ can be rewritten to sound like ‘some'll role with you in the sack, and some'll fight you with their fore teeth.’ A woman who encounters a personality disorder as that displayed by Balaam will at some time desire to escape. Only through creating fear in the Other will he succeed in the masculine sexuality triumph of his environment.

If the analogy of the imagery of the Other, in this instance of the horse and the female sex, is true, then one can imply that it is the female sex who is man's real enemy. Jane Tompkins has suggested that the female cackling and emotional female outbursts remind the hero of the child within.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, semiotic and emotional aspects of the female language trigger man's repressed self. It is too painful to face the lack of the little boy within. Silence serves as a defence mechanism and protects the silent one from inspection. Instead, the cowboy hero projects onto women traits that he cannot face in his own being. Jane Tompkins underlines that by ‘becoming a solid object, not only is man relieved of the burden of relatedness and responsiveness to others, he is relieved of consciousness itself, which is to say, primarily, consciousness of self.’<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Tompkins emphasizes that:

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<sup>79</sup> Wister, Owen, p 199.

<sup>80</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 153.

<sup>81</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 57.

In the process by which people learn to give and receive blows in Westerns, animals play a central though unobserved part. The horses...that men variously drive, command, subdue, and often kill—though they often rescue and love them as well—are an analogue to the child within.<sup>82</sup>

By silencing the Other, in this instance the horse Pedro, the male sex is silencing the self and the child within. The Virginian once in the novel pronounced that you could tell a man by how he treated his horse. However, you can also tell a man by how he treats his woman. Thus, how he treats his woman is how he treats the self and the child within.

Wister's feelings toward the female sex are so hostile and twisted that they cannot be expressed in any but an oblique and displaced form.<sup>83</sup> The notion of male dominance as in the case of Balaam would be too horrible to digest if Wister had changed the passage by literally shifting out the image of the horse with the image of the female sex. The descriptions of the physical abuse executed by Balaam onto Pedro are heartbreaking. Moreover, the body language of Pedro gives one connotations of the body language of an abused and broken human being. After Balaam had displayed a series of violent attacks, he mounted Pedro who 'walked mechanically forward.'<sup>84</sup> Wister goes on portraying a broken and denigrated horse:

...and the monstrosity was wrought. Pedro sank motionless, his head rolling flat on the earth. Balaam was jammed beneath him. The man had struggled to his feet before the Virginian reached the spot, and the horse then lifted his head and turned it piteously round.<sup>85</sup>

The Virginian comes to Pedro's rescue as he does several times when rescuing his heroine. A puzzling question arises when contemplating the imagery of mastery. Wister obviously does not approve of the dominant, violent, and destructive behaviour displayed by Balaam. The fact that Wister employs the male protagonist in the rescuing scene is proof of Wister's disapproval. Still the main plot of the novel revolves around the power struggle between the sexes and the final surrender of the heroine to her Master. Pedro seems so far to have been completely broken. Interpreting the body language of a subject is important when attempting to grasp the truth of what is being communicated. Even though a subject does not use words

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<sup>82</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 122.

<sup>83</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 140.

<sup>84</sup> Wister, Owen, p 202.

<sup>85</sup> Wister, Owen, p 203.

to communicate, the subject's body language might tell a story of fear, control, and domination, which has the effect of subduing, quieting, and silencing the subject. The body language of Pedro reinforces the notion of being silenced as he walks 'mechanically' and sinks 'motionless'. Balaam ultimately puts Pedro to sleep. Pedro as the image of the colonized Other has been silenced. A parallel and similar plot has not been completely settled between the hero and the heroine. An interesting observation in this respect is the fact that Wister wrote the story of *'Balaam and Pedro'* in 1892, the same year he wrote the story of *'Emily'*. This reinforces that Wister was preoccupied with solving the issues and power struggle of the male and female sex. Why is it then of utmost importance for the male sex to master his environment, his horse, his woman, circumstance, and ultimately the self?

#### **2.4.0 The Other and the Discourse of the Master**

Wister throughout his novel attempts to unravel the dominance of men over women. Wister creates passages of women being completely left out of the picture, occupying minor roles staged in the background, or being subjected to chivalric virtues of the male protagonist, which all enhance the superiority of the male sex. The chapter *Em'ly* highlights Wister's mocking and belittling views of women. Wister continues to use the literary technique of humour to denigrate women in other parts of the novel as well. Notions of mastery and subordination are underlying themes that appear in overt and disguised form. The power struggle between the sexes is ultimately personified through the gender conflict revolving around the hero and the heroine. Unlike traditional Westerns the heroine is given prominent space in Wister's novel. Molly Stark is an unusual woman for her period. Tompkins describes her as being 'a man and a woman rolled in one, and therefore perfect.'<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Molly is staged in the novel mainly to enhance the image of mastery of the male protagonist. Owen

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<sup>86</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 139.

Wister attempts and succeeds to silence and marginalize the female sex by ultimately positioning Molly Stark as the Other in the discourse of the Master.

Wister goes at length to portray the male protagonist simultaneously as he introduces women of lesser moral character figuring in the background. In his introductory chapters Wister employs the literary technique of juxtaposition. The very first woman in the novel mentioned by name is Ella Watson called 'Cattle Kate.'<sup>87</sup> She had been accused of bigamy and prostitution.<sup>88</sup> A second woman is a waitress. And yet a third woman, the hotelkeeper, is staged and given a body language, which demonstrates her being spellbound by the male protagonist. She is his to do with what he pleases. In the passage involving Uncle Hughie, the Virginian confronts Uncle Hughie with the names of all the women he allegedly had married or attempted to marry. These women are introduced in a section of the novel where the narrator portrays the Virginian as the perfect male protagonist. He is in control and excellent at using his rope. The narrator portrays him as a man who knows his business.<sup>89</sup> Wister through the narrator depicts the perfect male protagonist and a born gentleman. By giving the Virginian a radiating description,<sup>90</sup> Wister in his opening pages already manages to suggest the hegemony of the male sex. By juxtaposing the repeatedly negative remarks on domestic life and the women of lesser moral character with the Virginian, a striking contrast emerges. This contrast reinforces the attitude and conviction that women are of lesser value.

Women were given roles in Westerns to enhance the brilliance of the male protagonist. The cowboy hero would ride in displaying chivalric virtues. Even though Molly is given a significant role in Wister's novel, the first encounter between the Virginian and Molly is that of his rescuing her and sweeping her onto his horse. She responds by clinging to him. This first encounter adds to verifying that the masculine sex is superior to that of the weaker

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<sup>87</sup> Wister, Owen, p 13.

<sup>88</sup> Wister, Owen, p 345.

<sup>89</sup> Wister, Owen, p 12.

<sup>90</sup> Wister, Owen, pp 12, 13.

female sex. More incidents occur subsequently underlining the aspect of male superiority. On a walk at Judge Henry's farm the party walking encounters a skunk.

"Oh, where is it? Don't let me see it!" screamed Molly. And at this deeply feminine remark, the Virginian looked at her with such a smile, that had I been a woman, it would have made me his to do what he pleased with on the spot.<sup>91</sup>

The Virginian is triggered in this episode. He perceives Molly as being vulnerable, weak, and subject to his chivalric instincts. And thus, he smiles. She acts like a helpless child who needs to be protected and rescued. The episode enhances the notion of superiority again and we have an instance of the rescuing element that supports the notion of the hierarchical order of the sexes and the male sex occupying the Master position in the Master's discourse. Mrs. Taylor tells Molly that the Virginian came to Molly's rescue at the beginning of her arrival at Bear Creek.<sup>92</sup> The outlaw Trampas had spoken disrespectfully of Molly whereby the Virginian spoke in her defence. The fact that the Virginian would never tell Molly that he had attained an enemy because of her, underlines his noble integrity. When Molly and the Virginian's roles are reversed and it is Molly that rescues the Virginian, he points to the unnatural and illogical aspect of the situation and tells her that she has "got to be the man through all this mess."<sup>93</sup> Five pages later the doctor has taken charge of doctoring the Virginian and reaffirms the words spoken by the male protagonist. The doctor tells her that 'she had not done a woman's part, but a man's part.'<sup>94</sup>

Women and children are there to be rescued and reinforce their position of the Other in the discourse of the Master. They are staged there to enhance the brilliance of the male sex and not vice versa. The Virginian finally writes a letter to Molly's mother telling her that they are engaged to be married. He has experienced life in a manner too tough for Molly to hear and admits not telling her because 'there are so many things too dark for a girl like her to hear

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<sup>91</sup> Wister, Owen, p 167.

<sup>92</sup> Wister, Owen, p 221.

<sup>93</sup> Wister, Owen, p 218.

<sup>94</sup> Wister, Owen, p 223.

about.<sup>95</sup> The Virginian wants to make a good impression and depicts an image of his being there for Molly. The element of protection is present also here.

The element of mastery is definitely an underlying theme throughout the novel that surfaces both overtly and covertly. I have already dealt with more covert aspects of mastery in my subchapter of *Balaam and Pedro*. The very first woman who actually appears in the novel enhancing the element of mastery is described as being pretty. A beautiful woman is a delight to the male sex and thus serves his needs. The woman is depicted from the perspective of the male sex and is as such an instance of the language of men portraying the female sex. The ‘pretty woman refilled his cup without his asking her’<sup>96</sup> suggests that more than one need is being filled. The male protagonist is the Master whereas the female is there to serve him as a servant or slave would serve her Master. The waitress is actually the owner of the establishment and probably the same hotelkeeper that is in love with the Virginian. Lacan posits that there is no neutral representation of reality as the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary and unstable. The pretty woman ‘refilled his cup’ suggests also that she as his mistress refills his cup sexually as well. In the case of pouring coffee, she refills his cup automatically ‘without his asking her.’ The patriarchal order of Wister’s period is implemented in the simple actions of the waitress and hotelkeeper. Judith Butler would comment on this very episode by pointing to how social identity is socially constructed and reinforced through the repetitions of everyday activities. Women’s behaviour have been internalised and naturalised. Even though the hotelkeeper is an image of a strong woman running her own business, the simple act of pouring coffee gives associations of a servant filling the demands of its Master. Automatically, she carries out the chores of daily life. The aspects of male dominance to female subordination are evident also here.

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<sup>95</sup> Wister, Owen, p 244.

<sup>96</sup> Wister, Owen, p 21.

Wister is not content with just employing the image of Em'ly as a mode of ridicule and mockery. Several episodes are elaborated to enhance the mocking and belittling aspects of the female sex. The prank the Virginian staged by exchanging babies at the Swinton barbecue deserves attention. Here Wister uses humour to mock and ridicule the role of motherhood. Whereas the fathers of the exchanged babies saw the mirthful side of the adventure, the women 'cried for vengeance, but they cried in vain, and were met with smiles.'<sup>97</sup> Women were not taken seriously. Like the chapter of *Em'ly*, this episode reinforces the notion of women being hysterical, being out of control, and making a lot of noise for nothing. Thus, the female sex holds the hysterical position of the Other in the discourse of the Master. The women's cries for vengeance are in vein and do not dislodge the position of the male sex. Wister's negative attitudes towards women are also revealed in the next passage.

The fathers were but of moderate assistance; it was the mothers who did the heavy work; and by ten o'clock some unsolved problems grew so delicate that a ladies' caucus was organized in a private room, - no admittance for men, - and what was done there I can only surmise.<sup>98</sup>

The whole episode serves as a displaced attack on the radical uprising of women. The mothers are joining forces. They organize 'a ladies' caucus' excluding their husbands. The women are in charge solving the baby-switching issue, but they are met with indulgence and smiles.

Another instance where women are subjected to ridicule and mockery is found in chapter *The Game and the Nation—Last Act*. The Virginian on his cattle trip to North Dakota tells the Tall Tale of how a botanist's wife saved his life after his being bit by a snake. In this passage Wister portrays the woman as conducting herself better than a man. Using an Indian medicine-stone, she managed to suck out the poison. The Virginian says:

"And I thanked the woman for saving my life that capable and keeping her head that cool. I never knowed how excited she had been till afterward. She was awful shocked."<sup>99</sup>

As a reply to a comment by the narrator he replies:

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<sup>97</sup> Wister, Owen, p 89.

<sup>98</sup> Wister, Owen, p 88.

<sup>99</sup> Wister, Owen, pp 121, 122.



”No; she didn’t say anything to me. But when her next child was born, it had eight rattles.”<sup>100</sup>

What the Virginian is actually doing here is ridiculing his male audience who are portrayed being of lesser quality than himself. However, he does so by telling a silly and unbelievable story using a ridiculous woman as the vehicle of mockery. Even though the Virginian’s life was supposedly to have been spared because of the nursing hands of a woman, he changes focus and ridicules her. He underlines the surprising fact that she was ‘that capable and keeping her head that cool’ which was not normally true of women. In fact the Virginian tells how ‘excited’ and ‘shocked’ she had been afterwards, which reinforces how the female sex frequently is considered hysterical and out of control. Wister ultimately mocks and belittles the botanist’s wife in the humorous remark about the domesticity of bearing her next child who had ‘eight rattles’. The passage is funny, but the underlying message is depressing when the passage is added to all the other instances of humiliation and belittling of the female sex.

Wister continues to mock women in the same chapter. The Virginian is telling the Tall Tale of the ‘Tulare frawg ranch’ and tells his male audience that the frogs “sing like girls in the organ loft.”<sup>101</sup> Even though a Tall Tale in itself is silly and improbable, it is an invention of the male sex and thus the language of men. The simile is belittling, degrading, and offensive. A person’s voice is an intimate part of his/her personality and identity. Making fun of and comparing the singing voices of women with frogs is rude and insensitive. A woman’s voice expresses disbelief upon hearing the Virginian and his storytelling.

”Why George,” whispered a woman’s voice behind me, “he’s merely deceiving them! He’s merely making that stuff up out of his head.”

“Yes, my dear, that’s merely what he’s doing.”

“Well, I don’t see why you imagined I should care for this. I think I’ll go back.”<sup>102</sup>

Wister gives the woman a touch of being hysterical, acting up, and making noise for nothing. Her husband belittles her by responding indulgently as if he were speaking to a child. Jane

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<sup>100</sup> Wister, Owen, p 122.

<sup>101</sup> Wister, Owen, p 132.

<sup>102</sup> Wister, Owen, p 132.

Tompkins refers to Shere Hite<sup>103</sup> who states that ‘not talking to a woman on an equal level can be a way for a man to dominate a relationship.’<sup>104</sup>

As pointed out, Wister creates passages where women are completely left out of the picture or occupy minor roles staged in the background to enhance the superiority of the male sex. This very same passage of the ‘Tulare frawg ranch’ enhances this notion. ‘But her husband stayed. Indeed, the male crowd now was a goodly sight to see, how the men edged close, drawn by a common tie.’<sup>105</sup> Wister here successfully creates a situation in which the female sex is not meant to partake. Thus, we have an instance of women being pushed aside, marginalized, and silenced. In fact two pages later we can read that the husband wanted to shake hands with the Virginian and tells him that he wished ‘he (I) was going to have more of his (your) company.’<sup>106</sup> The husband overtly expresses the desire for companionship with a person of his own sex. He ignores and neglects his wife. The bond between men is of considerable importance. Wister successfully creates a passage that reinforces the notion that intellectually and companion-wise there are needs for the male sex to bond. The husband is open for the crude western, “manly” humour, which the wife, clearly, is not. Thus, Wister in this passage succeeds in excluding women.

Also the Virginian’s close relationship to his best friend Steve verifies once again the prominent space Wister gives the relationship between the male sexes. Before Steve is lynched for stealing cattle, he writes the Virginian a note addressing him with his first name Jeff. This is the first and only instance in the whole novel where the male protagonist is mentioned by his first name. Not even in the scenes where the heroine is involved does the birth name of her hero pop up. This fact emphasizes again how Owen Wister stresses the importance of companionship between men. During the period of Molly’s nursing the

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<sup>103</sup> Shere Hite, author of *Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress* (1987)

<sup>104</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 59.

<sup>105</sup> Wister, Owen, p 133.

<sup>106</sup> Wister, Owen, p 135.

Virginian back to life, she reads him a poem where the last line stresses ‘the need for a world of men.’<sup>107</sup> The Virginian comments on how much truth the poem reveals. Molly does not understand:

“Life ma’am. Whatever he was a-doin’ in the world of men. That’s a bed-rock piece, ma’am!”  
“Well, I don’t see why you think it’s so much better than some of the others.”  
“I could scarcely explain,” answered the man. “But that writer does know something.”<sup>108</sup>

Life itself is when a man partakes in activities in the companionship of men. The final remark hints that the author of the poem has a profound understanding of life itself. ‘Life’ is the world of men where women are not invited. Thus, again Wister manages to push aside, marginalize, and silence the female sex. The underlying depressive message reveals that women are there just to serve and fulfil the sexual needs of men. They are not invited into the companionship of ‘life’ itself. First, when man has refilled his intellectual cup among his own sex does he return to his wife for fulfilment of other desires.

Owen Wister was a genuine admirer of Theodore Roosevelt. Being much influenced by Roosevelt, Wister in the beginning of his novel writes a dedication to his friend. We know as a historical fact that Roosevelt urged for the establishment of hunting grounds for men. Here men would regress into a more primitive state, which again would positively enhance their development. Thus, they would be enriched and emerge as more qualified breeders. They would undergo a sense of self-transformation. By returning to civilization and mating with a female of aristocratic descent, they would ultimately be regenerated and emerge as finer and nobler human beings and become members of a superior human race which qualified them to partake in the ruling class of a society. Again the female is there for one purpose, namely to enhance the brilliance of the male sex.

Large portions of the novel are as stated dedicated to scenes where only men are present or where women occupy minor roles in the background setting. The relationship

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<sup>107</sup> Wister, Owen, p 229.

<sup>108</sup> Wister, Owen, pp 229, 230.

between the narrator Tenderfoot and the male protagonist is given much space in the novel. A special bond and friendship evolves between the two men. Much of their time together is spent in silence. Still, some of the most philosophical topics and underlying themes of the novel emerge in the solitude of the two men. Kristin Campbell points to how Lacan believes that ‘the paternal order structures the knowledge of the masculine subject.’<sup>109</sup> According to Lacan, philosophy is the supreme exposition of University knowledge.<sup>110</sup> Significantly, Lacan claims that the discourse of the University is what reinforces and justifies the discourse of the Master.<sup>111</sup> University knowledge produces a masculine position of a *knowing subject of consciousness*, which participates in the Master’s drive for power, control, and domination. The knowing Master seeks to master its object, its Other, and thus its unconscious. The Virginian in the solitude of men and in his encounter with the female protagonist emerges as a *knowing subject of mastery*.

Owen Wister continues to discriminate against women through the language and words he uses or leaves out. In chapter 18 “*Would you be a Parson?*” the male protagonist initiates a conversation with the narrator. The former is in a philosophical mood and moves to the issue of having children: “If ever I was to have a son or somebody I set store by...”<sup>112</sup> The female sex is devalued and not even worth mentioning. A daughter is reduced to a ‘somebody’. Wister through the Virginian’s mode of speech succeeds in discriminating the female sex and undermines even the importance of her existence.

Religion is an issue, which Wister deals with in his novel. The female sex is traditionally associated with religion and pretty actions and her main concern in life is at the centre of the world’s most important work of saving souls.<sup>113</sup> The Western, being an antithesis to the domesticity of the American Victorian novel, thus undermines the values of women. In

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<sup>109</sup> Campbell, Kristin, p 71.

<sup>110</sup> Campbell, Kristin, p 71.

<sup>111</sup> Campbell, Kristin, p 71.

<sup>112</sup> Wister, Owen, p 143.

<sup>113</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 38.

dealing with the issues of religion Wister explicitly attempts to rid the novel of Evangelical Protestantism. By doing so he also rids and undermines the novel of the values and virtues of the female sex. In *In a State of Sin* Wister creates a chapter that literally deals with organized religion. Dr. MacBride, an old fashioned Calvinist, has arrived and is lodging at Judge Henry's ranch. A church meeting is called together. Dr. MacBride has chosen a text about original sin and gives his congregation not a ray of hope.<sup>114</sup> The preacher is of the typical Puritan type that leaves one with little hope of salvation. Everyone dislikes the parson including Molly. The Virginian does not say much himself. Nevertheless, he agrees with everyone and deals with the situation. Dr. MacBride is planning to stay for another six days. By the next morning our male protagonist has swept the parson off the ranch by acting up and deceiving the man throughout the night. This incident illustrates how Wister attempts to rid the Western of evangelical Protestantism. By doing so he also succeeds in sweeping aside and marginalizing the ideals normally perpetuated by the domesticity of the nineteenth century sentimental Victorian female.<sup>115</sup>

The element of mastery involving the power struggle and the final conquest of the female sex is ultimately dealt with triumphantly through the successful courtship of Molly. The episode of the babies being switched around is the very one that initiates the real power struggle between the hero and heroine. The Virginian asks Molly to go riding with him and tells her she has “no babies this mawnin’ to be anxious after”<sup>116</sup> whereupon ‘Grandmother Stark flashed awake deep within the spirit of her descendent, and she made a haughty declaration of war.’<sup>117</sup> The obvious battle between the two is also verified through the language Wister uses to portray their verbal attempts to outwit each other:

She did not want him to go—and she wished to win her battle.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Wister, Owen, p 159.

<sup>115</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 39.

<sup>116</sup> Wister, Owen, p 90.

<sup>117</sup> Wister, Owen, p 90.

<sup>118</sup> Wister, Owen, p 91.

But he did not tremble in the least. Her fierceness filled him with delight, and the tender desire of ownership flooded through him.<sup>119</sup>

It was his second broadside. It left her crippled. She was silent.<sup>120</sup>

The Virginian was set on winning the battle and mastering his woman. He enjoys her fierceness and feels the ‘tender desire’ for her to be his. The elements of possession and of mastery are present. After his second broadside she is ‘crippled’ and ‘She was silent’. Here Wister explicitly spells out an instance of the heroine being silenced and thus positioned as the Other in the discourse of the Master.

The Virginian’s need to be in control continues, as does the power struggle between the hero and the heroine. Initially Molly sees herself as superior to the Virginian both by birth and culture. In chapter *The Sincere Spinster*, Molly is depicted differently compared to the women of lesser moral character. Wister gives Molly a prominent space in the novel by furnishing her with a history descending from the lady whose name she bore, Molly Stark, a name which means soft and strength. Molly in a sense is an image of the New Woman as she is ‘a man and a woman rolled into one.’<sup>121</sup> Jane Tompkins emphasises a relevant biographical note in the fact that Wister’s own wife Molly, was referred to by a friend as a “stirrer up, and reformer of all things wrong.”<sup>122</sup> The friend, Darwin Payne, ‘makes clear that Molly’s civic activism troubled Wister deeply, though he felt uneasy about his objections to it.’<sup>123</sup> Molly incarnates the masculine traits of the New Woman as she at least for two-thirds of the novel succeeds in taking control of her life. She *chooses* not to marry the man of her mother’s choice. She *chooses* to make her own money. And, she *chooses* to go West accepting the position as schoolmarm of Bear Creek.

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<sup>119</sup> Wister, Owen, p 91.

<sup>120</sup> Wister, Owen, p 91.

<sup>121</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 139.

<sup>122</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 140.

<sup>123</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 140.

Moreover, Molly is given an Eastern aristocratic genealogy that Wister presents as being of superior quality. The very fact of her aristocratic inheritance is part of what the Virginian admires and respects her for. Unlike the other loose women in the novel, Miss Mary Stark Wood is a lady who should be treated as such. Wister underlines the importance of the imagery of aristocracy and quality by introducing the passage of the ruthless and ‘manly’ Queen Elisabeth. The following passage displays the Virginian’s comments to Tenderfoot concerning Queen Elisabeth:

“Don’t you think you could have played poker with Queen Elisabeth?”  
“No; I expaict she’d have beat me,” he replied. “She was a lady.”<sup>124</sup>

At this point in the novel the male protagonist acknowledges his own shortcomings. Queen Elisabeth is the image of a strong woman representing power, class, culture, religion, and above all being ‘a lady’. The theme of quality and equality is prominent in the novel and linked to that of Social Darwinism. Wister goes at great length to unravel the ideas behind the notions of quality and equality.

When he was absent from her, and she could sit in her cabin and look at Grandmother Stark, and read home letters, then in imagination she found it easy to play the part which she had arranged to play regarding him—the part of the guide, and superior and indulgent companion. But when he was by her side, that part became a difficult one. Her woman’s fortress was shaken by a force unknown to her before.<sup>125</sup>

Molly has taken on the role of educating and civilizing the Virginian. Initially she takes on the role of being his superior guide. When the couple is apart, she has no trouble adjusting to her new role. When the Virginian is present, however, she has a hard time coping with his being in her presence. Wister indicates that this ‘force unknown to her’ can be linked to that of quality and superiority. The notion of quality and equality being linked to the ideas of the survival of the fittest can be exemplified in the comment given by the Virginian on finding the murdered body of the lower quality male Shorty. This might seem like a digression. However, the passage illustrates the importance of having to do things well. Although there is no natural

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<sup>124</sup> Wister, Owen, p 136.

<sup>125</sup> Wister, Owen, p 98.

harm in Shorty, he is killed because he is neither smart enough nor strong enough. The Virginian on encountering Shorty's dead body says that there was no natural harm in him, but "you must do a thing well in this country."<sup>126</sup> The Virginian has already proved his quality in several ways including his courtship to Molly. He is a man in upward movement and tells Molly that one day he will be her best scholar.<sup>127</sup> She believes that all men are born equal which the Virginian calls a bluff. In fact, the Virginian even questions if being born equal applies to women.

"All men are born equal," he now remarked slowly.  
"Yes," she quickly answered, with a combative flesh. "Well?"  
Maybe that don't include women?" he suggested.<sup>128</sup>

Here Wister literally marginalises and silences women suggesting that 'all men are born equal' does not include women, which effectually deprives women of equal rights and thus silences her. In a sense Wister redefines the Declaration of Independence. Richard Slotkin interprets Wister as elaborating the views of the Virginian into a new political doctrine.<sup>129</sup>

"It was through the Declaration of Independence that we Americans can acknowledge the eternal inequality of man"..."Let the best man win, whoever he is"..."That is America's word. That is true democracy. And true democracy and true aristocracy are one and the same thing."<sup>130</sup>

The marital union of the young couple unites true democracy and aristocracy. The Virginian has the qualities of being the perfect breeder and is in fact the image of the perfect male. He enters the scene displaying excellent control using the rope and outplays the other men in trying to tame a pony.<sup>131</sup> He is the supreme horse-rider and gunman. Furthermore, he is intelligent, handsome, gentle, and a true noble gentleman. He belongs to the ruling class and is the future hope of a prospering America. Molly contributes with the aristocratic genealogy needed for the Virginian to be regenerated and to emerge as the true nobleman he was always

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<sup>126</sup> Wister, Owen, p 274.

<sup>127</sup> Wister, Owen, p 100.

<sup>128</sup> Wister, Owen, p 98.

<sup>129</sup> Slotkin, Richard, *Gunfighter Nation*, p 101.

<sup>130</sup> Wister, Owen, p 101.

<sup>131</sup> Wister, Owen, p 11.



meant to be. Also here is another instance of male dominance and female subordination. The feminine qualities are there but to serve and enrich the male sex.

The power struggle between the couple continues as does Molly's civilizing attempts. In part of the novel their roles are reversed. She finds him wounded and nourishes him back to life. This incident changes their relationship. Molly grows to appreciate his inner qualities and believes that he is not subordinate to her. When the Virginian and Molly decide to inform her mother of their wedding plans, the Virginian actually beats Molly at her own game of letter-writing and 'greatly excelled the schoolmarm.'<sup>132</sup> Molly hesitates to tell the world about their engagement, but acknowledges that the Virginian is right about announcing their future plans:

Molly saw how true his instinct was here; and a little flame shot upward from the glow of her love and pride in him...She did not dare because—well, because she lacked a little faith. That is it, I am afraid. And for that sin she was her own punishment. For in this day and many days to come, the pure joy of her love was vexed and clouded, all through a little lack of faith; while for him, perfect in his faith, his joy was like crystal.<sup>133</sup>

This passage reveals that he is superior to Molly in other areas as well. Not only has he excelled her in letter-writing, but he is equipped with a sense of true instinct. By juxtaposing Molly's shifting lack of faith with the Virginian's perfect faith the Virginian emerges as the better person of the two. The Virginian no longer needs to be educated by Molly. The Virginian once pronounced that one day he would become her scholar.

She looked at him, and knew that she must step outside that reticence again. By love and her surrender to him their positions had been exchanged. He was not now, as through his long courting he had been, her half-obeying, half-refractory worshipper. She was no longer his half-indulgent, half-scornful superior. Her better birth and schooling that had been her weapons to keep him at his distance, or bring her off victorious in their encounters, had given way before the onset of the natural man himself. She knew her cowboy lover, with all he lacked, to be more than ever she could be... He was her worshipper still, but her master, too.<sup>134</sup>

By portraying their relationship in this manner Wister literally spells out the hierarchical order between the hero and the heroine. By realising that the Virginian is 'her master', Molly has been positioned as the Other in the discourse of the Master. The female protagonist has laid

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<sup>132</sup> Wister, Owen, p 240.

<sup>133</sup> Wister, Owen, p 238.

<sup>134</sup> Wister, Owen, p 292.

down her weapons. By becoming Molly's scholar, the Virginian emerges as a *knowing subject of mastery*, which justifies his right to control and master his Other. Molly has been tamed and broken as would eventually occur in the taming and breaking of a wild horse.

However, the couple's relationship is once more tested. Wister uses a passage, the dual scene with the outlaw Trampas, to ultimately subordinate the female sex. Molly begs the Virginian to not kill Trampas and threatens him by putting their marriage on line. The power struggle has been revived and she is performing her last weak attempts to avoid submission. She is asking too much. He cannot suppress his very own being, the man in him. He kills Trampas and returns to Molly finding her ready to capitulate and surrender once again.

Her lips were parted, and her eyes fixed on him, nor did she move, or speak... Thus did her New England conscience battle to the end, and, in the end, capitulate to love.<sup>135</sup>

Like the hotelkeeper, Molly's lips were parted and her eyes were fixed on the Virginian as if telling her hero that she was his possession. Moreover, she did not 'move, or speak.' Molly has finally given up and the last resisting kicks with her 'forelegs' have quieted down. She has ultimately capitulated and repositioned herself as the Other in the discourse of the Master. Like the horse Pedro, also Molly is silenced. Both horse and woman are images of the Other. Jane Tompkins writes that the novel seems infatuated with Molly for two-thirds of the length, but 'turns on her without warning near the end, reducing her to a status that is little better than that of Em'ly the hen.'<sup>136</sup> Tompkins explains that Molly is 'society's "happy" version of Em'ly; she is the hen who doesn't refuse the rooster, and so can assume her rightful place in the social order.'<sup>137</sup> It is necessary to rephrase Tompkins a bit. By not refusing the Virginian, Molly repositions herself as the Other in the symbolic social order of patriarchy and thus as the Other in the discourse of the Master.

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<sup>135</sup> Wister, Owen, p 314.

<sup>136</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 141.

<sup>137</sup> Tompkins, Jane, pp 140, 141.

## 2.5.0 Feminized and Sexual Imagery of the Landscape

An interesting aspect of my thesis is to dig into the mind of the male sex as to unravel the underlying unconscious motives for men to want to silence his mate. Why is it of utmost importance to silence women? Why is the male so opposed to the language of women? Tompkins explains that female cackling and emotional outbursts remind the hero of the child within.<sup>138</sup> Semiotic aspects of the female language trigger his repressed self, his inner being. Owen Wister had a complicated relationship with his mother. She was a dominating, controlling person, and somewhat indifferent emotionally. All human beings experience going through the stage of being separated from its nourishing parent. It is a painful process resulting in different degrees of sensations of lack and of something that is lost forever, namely the complete superabundant *jouissance* of the mother's body. No one would consciously want to rid oneself of the sensation of oneness of the Imaginary stage filled with harmony, warmth, and security. In the separation process some succeed more than others. It is, however, most of the time too painful to face the lack of the child within. In fact, Wister gives us literally a peek of the child. The lynching scene of the Virginian's best friend, Steve, emotionally affects the Virginian to such a degree that the child within is awoken:

"I expect in many grown-up men you'd call sensible there's a little boy sleepin'—the little kid they once was—that still keeps his fear of the dark. You mentioned the dark yourself yesterday. Well, this experience has woke up that kid in me, and blamed if I can coax the little cuss to go to sleep again! I keep a-telling him daylight will sure come, but he keeps a-crying and holding on to me."<sup>139</sup>

The little boy crying is so painful that the Virginian attempts to bottle up the pain. This is what most Westerns do and as such this passage is unusual for most Westerns. The Virginian does not succeed in quieting the little boy as he 'keeps a-crying and holding on' to him. Jane Tompkins explains that Western fiction silences women and treats the male sex as solid objects so that 'man is relieved of the burden of relatedness and responsiveness to others, he is

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<sup>138</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 153.

<sup>139</sup> Wister, Owen, p 272.

relieved of consciousness itself, which is to say, primarily, consciousness of self.<sup>140</sup> It is of utmost importance for the male sex to be Master of self so as to avoid the unpleasantness and degrading experience of facing the Other within his own being.

The hardest task of my thesis is to unravel the unconscious elements of *The Virginian*. Are there any passages that reveal the unconscious elements that prove what I am seeking? Are there any sections that verify a longing to reunite with the maternal and nourishing parent that proves that the male sex is trying to block out the lack deep within? Castration occurs being the operation when jouissance is drained from the body representing something that is lost forever. A kernel of jouissance cannot be drained away remaining a force within language. Even though the Symbolic order of language will attempt to disguise the existence of jouissance there will be instances of unconnected, free-floating, meaningless signifiers or words that are completely saturated by jouissance. The subject's entrance into the Symbolic realm opens up the unconscious. Dreams, fantasies, slips of the tongue etc. are unconscious formations according to both Freud and Lacan. These unconscious formations belong to the Symbolic order of language and thus help to open up the unconscious. The unconscious element bears the trace of the Name-of-the-Father, which is coupled with the instance of castration and drainage of jouissance. The repressed desire for the symbiotic unity with the mother creates the unconscious. In one sense the unconscious is desire.<sup>141</sup>

As pointed to in my introduction, Annette Kolodny has attempted to reveal this notion of the male connection with the virginal paradise image of the New World. Already in chapter *Deep into the Cattle Land* Wister reinforces this notion:

Sardines were called for, and potted chicken, and devilled ham; a sophisticated nourishment, at first sight, for these sons of the sage-bush. But portable ready-made food plays of necessity a great part in the opening of a new country. These picnic pots and cans were the first trophies that Civilization dropped on Wyoming's virgin soil. The cow-boy is now gone...but the empty sardine box lies rusting over the face of the Western earth.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 57.

<sup>141</sup> Moi, Toril, p 101.

<sup>142</sup> Wister, Owen, p 37.

The feminized imagery of the connection with ‘Wyoming’s virgin soil’, the virginal image of the New World, and ‘these sons of the sage-bush’ is striking. The trophies that stick out as images and evidence of the masculine mastery of the landscape are there as in the image of ‘the empty sardine box’ being an image of something being used and cast away. Wister in his novel uses a feminized erotic imagery when depicting the landscape. In chapter *With Malice Aforethought* Wister portrays how ‘in the virgin wilderness the scars of new-scraped water ditches began to appear, and the first wire fences.’<sup>143</sup> Again the feminized imagery is apparent and juxtaposed to ‘the scars of new-scraped water ditches’ and ‘the first wire fences’ being an image of mastery and control. The metaphorical implications are frightening.

There are many examples in Wister’s novel of imagery where the wilderness is feminized. He speaks of the country in terms of the female body with ‘its folds and curvings.’<sup>144</sup> A passage that subconsciously depicts sexually erotic elements is taken from the scene when the Virginian leads his heroine to the island. Knowing that the Virginian has just married Molly and brought her to the place of their honeymoon substantiates that sexual erotic desires are reflected onto the landscape as a metonymical displacement of desire.

She looked, and saw the island, and the water folding it with ripples and with smooth spaces. The sun was throwing upon the pine boughs a light of deepening red gold, and the shadow of the fishing rock lay over a little bay of quiet water and sandy shore. In this fore-running glow of the sunset, the pasture spread like emerald; for the dry touch of summer had not come near it. He pointed upward to the high mountains which they had approached, and showed her where the stream led into the first folding.<sup>145</sup>

This whole passage radiates because of the sexual erotic undertones. ‘Ripples’ can easily be mistaken for nipples. ‘Smooth spaces’ gives connotations to the private parts of the female sex. ‘A light of deepening red gold’ reminds one of blushing and the physical changes in a person when sexually aroused. ‘The fishing rock’ can be mistaken for the fishing rod being an image of the phallus. ‘The pasture spread like emerald’ indicates the female body getting

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<sup>143</sup> Wister, Owen, p 298.

<sup>144</sup> Wister, Owen, p 262.

<sup>145</sup> Wister, Owen, p 317.

ready for intercourse. The flowing of fluids when mating is suggested by the phrase ‘for the dry touch of summer had not yet come near.’ ‘The stream into the first folding’ suggests the imagery of fluids and of sexual penetration. This whole passage radiates with the notion of romance as sexual erotic unconscious desires are projected onto the landscape.

Wister projects onto the landscape the inner desires of the masculine sex. Lacan’s elaborating work on Freud’s emphasis on dreams allowing repressed sexual elements to surface is important to my thesis. Lacan focused on how a text should be treated and analysed as a dream. The subconscious desires of an author will in a text like in a dream surface and reveal his/her inner being. In the attempt of unravelling the hidden meanings of a text one might go too far projecting onto the text meanings that are not there. I need to take that risk. Wister spells out literally and in disguised form the feminized and sexualized imagery of the beautiful island to which our hero brings his heroine on their honeymoon:

So many visits to this island had he made, and counted so many hours of revery spent in its haunting sweetness, that the spot had come to seem his own. It belonged to no man, for it was deep in the unsurveyed and virgin wilderness; neither had he ever made his camp here with any man, nor shared with any the intimate delight which the place gave him.<sup>146</sup>

‘The haunting sweetness,’ ‘the unsurveyed and virgin wilderness’, and ‘the intimate delight’ are all images that easily can be associated with and used to describe the sensations that are awoken when a man and woman are experiencing the intimacy of life.

Another passage that reveals the desire for the symbiotic unity with the primordial Mother, deals with Tenderfoot who has set out to meet the Virginian.

I was steeped in a revery as the primal earth; even thoughts themselves had almost ceased motion. To lie down with wild animals, with elk and deer, would have made my waking dream complete; and since such a dream could not be, the cattle around the deserted buildings, mere dots as yet across separating space, were my proper companions for this evening.

...And to leave behind all noise and mechanisms, and set out at ease, slowly, with one packhorse, into the wilderness, made me feel that the ancient earth was indeed my mother and that I had found her again after being lost among houses, customs, and restraints.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Wister, Owen, p 315.

<sup>147</sup> Wister, Owen, p 265.

The beauty of the wilderness takes him in and we sense the desire and longing to be enveloped, to become one with nature which includes the animals of the woods. The noises of civilization, 'the cattle' and 'all noise and mechanisms,' interrupt his dream. He yearns to be reunited with 'the ancient earth,' his mother. The notion of the male sex having been lost and separated from the primal maternal parent is reinforced. Moreover, the notion of being lost because of 'customs' and 'restraints' suggests the alienating effect of the Mirror stage disrupting the Imaginary sensation of oneness of the maternal body. The paternal parent signified by the Name-of-the-Father, breaks up the dyadic unity of mother and child, and plunges the child into the Symbolic order of restraints and socialisation.

Wister ultimately portrays the desire for the superabundant jouissance of the primordial Mother in the scene of the honeymoon island and the newly-weds. The couple are watching a little wild animal rolling in the sand whereupon the bridegroom opens his heart:

"I am like that fellow," he said dreamily. "I have often done the same." And stretching slowly his arms and legs, he lay full length upon his back, letting his head rest upon her. "If I could talk his animal language I could talk to him," he pursued. "And he would say to me: 'Come and roll on the sands. Where's the use of fretting? What's the gain in being a man? Come roll on the sands with me.' That's what he would say."... "the trouble is, I am responsible. If that could only be forget forever by you and me!"...he...went on...dreamily. "Often I have camped here, it has made me want to become the ground, become the trees, mix with the whole thing. Not know myself from it. Never unmix again. Why is that?"<sup>148</sup>

Here Wister depicts how the male sex yearns and longs to be reunited with his mother and how he wishes to regress back into the Imaginary stage when the child does not have a perception of itself being separate from its mother.

He sighed with supreme quiet and happiness, and seemed to stretch his length closer to the earth. And so he lay, and talked to her as he had never talked to any one, not even to himself. Thus she learned secrets of his heart new to her: ... "What I did not know at all," he said, "was the way a man can be pining for—for this—and never guess what is the matter with him." ...she looked down at him and the wonderful change that had come over him, like a sunrise. Was this dreamy boy the man of two days ago? It seemed a distance immeasurable; yet it was two days only since that wedding eve when she had shrunk from him as he stood fierce and implacable...She had seen destruction like sharp steel glittering in his eyes. Were these the same eyes? Was this youth with his black head of hair in her lap the creature with whom men did not trifle...? Where had the man melted away to in this boy? For as she looked at him, he might have been no older than nineteen to-day. Not even at their first meeting—that night

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<sup>148</sup> Wister, Owen, pp 320, 321.

when his freakish spirit was uppermost—had he looked so young. This change their hours upon the island had wrought, filling his face with innocence.<sup>149</sup>

The Virginian is experiencing the sensation of oneness. He stretches his length closer to the earth so that he might melt and unite even more. He is in a state of supreme quiet and happiness. Molly does not understand what has happened to him and neither does he. He has in a sense gone through a transformation and is no longer the man she remembers. The ‘innocence’ of his face suggests that the child within has returned once more. This time the little boy is not afraid and unhappy as he was when he was awoken by the grief due to the death and betrayal of Steven. This time is quite the contrary. The underlying sensation of oneness, love, security, satisfaction, and recognition suggests an intermingling of erotic and maternal elements going hand in hand. Both the island and the heroine have the embedded aura of innocence and virginity about them. Our hero experiences the intimacy with both his bride and Mother Earth. We have been given an insight into the soul of the male sex. As he has longed to become one with his wife, he yearns and longs to be reunited with the maternal parent to escape and hide from all the responsibilities of having to cope with the paternal restraints of the Symbolic realm. Here on the island he has found his primal maternal wild that he has dreamt of reinforced and triggered by the intimacy between husband and wife. The Virginian’s unfilled desire and lack are gratified by becoming symbolically reunited with the primal maternal parent. This last passage ultimately verifies what I have been searching for, namely the longing and desire of the male sex to reunite with the maternal parent in order to block out the lack of the little child within.

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<sup>149</sup> Wister, Owen, p 321.



## 3.0.0 The Silencing of Jane

### 3.1.0 Zane Grey

Zane Grey (1872-1932) and Owen Wister grew up in a different socio-economic environments, Wister being the more privileged. Both lived in a sense what they wrote. Jane Tompkins points to how fiction and fact interpenetrated continually when considering their lives in relation to their work.<sup>150</sup> Zane Grey followed his father's footsteps and earned a degree in dentistry. He opened a dental practice mainly to put bread on the table. Like Wister, he did not pursue his career for long. He soon abandoned dentistry completely and started writing full time. The first years were so hard financially that he partly lived off his wife's inheritance. Grey and his wife spent their honeymoon in the Grand Canyon. Like Wister, Grey loved the West and he returned regularly. These trips were of immense importance for his authorship as he recorded his adventures into novels.

*Riders of the Purple Sage*, published in 1912, was Zane Grey's first bestseller novel. By the time of his death he had published nearly sixty novels of the West, most of them if not all still in print. Hollywood converted dozens of his novels into Western films. In the last decade universities have started to treat Grey with more respect by including his novels in courses of modern or Western literature. Steve Goode in his article "The King of Westerns" refers frequently to Thomas H. Pauly, a professor of English, who has written the large scale biography *Zane Grey: His Life, His Adventures, His Women*. Mr. Pauly makes use of letters and journals previously not available to other Grey scholars. Mr. Pauly 'delves into aspects of Grey's life that have been largely ignored or dealt with in passing, Grey's perpetual womanizing and his deep lengthy depressions.'<sup>151</sup>

...there exists "an enormous, totally unknown cache of photographs taken by Grey of nude women" throughout his life...Grey is there too, naked and engaged in sex. Grey's long-

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<sup>150</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 7.

<sup>151</sup> Goode, Steve, 2005, "The King of Westerns", The Washington Times.

suffering wife, Dolly, knew of the affairs. How could she not? Many were with relatives of hers or women she knew.<sup>152</sup>

The womanizing and depression aspects of Grey's life reveal a somewhat disturbed personality. Again we observe a similarity with Owen Wister. These observations of a troubled Grey comply with what Jane Tompkins writes in her *West of Everything*. Writing for Grey 'was a matter not just *representing* deeds of valor but of performing them.'<sup>153</sup> He had to be fully engaged in his task of writing and sweated out the novels, one by one.

Being, acting, and writing formed a perfect continuum: as you were, so would you write. Since his own idea of greatness was modeled on the heroes of adventure stories, he describes the writer as a kind of gallant explorer, who "looks at things so keenly as to find unknown characteristics, unsuspected points of view, secret depths, the life & soul of natural facts."<sup>154</sup>

Grey's diaries reveal 'agonizing struggles to produce, superhuman effort, self-flagellation, exhaustion, exhilaration, triumph, and release.'<sup>155</sup> Tompkins points to how Grey at times experiences 'drastic changes of mood on a daily and even hourly basis.'<sup>156</sup>

A hyena lying in ambush—that is my black spell!—I conquered one mood only to fall prey to the next. And there have been days of hell. Hopeless, black, morbid, sickening, exaggerated, mental disorder...It took a day—a whole endless day of crouching in a chair, hating self and all, the sunshine, the sound of laughter, and then I wandered about like a lost soul, or a man who was conscious of imminent death...and there was pain in my heart.<sup>157</sup>

The emotional pain involved in Grey's act of writing is striking. Tompkins writes that Grey was a man of self-discipline and he believed that a writer must have strong and noble convictions about life. For my purpose, these observations are important considering my psychoanalytic and Lacanian reading of *Rider's of the Purple Sage*. He obviously put his soul into his writing and literally performs the act of writing with his whole body and psyche. The experience of pain is present in *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Both Wister and Grey were at times tormented souls. This aspect was crucial and necessary for them to become the exceptional authors they both turned out to be. Like Wister, Grey wrote romantic novels.

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<sup>152</sup> Goode, Steve, "The King of Westerns".

<sup>153</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 164.

<sup>154</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 164.

<sup>155</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 165.

<sup>156</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 165.

<sup>157</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 165.

Tompkins emphasizes *Riders of the Purple Sage* as a novel of strong passion where ‘Grey’s canvas is the cosmos, and everything can be pigment: blood, wind, buttes, bullets, tears.’<sup>158</sup>

Passion as a part of his life is projected onto his novels. The time of writing his novel was not a time for overtly sexual descriptions. However, the vitality and the desire for *jouissance* runs through his novel as metonymical displacements conveying Grey’s repressed desires, which are projected onto the landscape and his female characters.

### **3.2.0 The Silencing of Mormon Women**

A question arises to why *Riders of the Purple Sage* became so popular and widely read. It is important for my thesis to give a short historical account of what was happening with issues concerning women at the time of Grey’s novel. These insights shed light on the plots of the novel and explain the novel’s relevance in the beginning of the twentieth century.

The New Woman of the early 1900’s was the centre of debates. Women were being transformed into ‘working girls’ and ‘career women’. The New Woman being a man and woman rolled into one aligns with these new positions for women. Accordingly, debates of birth control, new divorce and property laws, prostitution, and suffragism were launched. Tens of thousands of independent, mobile, urban women joined the working force. The issue of sexual immorality was at stake. ‘A social action movement developed that became known as the ‘Purity Crusade’, organized by a loose federation of women’s groups, former abolitionists, temperance, associations, and ministers, all concerned with the regeneration of American sexual morality through public means.’<sup>159</sup> The Social Purity movement had conflicting agendas. On the one hand, they hoped ‘to grant all women more autonomy in sexual matters and to abolish prostitution as a privileged outlet for men.’<sup>160</sup> On the other hand,

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<sup>158</sup> Tompkins, Jane, pp 157, 158.

<sup>159</sup> Mitchell, Lee Clark, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, p xxv.

<sup>160</sup> Mitchell, Lee Clark, p xxv.

‘they struggled to control young working women whose sexual behavior they described as ‘clandestine prostitution’.<sup>161</sup> An assumption at the time was that lower-class females were against their will being led into prostitution and middle-class daughters were being influenced and distancing themselves from older standards. Reports confirmed (with little or no evidence) that for some decades a vast number of women moved from country to country in the sole purpose of prostitution. In 1904 a treaty signed by 13 countries including the USA pledged that they would fight what was known as the white slave trade.<sup>162</sup> A year before Congress passed the White Slave Traffic Act, a genre appeared known as the white slavery tract. Lee Clark Mitchell writes that ‘such tracts were a fictional species of salacious vice commission report that detailed how innocent girls became prostitutes not because of low wages, but because of a powerful, all-encompassing conspiracy controlled by foreigners.’<sup>163</sup> The genre drew on the old Indian captivity narrative. Instead of women being abducted by Indians and disappearing in the wilderness, young rural girls were abducted to the urban wilderness and held sexually against their will. The genre contained elements of silence and conspiracy. A girl in the grips of her abductors had little or no chance of escape.

In the midst of this era Grey rewrites the white slavery tracts in *Riders of the Purple Sage* and inserts instead the equally ruthless Mormons. Their practice of polygamy was likely to promote and enforce enslavement of Mormon women. Grey employs several separate plots of women being abducted; Lassiter’s sister Milly Erne is taken by Bishop Dyer and later her daughter is also abducted by the same man; Fay, Jane’s adoptive daughter, is kidnapped by the Elder Tull and his men; Milly’s daughter Bess is shot by Venters and hidden from her foster parent, the outlaw Oldring.

The Mormon plot involving silence, conspiracy, abduction of women, religious indoctrination, abuse, and polygamy is apparent. Grey himself was deeply concerned with the

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<sup>161</sup> Mitchell, Lee Clark, p xxvi.

<sup>162</sup> Mitchell, Lee Clark, p xxvii.

<sup>163</sup> Mitchell, Lee Clark, p xxvii.

trials of Mormon women and hated how Mormons treated their women. Using Lacanian terminology Mormon men were Masters in the discourse of the Master. Their women were enslaved occupying the position of the Other. Lacan when first introducing the term *jouissance*, he uses it in discussions of the dialectic between the Master and the slave. When the Master puts the slave to work, the slave produces objects, which only the Master can possess and enjoy.<sup>164</sup> Mitchell writes that Mormon women are ‘reduced to a supine position, serving as little more than pliant receptacle for male lust.’<sup>165</sup> Jane Withersteen is put under hard pressure to become one of Mormon Tull’s many wives. Even Tull’s wife, Mary Brandt, tries to persuade Jane to marry Tull and become one of them.

“But, Mary, I don’t love Tull,” said Jane stubbornly.

“I don’t blame you for that. But Jane Withersteen, you’ve got to choose between the love of man and the love of God. It’s not easy. The kind of happiness you want I wanted once. I never got it, nor will you, unless you throw away your soul...Marry Tull. It’s your duty as a Mormon. You’ll feel no rapture as his wife—but think of Heaven! Mormon women don’t marry for what they expect on earth. Take up the cross, Jane. Remember your father found Amber Spring, built these old houses, brought Mormons here, and fathered them. You are the daughter of Withersteen!”<sup>166</sup>

Mormon women silently accepted their cross. Here we have an instance of the Hysteric silently protesting the oppression of women. Lacan’s discourse of the Hysteric is predominantly attributed to the female sex. Kristin Campbell refers to the feminist Maria Ramas who argues ‘that the hysteric silently protests the oppression of women by taking up a position of inarticulate and passive resistance, thereby participating in traditional feminine protest of mute victimhood.’<sup>167</sup> Mormon women in Grey’s novel have silently suffered the injustices of the patriarchal order of the male sex. The protests of the Mormon women in Grey’s novel are in vain. They do not dislodge the position of the Master. Mormon women are images of slaves giving up their earthly pleasure or *jouissance* hoping for a reward in heaven.

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<sup>164</sup> Nobus, Dany, p 3.

<sup>165</sup> Mitchell, Lee Clark, p xxix.

<sup>166</sup> Grey, Zane, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, p 63.

<sup>167</sup> Campbell, Kristin, page 78.

In Grey's novel there are many instances of how Mormon women are denigrated and mastered by the Mormon church. Already on page two Tull, as a leader and an Elder of the Mormon church, behaves in an authoritative and dominating manner.

Tull spoke with the arrogance of a Mormon whose power could not be brooked and with the passion of a man in whom jealousy had kindled a consuming fire.<sup>168</sup>

This citation is taken from the opening scene where Tull and his men take hold of the Gentile cowboy Venters, one of Grey's male protagonists. Tull threatens to whip the Gentile. Venters is working for Jane Withersteen being her main rider. Jane goes to his defense whereupon Tull lifts a shaking finger toward her and silences her:

“That'll do from you. Understand, you'll not be allowed to hold this boy to friendship that's offensive to your Bishop. Jane Withersteen, your father left you wealth and power. It has turned your head. You haven't yet come to see the place of Mormon women. We've reasoned with you, borne with you. We've patiently waited. We've let you have your fling, which is more than I ever saw granted to a Mormon woman...”<sup>169</sup>

The hierarchical subject positions are obvious also here. Women are silenced by the power executed by the order of the Mormon patriarchy evoking fear in the opposite sex. Jane in this passage is commanded to acknowledge her place in life being that of a subordinate position serving her Master. Evoked by fear, Jane repents and begs Tull to spare Venters.

Lacan develops and gives the term *jouissance* different and additional connotations. Dany Nobus refers to Lacan stating that the ‘sacrifice of a piece of instinctual satisfaction...does not simply lead to its distinction. On the contrary, the sacrificed *jouissance* collects in the superego whence it can return in the evil. The ‘Deity’ of which Freud speaks is thus to be convinced not as a beneficent God...but primarily as a ‘dark God.’<sup>170</sup> Lacan claims that surplus *jouissance* cannot be disposed of, as there will always be a certain amount left over that will appear in disguise. This evil is a nuance of surplus *jouissance*, which Grey gives us glimpses of in the portrayal of the Elder Tull just prior to Jane's repentance.

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<sup>168</sup> Grey, Zane, p 3.

<sup>169</sup> Grey, Zane, p 4.

<sup>170</sup> Nobus, Dany, pp11, 12.

The strange glow, the austere light which radiated from Tull's face, might have been a holy joy at the spiritual conception of exalted duty. But there was something more in him, barely hidden, a something personal and sinister, a deep of himself, an engulfing abyss. As his religious mood was fanatical and inexorable, so would his physical hate be merciless.<sup>171</sup>

This 'something more in him, barely hidden, a something personal and sinister, a deep of himself, an engulfing abyss' suggests repressed jouissance trying to surface. The notion of darkness embodied in the Elder Tull is striking and serves as a reminder of the scene of Balaam and Pedro when Balaam evokes fear to break and pacify the horse Pedro. Also Balaam embodied this notion of evilness. After the abuse of Pedro, the horse moved on 'mechanically' as if being in a trance. The body language of Pedro is analogous to the body language of a colonized Other and to the body language of the Mormon women of Grey's novel. Working for Jane, Mormon women did the work they were bidden to do by the Elders of the Mormon church. 'Through it all they were silent, rapt in a kind of trance.'<sup>172</sup> Both Pedro and the Mormon women have become extensions of the Master doing what the Master bids. Grey even gives us a stronger image of a colonized Other in his portrayal of Jane Withersteen's stolen Arabian horse, Black Star, who is broken in a wild race between Venters and one of Elder Tull's men.

As Venters ran back to Black Star he saw the horse, stagger on shaking legs and go down in a heap...He had no hope for the stricken horse. Black Star lay flat, covered with bloody froth, mouth wide, tongue hanging, eyes glaring, and all his beautiful body in convulsions.<sup>173</sup>

The image of Black Star gives associations to the building of empires and the exploitation and suppression of the colonized Others. Like in a colonized Other, fear is evoked in Jane and 'her head was bowing to the inevitable.'<sup>174</sup> Other descriptions of the body language of Mormon women underline and reinforce this notion. Venters tells the story of Milly Erne to Lassiter, the other male protagonists of Grey's novel. Milly Erne 'passed as a Mormon, and certainly

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<sup>171</sup> Grey, Zane, p 5.

<sup>172</sup> Grey, Zane, p 117.

<sup>173</sup> Grey, Zane, p 176.

<sup>174</sup> Grey, Zane, p 5.

had the Mormon woman's locked lips.'<sup>175</sup> On riding through town to return the stolen racers of Jane Withersteen, Venters experiences the effect of fear evoked by Tull and his men:

Yet all were silent. Here were the familiar characteristics—masked feeling—strange secretiveness—expressionless expression of mystery and hidden power.

...In reply there came not a word, not a nod or a shake of head, not so much as dropping eye or twitching lip—not but a quiet, stony stare.

“Been under the knife? You’ve a fine knife-wielder here—one Tull, I believe!...Maybe you’ve all had your tongues cut out?”<sup>176</sup>

The whole village is under the grip of the ruthless Mormons, which definitely reinforces that Mormon women being part of the village are silenced.

Jane Tompkins elaborates how the Western struggles to rid itself of organized religion because of its cultural weight. Like Wister, Grey also engages in this issue although definitely more strongly. Tompkins believes that the Western tries to rid itself of organized religion because of its connection with the female sex. Grey more than Wister confronts and repudiates the cult of religion through the power struggle between the heroine Jane Withersteen and her Mormon church.

### **3.3.0 The ‘Breakin’ of Jane**

The main plot of Grey's novel revolves around Jane Withersteen, the daughter of the rich Mormon polygamist, and Lassiter, the outlaw gunman. Lassiter blames the leaders of the Mormon church for the abduction and death of his sister Milly Erne. Jane attempts to prevent Lassiter from shooting the kidnappers of his sister. Moreover, the same Mormons attempt to destroy Jane's ranch to force her to marry into the church. A union between Jane and the Elder Tull would serve and strengthen the Mormon community. The greedy motives are obvious when considering the Marital Laws prevailing at the time. The Declaration of Sentiments of 1848 underlines that the history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries

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<sup>175</sup> Grey, Zane, p 23.

<sup>176</sup> Grey, Zane, p 180.



toward woman, 'having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.'<sup>177</sup>

The language of men, the Law, has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

...In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming...her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.<sup>178</sup>

The Law grants, justifies, and reinforces the patriarchal Mormon position of Master. The main plot revolves around Jane's struggle to come to terms with her own position in life.

On the one hand, Jane Withersteen is portrayed as an image of the New Woman. As the owner of Withersteen House, a great ranch with its thousands of cattle and the swiftest horses of the sage, she stands forth as embodying a Master position in the little village of Cottonwoods on the Utah border. The year is 1871. The position of Jane is unusual. On the other hand, Jane Withersteen is the incarnation of the female image of feminized Christianity and fits the description of the heroine of the sentimental domestic Victorian novel.<sup>179</sup> She dresses in white, loves children, preaches against violence, and is generous to those less unfortunate. 'She meant to do so much more for her people than she had done.'<sup>180</sup> Above all she embodies this self-sacrificial attitude. Her purpose in life is to be a vehicle of righteousness in the service of saving souls.

The hero enters the scene when Bern Venters is about to be whipped by Tull and his men for being a Gentile. Jane turns her eyes to the purple hills whispering a prayer: "Whence cometh my help!"<sup>181</sup> One of Tull's men points to the west.

Jane Withersteen wheeled and saw a horseman, silhouetted against the western sky, come riding out of the sage. He had ridden down from the left, in the golden glare of sun, and had been unobserved till close at hand. An answer to her prayer!<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Stanton, Elizabeth, pp 70, 71.

<sup>178</sup> Stanton, Elizabeth, pp 70, 71.

<sup>179</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 39.

<sup>180</sup> Grey, Zane, p 1.

<sup>181</sup> Grey, Zane, p 5.

<sup>182</sup> Grey, Zane, p 5.

The party of Tull and his men observed in awe that he was wearing black leather, a black sombrero, and ‘two black-butted guns—low down.’<sup>183</sup> Jane Tompkins believes that ‘Grey deliberately invokes the biblical reference, and just as deliberately rejects it.’<sup>184</sup> Jane’s help does not come from heaven. Her redeemer has a most earthly appearance considering that his horse and clothing belongs to the world of men. Her savior is personified as Lassiter, a feared gunman, ‘the saviour as Antichrist.’<sup>185</sup> The appearance of the phallic image of Lassiter is both frightening and attractive to Jane. Tompkins suggests that already in the opening pages Grey sets out to rid the Western of female virtues linked to that of Christianity.

Like the Virginian, Lassiter is the perfect male protagonist within the genre confines and ideology of the Western. He is a man of few words, approaches slowly and responds with a curt nod. Jane observed a rider that for years had lived in silence and solitude. Like the Virginian he is extremely attractive to women. Greeting him and looking into his face, Jane trusted him instinctively.<sup>186</sup> ‘She felt the drawing power of his eyes.’<sup>187</sup> Like the Virginian, Lassiter is the born gentleman asking politely to water his horse. When addressing Jane he is mild and gentle. When addressing Tull and his men he outdoes them psychologically. Tull bids Lassiter to not interfere, to water his horse, and be on his way.

”Easy—easy—I ain’t interferin’ yet,” replied the rider. The tone of his voice had undergone a change. A different man had spoken. Where, in addressing Jane, he had been mild and gentle, now, with his first speech to Tull, he was dry, cool, biting...”

“Queer or not, it’s none of your business,” retorted Tull.

“Where I was raised a woman’s word was law. I ain’t quite outgrown that yet.”

Tull fumed between amaze and anger.

“Meddler, we have a law here something different from woman’s whim—Mormon law!...Take care you don’t transgress it.”

“To hell with your Mormon law!”<sup>188</sup>

Tull has struck a string that transforms Lassiter into an awakening menace. Lassiter’s blasphemous affront staggers, paralyzes, and evokes fear in the Mormon riders. When Lassiter

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<sup>183</sup> Grey, Zane, p 6.

<sup>184</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 32.

<sup>185</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 32.

<sup>186</sup> Grey, Zane, p 6.

<sup>187</sup> Grey, Zane, p 7.

<sup>188</sup> Grey, Zane, p 7.

makes a rapid phallic move revealing ‘the big black gun-sheaths swung round to the fore,’<sup>189</sup> Venters realizes that the rider is the dreaded gunman Lassiter and cries out his name. Tull and his men depart. Like the Virginian, Lassiter is an expert with guns. Like the Virginian, Lassiter outdoes other men. The Virginian and Lassiter are both Masters of Masters.

Like Molly in *The Virginian*, Jane sets out to civilize Lassiter. She hires him as her main rider. Jane is involved in two power struggles at the same time. The struggles are intertwined as both Jane and Lassiter intervene and try to tell each other what to do. On the one hand, she is determined on saving the soul of Lassiter who is set on revenging his sister’s death. She attempts to disarm him like Molly attempted to disarm the Virginian. On the other hand, Jane being an image of the New Woman is fighting for her freedom in relation to the leaders of her Mormon church. Both struggles are connected to the Mormon issue.

Upon reading *Riders of the Purple Sage* the first time, I recollect being thrilled observing the awakening of Jane and hoping that she would manage to resist the power of her Mormon church. Just after Jane has begged Tull to spare Venters, Grey writes the following:

Her head was bowing to the inevitable. She was grasping the truth, when suddenly there came, inward constriction, a hardening of gentle forces within her breast. Like steel bar it was, stiffening all that had been soft and weak in her. She felt a birth in her of something new and unintelligible.<sup>190</sup>

This is the awakening of the fighting spirit of the New Woman, who will not willingly submit to the subordinate position of the Mormon women of Grey’s novel. The ‘hardening of gentle forces’ and the ‘stiffening all that had been soft and weak’ are phallic images suggesting the masculine birth of the New Woman. The ‘unintelligible’ element suggests dark emotions that she has repressed and which she does not allow as a part of her conscious self. She has been given a glimpse of the unconscious, the unacceptable emotions of anger, rage, and hate.

In the chapter of *Amber Spring* the New Woman image of Jane is reinforced by the thoughts of Venters thinking about Jane wanting the ‘divine right’ of ‘freedom’:

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<sup>189</sup> Grey, Zane, p 9.

<sup>190</sup> Grey, Zane, p 5.

No queen could have given more royally out of a bounteous store than Jane Withersteen gave her people, and likewise to those unfortunates whom her people hated. She asked only the divine right of all women—freedom; to love and to live as her heart willed.<sup>191</sup>

The right of freedom for all women being linked to the New Woman image is reinforced by Jane's own thoughts after her rider Judkins dares to tell her that there "never was any other rich Mormon woman on the border, let alone one that's taken the bit between her teeth."<sup>192</sup>

But had she taken the bit between her teeth?...And then, with a quick spurt of warm blood along her veins, thought of Black Star when he got the bit fast between his iron jaws and ran wild in the sage. If she ever started to run! Jane smothered the glow and burn within her, ashamed of a passion for freedom that opposed her duty.<sup>193</sup>

In the midst of her passion for freedom she is succumbed to her duty as a Christian to help the less fortunate. In helping the unfortunate Gentiles, Jane was deceiving her churchmen. For this she did not pray for forgiveness. By keeping up this activity she was demonstrating a mode of resistance. Jane's joy in life was to experience that through her deeds the hatred of the Gentiles had softened towards her own people. Still, she could no longer suppress the emotions awakening in her. After she has spoken to Judkins being told that her cattle are disappearing, she rushes to the silence and the seclusion of her room and there could:

no longer hold back the bursting of her wrath. She went stone-blind in the fury of a passion that had never before showed its power. Lying upon her bed, sightless, voiceless, she was writhing, living flame...

Then...she lay thinking, not of the oppression that would break her, but of this new revelation of self...Jane Withersteen realized that the spirit of wrath and war had lain dormant in her...The one thing in man or woman that she scorned above all scorn, and which she could not forgive, was hate...beyond her control there had been in her a birth of fiery hate.<sup>194</sup>

This portrayal of Jane manages to dislodge the female sex off her high virtuous feminine pedestal of the sentimental domestic Victorian novel. Even though Jane is in her full right to react to the oppression of her Mormon church she is given an insight into the self, which she up until now has managed to repress. A psychoanalytic and Lacanian reading suggests that what Jane scorns so much in the Other is actually a part of her own repressed and unconscious

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<sup>191</sup> Grey, Zane, p 20.

<sup>192</sup> Grey, Zane, p 48.

<sup>193</sup> Grey, Zane, pp 48, 49.

<sup>194</sup> Grey, Zane, pp 51, 52.

self. Jane is depicted being in the process of being silenced. When Jane is lying in her bed she is 'sightless, voiceless'. The 'new revelation of self' astounds her to such a degree that she is silenced. By putting her in contact with her repressed self she is in a sense disarmed. She cannot any longer with the same strength scorn those who seek revenge as in the case of Lassiter who is out to revenge his sister's death. Jane has had an awakening and is alarmed of the insight and glimpses she has been given into her unconscious. The mightiest problem she now encounters is the salvation of her soul. As a symptom of the Hysteric, she prayed as she had never prayed before. She prayed to be forgiven for her sin and to become immune to the dark hatred that was swelling in her. She rose from her prayer as a 'changed woman.'<sup>195</sup>

Jane is going through some kind of transformation. Lee Clark Mitchell suggests the novel celebrates the New Woman. The fact that Jane runs her own ranch reinforces this celebration. The fact that Jane is going through a transformation and experiencing herself as a changed woman also reinforces the notion of the New Woman. As a changed woman 'she would do her duty as she saw it, live her life as her own truth guided her.'<sup>196</sup> What we see here is a glimpse of the fighting spirit of the New Woman. Her change involves a shift of whom she will rely on for guidance. She would do her duty according to her *own* convictions. Nevertheless, she is not free, but still trapped in a subject position within the discourse of the Master and prepared to remain in the position of nearly mute victimhood of the Hysteric.<sup>197</sup> She will not marry Tull. She is, however, willing to give up a marriage of her own choice. By giving up a marriage of her own choice she is still paying the sacrificial price of herself and thus repositioning herself by still taking the mute victimhood position of the Hysteric. The force and significance of the Master signifier, the Name-of-the-Father with its cultural and religious weight, is still hovering above her refusing her to break out of her enslaved situation.

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<sup>195</sup> Grey, Zane, p 52.

<sup>196</sup> Grey, Zane, p 52.

<sup>197</sup> Campbell, Kristin, p 78.

In “Violent Housekeepers: Rewriting Domesticity in *Riders of the Purple Sage*”, Cathryn Halvorson suggests that the plot of Grey’s novel revolves around people coming together rather than remaining apart. The ‘men need women in order to become men, and the women need men in order to become women.’<sup>198</sup> Halvorson suggests that Zane Grey urges gender integration. In this sense Wister and Grey differ somewhat. The seclusion of men is prominent in Wister’s novel. Although there are separate spheres of the sexes in Grey’s novel, he does not give this aspect prominent space. Lassiter and Venters do spend some time together and a relationship does develop, but Halvorson underlines how this relationship embodies more the elements of a relationship between father and son.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, there is no gender integration in the Mormon community. However, when the two heroes and heroines of *Rider’s of the Purple Sage* come together, they stay together and interact. The interaction between Lassiter and Jane is definitely decisive for the transformation of Jane. Without Lassiter being there to rescue her from the Mormons, Jane would forever be engulfed by her church.

Even though Lassiter is domesticated and in a sense for a period of time emasculated by Jane, he always holds the subject position of mastery. He proves himself brilliant also when helping Jane with the domestic chores and actually outdoes her. ‘His great, brown hands were skilled in a multiplicity of ways which a woman might have envied.’<sup>200</sup>

He shared Jane’s work, and was of especial help to her in nursing Mrs. Larkin...Mrs. Larkin...praised him to Jane. “He’s a good man and loves children”...Yet ever and ever Lassiter towered above her, and behind or through his black, sinister figure shone something luminous that strangely effected Jane.<sup>201</sup>

Lassiter ‘tower(ing) above’ and being ‘skilled in a multiplicity of ways’ reinforce Lassiter’s position of mastery. Cathryn Halvorson refers to Gail Bederman who reflects on ‘a dominant

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<sup>198</sup> Halvorson, Cathryn, p 47.

<sup>199</sup> Halvorson, Cathryn, p 47.

<sup>200</sup> Grey, Zane, p 118.

<sup>201</sup> Grey, Zane, p 118.

turn-of-the-century conception of masculinity<sup>202</sup> and argues that “middle-class white men simultaneously construct powerful manhood in terms of both ‘civilized manliness’ and ‘primitive masculinity’.”<sup>203</sup> Halvorsen argues that this move to the domestic sphere actually expands the scope of male power. In Grey’s novel Jane does not excel in homemaking. In fact it is when Lassiter moves in with Jane that Withersteen House is turned into a home. The novel hereby manages to silence the female sex by even dislodging her from the position of control of the domestic sphere.

Toril Moi explains that for Lacan, repressed ‘desire ‘behaves’ in precisely the same way as language: it moves ceaselessly on from object to object or from signifier to signifier.’<sup>204</sup> Jane Tompkins reinforces Lacan’s theories when she proclaims that the ‘Western...is about men’s fear of losing their mastery, hence their identity, both which the Western tirelessly reinvents.’<sup>205</sup> It is of utmost importance for the masculine sex to master his horse, his woman, circumstance, the landscape, and self. Grey also goes at length to portray the relationship between man and his horse. Even though Cathryn Halvorson points out that the novel is more about gender integration, Jane Tompkins has interesting views on this topic and writes that ‘men, animals, landscape constitute a sort of peaceful kingdom.’<sup>206</sup> Tompkins explains that ‘the horse takes over the role of human companionship.’<sup>207</sup> The horse as friend and pal fulfils a dream of companionship.<sup>208</sup> The bond that exists between Lassiter and his blind horse is remarkable. Tompkins goes as far as to say that the ‘horse is the cowboy’s home on the range.’<sup>209</sup> In the chapter *Wrangle’s Race Run Venters* during the chase experiences a deep affection for his horse Wrangle: ‘But Wrangle’s flesh was still cold, and

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<sup>202</sup> Halvorson, Cathryn, p 41.

<sup>203</sup> Halvorson, Cathryn, p 41.

<sup>204</sup> Moi, Toril, p 101.

<sup>205</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 45.

<sup>206</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 95.

<sup>207</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 95.

<sup>208</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 97.

<sup>209</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 97.

felt in him a love for the horse he had never given to any other.’<sup>210</sup> Keeping Tompkins’s suggestions in mind, the image of the man and his horse is significant to the understanding of the Western genre. When elaborating the significance of horses in Westerns, Jane Tompkins emphasizes that the aspect of companionship is overturned by the aspect of man proving his strength and thus being in the position of the Master. The cowboy hero’s ‘desire to curb the horse and make it submit to human requirements is as important to Westerns as the desire for merger and mutuality. Horses do not start out as pals; they have to be forced into it.’<sup>211</sup> The horse is not a friend won through nurture and gentle suasion, but an occasion to prove the hero’s superior strength.<sup>212</sup> In the chapter *Wrangles Race Run*, Venters proves his strength and mastery when he tries to catch Wrangle who has turned wilder than ever. ‘Wrangle yielded to the lasso and then to Venters’ strong hand.’<sup>213</sup>

Horses do have a special purpose in Westerns as they spark our emotions. Zane Grey more than anyone manages to bring life to nature, animals, and human beings by breaking down the boundaries, which separate the different spheres.

Horses are there to galvanize us. More than any other single element in the genre, they symbolize the desire to recuperate some lost connection to life...What, horses and landscape will, the boundaries between his characters and their surroundings—animal, vegetable, and mineral—continually break down, and everything becomes part of a vortex of live energy coursing indiscriminately through the cosmos.<sup>214</sup>

Grey portrays suffering horses and succeeds evoking our emotions giving associations to felt experiences of human life. Grey more than Wister spells out this analogy of felt experiences between horses, men and women. Both women and horses experience to be treated like a colonized Other. Breaking down the boundaries between the different spheres enhances and reinforces mastery as a crucial element. Because of ‘men’s fear of losing their mastery, and

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<sup>210</sup> Grey, Zane, p 173.

<sup>211</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 97.

<sup>212</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 100.

<sup>213</sup> Grey, Zane, p 168.

<sup>214</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 94.



hence their identity,<sup>215</sup> it is of utmost importance for the male sex to master his environment. Every time ‘a horsemen appears against the horizon, it celebrates the possibility of mastery, of self, of others, of the land, of circumstance.’<sup>216</sup>

When Lassiter enters the scene he is riding his horse that has been blinded by Mormons. The image of blindness suggests a state of dependence, which again suggests the need for help and guidance, the need to be led and directed. When riding his blind horse to save Jane’s stampeding white herd Lassiter proves how he excels in mastery. Jane is spellbound: ‘It was then that Jane, suddenly understanding Lassiter’s feat, stared and gasped at the riding of this intrepid man.’<sup>217</sup> When Jane comprehends in awe the masterly accomplishment by Lassiter, ‘a flush of fire flamed in her cheeks, and her trembling hands shook Black Star’s bridle, and her eyes fell before Lassiter’s.’<sup>218</sup> This is the unconscious body language of a female realizing that she is facing a champion, a superior being, and a person she should seek for guidance. As she bows her head inevitably invoked by the rage of Tull, her eyes fall before Lassiter because of respect and admiration. What we have been witnessing are the symptoms of the Other and the Hysteric, the subordinate position produced by the discourse of the Master. In the case of Tull, fear is the vehicle used to subordinate the female sex. In the case of Lassiter the discourse of the Master is coupled with the notion of perfection and knowledge.

Lacan posits that ‘the operation of desire produces and structures knowledge’<sup>219</sup> and that the ceaseless movement of unfulfilled desire, the desire for the plenitude and completeness of the symbiotic unity with the m(Other), enacts and produces knowledge. As stated, Lacan regards philosophy as the supreme exposition of University knowledge.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 45.

<sup>216</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 101.

<sup>217</sup> Grey, Zane, p 58.

<sup>218</sup> Grey, Zane, p 59.

<sup>219</sup> Campbell, Kristin, p 69.

<sup>220</sup> Campbell, Kristin, p 71.

Significantly, Lacan claims that the discourse of the University is what reinforces and justifies the discourse of the Master.<sup>221</sup> The University discourse justifies structures of domination and authority, which produces a masculine position of a knowing subject of consciousness. Dany Nobus points out that for Lacan, the University discourse provides ‘a sort of legitimation or rationalization of the master’s will.’<sup>222</sup> The knowing Master participates in the Master’s drive for power, control, and domination. The knowing Master seeks to master its object, its Other, and thus its unconscious. By coupling knowledge that is produced in the University discourse with Lassiter’s Master position in the discourse of the Master, Lassiter emerges as a *knowing subject of mastery*. In the passage below, an utterance by Jane referring to Lassiter serves to justify this notion. “How splendidly he championed us misunderstood souls! Somehow he knows—much.”<sup>223</sup> When Jane is in need of help she knows it is right to ask Lassiter to become her new rider.

The image of blindness is repeatedly reinforced in *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Not only is Lassiter’s horse blinded by the Mormons. Jane and the Mormon women are repeatedly accused of being blind. The male protagonists even call the Mormons blinders of women. The first instance blindness is being used referring to the female sex is right after Jane realizes that Lassiter’s horse is blind. Lassiter tells Jane: “I believe Mormon women are the best and noblest, the most long-sufferin’, and the blindest, unhappiest women on earth.”<sup>224</sup> Grey juxtaposes the blindness of the horse to the blindness of the Mormon women to make a point. Moreover, comparing women and horses is denigrating to the female sex as we recollect how Jane Tompkins compares a horse with a colonized subject.<sup>225</sup> Not only Lassiter considers Jane blind. Before the coming of Lassiter, Jane has convinced Bern Venters to lay down his guns. The coming of Lassiter has awoken Venters and restored him as a man. Venters commands

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<sup>221</sup> Campbell, Kristin, p 71.

<sup>222</sup> Nobus, Dany, p 33.

<sup>223</sup> Grey, Zane, p 12.

<sup>224</sup> Grey, Zane, p 11.

<sup>225</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 101.

Jane to give him back his guns and exclaims: “Jane, you’re a wonderful woman so unselfish and good. Only you’re blind in one way”<sup>226</sup> Jane continues to reason with him, which leads to Venters’ outburst: “But you can’t see. Your blindness—your damned religion!”<sup>227</sup> Later Lassiter several times on the same page points out her blindness:

“...I know you’re blind...”

“After all, Jane, mebbe you’re only blind—Mormon blind...”

“...It’s your damned Mormon blindness.”<sup>228</sup>

Reaching one of the novel’s climaxes, the imagery of blindness is once more used by Lassiter:

“You poor woman! Still blind! Still faithful!...Listen. I *know*. Let that settle it.”<sup>229</sup>

Here Grey succeeds employing Lassiter as the *knowing subject of mastery*, to juxtapose the blindness of Jane to the knowledge of Lassiter. The blind horse needs to be led and cared for by his Master. Also blind women including Jane need guidance and leadership. Lassiter wants to help Jane escape from the engulfing clutches of the Mormons. Lassiter, in a Master position, does rescue Jane. The result of the rescue maneuver does not, however, change the hierarchical structure of their relationship. I will ultimately outline why the outcome does not disrupt and dislodge the position of the Master.

Zane Grey uses other images apart from blindness to create the analogy of horses and women. Grey explicitly spits out the analogy by ceaselessly employing language, which is used when a wild horse is broken in. The breaking of Jane serves in a sense as a double reinforcement stressing the need for the male sex to master his environment. In the case of Balaam and Pedro in *The Virginian*, Wister employs an opposite technique of employing abusive language functioning as a metonymical displacement when abusing his horse Pedro. The analogy of felt experiences between horse and woman is more overt and obvious in Grey’s novel. Grey’s technique enhances the notion of need for mastery and thus the

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<sup>226</sup> Grey, Zane, p 14.

<sup>227</sup> Grey, Zane, p 15.

<sup>228</sup> Grey, Zane, p 112.

<sup>229</sup> Grey, Zane, p 198.

discourse of the Master. Lassiter when confronting Jane with her blindness explains to Jane how the Mormons are determined to break her. Judkins told Jane once how others viewed her. ‘Taking the bit between her teeth’,<sup>230</sup> cannot be misunderstood and verifies the analogy of horses. On encountering Venters, Lassiter comments on the breaking of Jane. This “‘breakin’ of Miss Withersteen may seem bad to you, but it ain’t bad—yet.”<sup>231</sup> Lassiter confronts Jane directly and tells her twice that she is to be broken.<sup>232</sup>

Jane struggles against the notion of her being broken. Nevertheless, Jane undergoes a transformation. One of the first signs of Jane’s transformation can be seen in the encounter Judkins and Jane are having concerning the conspiracy against her. After Judkins has given Jane his views Jane bursts out in awe:

”Plain!..My herds to wander in the sage—to be stolen! Jane Withersteen a poor woman! Her head to be brought low and her spirit broken!”<sup>233</sup>

This first revelation leads to her rushing to the seclusion of her own room. There she throws herself on her bed and experiences being succumbed by dark emotions. When her fury finally dies out, she lies ‘thinking, not of the oppression that would break her, but of this new revelation of self.’<sup>234</sup> The change that she is undergoing is demonstrated in not only realizing the evil conspiracy of her Mormon church, but also realizing this new revelation of self, which frightens her to such a degree that she falls on her knees and:

she prayed to be forgiven for her sin; to be immune from the dark, not hate; to love Tull as her minister, though she could not love him as a man; to do her duty by her church and people and those dependent upon her bounty; to hold reverence of God and womanhood inviolate.<sup>235</sup>

Even though Jane in the above passage is still under the grip of her Mormon church, she is so only to a certain extent. Her refusal to marry Tull demonstrates her fighting spirit, which is

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<sup>230</sup> Grey, Zane, p 48.

<sup>231</sup> Grey, Zane, p 119.

<sup>232</sup> Grey, Zane, pp 124, 125.

<sup>233</sup> Grey, Zane, p 51.

<sup>234</sup> Grey, Zane, p 51.

<sup>235</sup> Grey, Zane, p 52.

reinforced in her determination that ‘they could not change her decision or break her spirit.’<sup>236</sup> Jane’s transformation continues. Initially she is not willing to accept herself being blind in relation to her Mormon church. In her confrontations with Lassiter, Jane is gradually realizing her blindness. At the end of chapter *Faith and Unfaith*, she literally pronounces that her convictions are staggered when she admits the possibility of her being blind: “‘If I *am* blind...’”<sup>237</sup> On the opening page of the next chapter *The Invisible Hand*, we continue to be given insights of Jane’s transformation. She senses that something ‘was changing in her, forming, waiting for decision to make it a real and fixed thing.’<sup>238</sup> When Lassiter in the same chapter unveils the secrecy and spying ways of her own Mormon women, she finally reaches full acknowledgement. ‘So bitter certainty claimed her at last, and trust fled Withersteen House and fled forever.’<sup>239</sup> Jane realizes the full impact of the enslaved situation of her Mormon sisters. She realizes the invisible hand of the Mormon patriarchy driving its women. Last but not the least, she sees the ‘blindness again’<sup>240</sup> in her sisters as well as in herself.<sup>241</sup>

The realization of her own blindness has been a painful process which might have been successful had she reached this realization on her own. Herein lies the key to why Jane still will remain in the position of the Other in the discourse of the Master. Drawing on Lacan and his four discourses, Kirsten Campbell posits the key to how women can free themselves of the patriarchal order of men and thus enable the emergence of new discourses for women. Campbell’s elaboration of Lacan’s discourse of the Analyst sheds light and clarifies what I am trying to prove. The Analyst’s discourse has two positions, that of the Analyst and that of the Analysand, corresponding to that of psychiatrist and that of patient. The position of the Analyst is a position of mastery. Lassiter in his relationship with Jane has also been

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<sup>236</sup> Grey, Zane, p 52.

<sup>237</sup> Grey, Zane, p 113.

<sup>238</sup> Grey, Zane, p 114.

<sup>239</sup> Grey, Zane, p 116.

<sup>240</sup> Grey, Zane, p 117.

<sup>241</sup> Grey, Zane, p 117.

occupying the master position of the Analyst in the discourse of the Analyst. He is person of high social intelligence, which is reinforced by his strange power to feel things.<sup>242</sup> In fact, Jane perceives Lassiter as being almost superhuman in his power of foresight.<sup>243</sup> Both Lacan and Campbell are concerned about the importance of stopping the discourse of the Master. Accordingly, the Analyst must repress his desire for mastery in the position of the Analyst. Only through the transference of mastery to the Other, that of the Analysand, hereby Jane, is there hope that the Analysand will emerge as Master of self. Jane does escape the clutches of the Mormon church. She does go through a transformation. However, she does so thanks to Lassiter. Jane must come to realization by seeing and pronouncing the truth herself. Only then is there hope of her becoming a *female speaking knowing subject* and hence being able to stop the discourse of the Master. In Lassiter's guidance of Jane he has not repressed his desire of mastery. He has shown her the truth by telling her himself that she is deceitful, selfish, false, unfaithful, and vile.

“After all, Jane, mebbe you're only blind—Mormon blind. That only can explain what's close to selfishness—“

“I'm not selfish. I despise the very word. If I were free—“

“But you're not free. Not free of Mormonism. An' in playin' this game with me you've been unfaithful.”

“Un-faithful!” faltered Jane.

“Yes, I said unfaithful. You're faithful to your Bishop an' unfaithful to yourself. You're false to your womanhood, an' true to your religion. But for a savin' innocence you'd made yourself low an' vile—betrayin' yourself, betrayin' me—all to bind my hands an' keep me from snuffin' out Mormon life. It's your damned Mormon blindness.”<sup>244</sup>

When Lassiter goes on explaining to Jane the need for a man to carry a gun, being lost without one, Jane exclaims:

”No time—for a woman!” exclaimed Jane, brokenly. “Oh Lassiter, I feel helpless—lost—and don't know where to turn. If I *am* blind—then—I need some one—a friend—you, Lassiter—more than ever!”

“Well, I didn't say nothin' about goin' back on you, did I?”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Grey, Zane, p 124.

<sup>243</sup> Grey, Zane, p 144.

<sup>244</sup> Grey, Zane, p 112.

<sup>245</sup> Grey, Zane, p 113.

Jane's response verifies how she has become very attached to Lassiter. She's on the verge of being broken and needs Lassiter's support, help, and guidance. Lacan emphasizes the bonds created especially in the discourse of the Analyst. It is essential to understand that the discourse of the Analyst is a discourse that describes social communicative interaction going on between people in real life. In fact, Dany Nobus refers to an analyst position of a judge or a parent.<sup>246</sup> The discourse therefore serves useful when attempting to describe social interaction between characters in narratives. The attachment between Lassiter and Jane reminds one of the bonds created in therapy between psychiatrist and patient, and thus between the Analyst and the Analysand. Lassiter is occupying the position of paternal Analyst. Chief Psychiatrist Dag Brendefur verifies that 'in therapy a special bond does emerge creating a sense of dependence of the patient in relation to the therapist.' Brendefur also substantiates that 'the therapist in relation to the patient needs to be cautious in giving advice. In fact, the therapist needs to be conscious of his or her desire to provide the patient with all the answers.' This applies of course to human relations in general. It is easy to make excuses for Lassiter not repressing his desire for mastery and in a sense forcing the truth upon Jane. The element of time is crucial because of the threat of the Mormons. Nevertheless, the effect is the same.

Lassiter ultimately reinforces his position as Master when explaining to Jane that the mind behind it all is an empire builder.<sup>247</sup> Jane protests whereupon Lassiter silences her:

"Child, be still!" said Lassiter... "You are a woman, fine an' big an' strong, an' your heart matches your size. But in mind you're a child... You meet now the cold steel of a will as far from Christlike as the universe is wide. You're to be broken."<sup>248</sup>

Lassiter is not speaking to Jane on an equal level. On the contrary, he is positioning himself as a father, a paternal figure signifying the symbolic order of patriarchy. Lassiter is definitely occupying the dominating position of the knowing Master. Like in *The Virginian*, Lassiter's mode of speech reinforces and verifies Jane Tompkins's reference to Shere Hite, who posits

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<sup>246</sup> Nobus, Dany, p 40.

<sup>247</sup> Grey, Zane, p 124.

<sup>248</sup> Grey, Zane, p 125.

that ‘not talking to a woman on an equal level can be a way for a man to dominate a relationship.’<sup>249</sup> Grey explicitly spits out through Lassiter that Jane is like a child. Moreover, he comments on her physical appearance being ‘fine an’ big an’ strong’, which gives associations of describing the body of a horse or colonized Other.

The Mormon abduction of Jane’s adoptive daughter signals the final breaking of Jane. The cruellest of attempts is now launched to enslave her completely. Speculating and playing on the love of a mother for her child is the lowest form of cruelty beheld by her church. Jane is shocked into obedience. An awakened Lassiter is now determined to do justice and kill the man responsible. Like Molly in the *Virginian*, Jane pleads with him to the final end. But Lassiter is set on doing justice not for Milly Erne’s sake, not for Fay’s sake, but for Jane’s. The power struggle between Jane and Lassiter has intensified and is reaching its climax.

She sprang up in despairing, breaking spirit, and encircling his neck with her arms, and held him in an embrace that he strove vainly to loosen. “Lassiter, would you kill me? I’m fighting my last fight for the principles of my youth—love of religion, love of father. You don’t know—you can’t guess the truth, and I can’t speak it! I’m losing all. I’m changing. All I’ve gone through is nothing to this hour. Pity me—help me in my weakness. You’re strong again—oh, so cruelly, coldly strong! You’re killing me—I see you—feel you as some other Lassiter! My Master, be merciful—spare him!”

His answer was a ruthless smile.

She clung the closer to him, and leaned her panting breast on him, and lifted her face to his. “Lassiter, I *do love you!* It’s leaped out of my agony. It comes suddenly with a terrible blow of truth. You are a man! I never knew it till now. Some wonderful change came to me when you buckled on these guns and showed that grey, awful face. I loved you then. All my life I’ve loved, but never as now. No woman can love like a broken woman. If it were not for one thing—just one thing—and yet! I *can’t* speak it—I’d glory in your manhood—the lion in you that means to slay for me. Believe me—and spare Dyer...”<sup>250</sup>

Not even her love and female allurements could persuade Lassiter from killing Dyer and ‘as if the hold of her arms was that of a child’s he loosened it and stepped away.’<sup>251</sup> Jane cannot longer be silent and reveals the terror and force of the Name-of-the-Father, signified by her own father being the cause of it all. The patriarchal Law of her father was the invisible hand behind the building of the Mormon empire, the man also responsible for the abduction of

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<sup>249</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 59.

<sup>250</sup> Grey, Zane, p 203.

<sup>251</sup> Grey, Zane, p 204.



Milly Erne. The thought of Lassiter killing Dyer for her father's sins is unbearable. Jane realizes the truth of her father being beyond human justice. Lassiter again tells Jane that it is for her he is killing Dyer.

Again for Jane Withersteen came the spinning of her brain in darkness, and as she whirled in endless chaos she seemed to be falling at the feet of a luminous figure—a man—Lassiter—who saved her from herself, who could not be changed, who would slay rightfully. Then she slipped into blackness.<sup>252</sup>

Jane's self-sacrificing commitment to convert, civilize, and change Lassiter has been in vain and he towers above her as a luminous figure. Even early in the novel Jane has 'felt swayed by a strength that far exceeded her own. In a clash of wills with this man she would go to the wall.'<sup>253</sup> The desire to mold and change Lassiter has turned against herself. She herself has become the object of transformation and change as the passage below verifies.

She realized, without wonder or amaze, how Judkins's one word, affirming the death of Dyer—that the catastrophe had fallen—had completed the change whereby she had been molded or beaten or broken into another woman. She felt calm, slightly cold, strong as she had been strong since the first shadow fell upon her.<sup>254</sup>

The acceptance of violence and Lassiter's shooting of Dyer has changed her in a sense of becoming an extension of Lassiter and what he represents. Like Lassiter, she is 'calm, slightly cold, strong'. Jane is not spiritually broken by her church. Lassiter is Jane's new Master. She continues to pay the sacrificial price for the knowledge of the Master by sacrificing herself. She has not dislodged the position of the Master. She has, as women throughout times, become repositioned as the Other within the discourse of the Master. She escapes the clutches of her church with the help and knowledge of Lassiter and rises above her church even though she has been deprived of her worldly goods. The irony in the 'breakin'' of Jane lies in that she has been broken, molded, and changed not by her church, but by Lassiter. Lassiter being in the knowing position of Master and Analyst has shown and convinced Jane of the truth about herself and of the need for violence and that of killing. As Jane Tompkins argues, Grey in

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<sup>252</sup> Grey, Zane, p 204.

<sup>253</sup> Grey, Zane, p 54.

<sup>254</sup> Grey, Zane, p 205.

*Riders of the Purple Sage* demonstrates the destruction of female authority.<sup>255</sup> When Jane, Fay, and Lassiter manage to escape the clutches of Tull and his men, they do so because Jane asks Lassiter to kill by telling him to push Balancing Rock which kills Tull and his men and secures their own safety in Surprise Valley. She has ultimately completely identified with Lassiter and become an extension of what he stands for. Tompkins suggests Jane's action is an act of self-destruction:

In this act of self-destruction, a long-awaited moment of "wrathful relief" that ends in dust and shrouds, the landscape expresses feelings that are too colossal, too outrageous, and too inexplicable for human characters to claim. Wreaking a horrible vengeance on the villain, the fall of Balancing Rock commits murder and sexual intercourse at the same time.<sup>256</sup>

The fall of Balancing Rock suggests the fall of Jane Withersteen. Lassiter is there, but Jane is gone. Thus, the female sex has been silenced.

### **3.4.0 The Desire of the Mother's Body**

The subplot of *Riders of the Purple Sage* grows at times to dominate the novel. After being restored as a man through the coming of Lassiter, the Gentile cowboy Berne Venters shoots the rustling outlaw Oldring's infamous Masked Rider. The Masked Rider turns out to be the long lost daughter of Milly Erne and thus the niece of Lassiter. Venters goes at length to provide a secure place for Bess and himself, which enables him to nurture her back to life. He builds a home for Bess in the narrow space of Surprise Valley. Even when Bess's health is restored, Venters outdoes Bess in homemaking. He takes pleasure in turning the wilderness into a home. Bess seems rather indifferent to the chores of domesticity as she has been brought up as a rider. This aspect of domesticity reinforces and verifies Cathryn Halvorson's focus on the expansion of the scope of male power moving it into the field of domesticity as in the case of Lassiter and Jane.

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<sup>255</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 39.

<sup>256</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 171.

In a sense the hero and heroine of the subplot parallel the couple of the main plot in other aspects as well. Bess can also be regarded as a celebration of the New Woman. The masculine trait of her excellent horse riding abilities as the infamous Masked Rider verifies this notion. In Westerns the male sex normally excels in this domain. Still, like Molly and Jane, Bess also has the position of the Other in the discourse of the Master. Bess also calls and titles her partner Master. Like Lassiter, Venters does not speak to Bess on an equal level. More than once Venters contemplates how she has the mind of a child<sup>257</sup> and even calls her child.<sup>258</sup> Moreover, all her life Bess has been in an enslaved position and has thus occupied a position of mute victimhood. Like all the women in the novel, also Bess has been tongue-tied.<sup>259</sup> Her foster parent Oldring brought her up and at times locked her up in a cabin keeping her away from women, men, and knowledge of life. Bess had been abducted by Bishop Dyer and given to Oldring who promised to bring her up as a vile rustler. Oldring grew to love Bess as a daughter and kept her away from the knowledge of life to protect her. Nevertheless, Bess was deprived of her freedom.

Even though the heroes resemble each other, we are given different insights into their minds. These insights compliment each other. Lassiter emerges as father figure whereas Venters takes the position of son. We witness the transformation of Venters. Jane marvels over how Venters left Withersteen House a boy and returned as a man. Moreover, she wonders if Lassiter has become Venters and Venters has become Lassiter. Like the Virginian and Lassiter, Venters emerges as a male protagonist of perfect qualities. Venters goes at length to secure a safe place to hide Bess. When he is carrying Bess to their secret hide-out, Venters climbs 'as if he had wings, the strength of a giant, and knew not the sense of fear.'<sup>260</sup> In the process of providing a home for Bess, Venters seeks out Oldring's herd and packs out

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<sup>257</sup> Grey, Zane, p 189.

<sup>258</sup> Grey, Zane, p 211.

<sup>259</sup> Grey, Zane, p 143.

<sup>260</sup> Grey, Zane, p 76.

calves, which he brings back to their hide-out of Surprise Valley. The task he has undertaken is one of ‘an exceedingly heavy burden, but Venters was powerful.’<sup>261</sup> Like the Virginian and Lassiter, Venters also incorporates the traits of being a rescuer and protector typical of the cowboy hero. Providing for Bess, Venters has time to do some thinking. On observing Bess, he perceives that he has before him ‘the blind terror of a woman confronted with the thought of death to her savior and protector.’<sup>262</sup> Like the Virginian and Lassiter, Venters also proves his perfection in relation to that of his gentler qualities.

‘It was this softer, gentler man who had awakened to new thoughts in the quiet valley. Tenderness, masterful in him now...’<sup>263</sup>

Like the Virginian and Lassiter, the image of mastery is also conveyed in how he exercises control of his horse. In the chapter *Wrangle’s Race Run*, Venters gains control of his horse that has turned wilder than ever. Venters catches Wrangle with ‘a perfect throw with his rope.’<sup>264</sup> Moreover, when Wrangle plunges in fright because of gunfire, he jerks ‘the horse down with a powerful hand,’<sup>265</sup> and leaps into his saddle. Upon realizing that the riders Venters is facing also are riding Jane Withersteen’s stolen beautiful Arabian racers, he utters ‘a savage outcry.’<sup>266</sup> He is succumbed with rage. Still, he exerts full control.<sup>267</sup> Like the Virginian and Lassiter, Venters is powerful, fearless, gentle, and masterfully tender, a savior and protector, intelligent and excels in the control of rope, horse, and guns. Moreover, the elements of confidence, implacability, energy of savagery and violence reinforce the image of superb strength of psyche in the heroes of both Wister’s and Grey’s novel. Nevertheless, these male incarnations of mastery contain the covert element which Jane Tompkins has emphasized trying to explain why it is of utmost importance for the Western hero to master his environment.

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<sup>261</sup> Grey, Zane, p 97.

<sup>262</sup> Grey, Zane, p 99.

<sup>263</sup> Grey, Zane, p 137.

<sup>264</sup> Grey, Zane, p 168.

<sup>265</sup> Grey, Zane, p 170.

<sup>266</sup> Grey, Zane, p 170.

<sup>267</sup> Grey, Zane, p 173.

When the male protagonist sets out to master his environment he does so in order to silence the voice of the child within. The lack and loss of the little child is too painful to face. Zane Grey like Owen Wister gives us the insight of repressed desire and the longing and yearning for the complete superabundant jouissance of the (m)Other. We are never told explicitly that this is the case, but there are definitely passages and indicators to reinforce such a notion. Again we remember Lacan who claims that the repressed desire for the mother's body moves ceaselessly from signifier to signifier or from object to object.<sup>268</sup> Jane Tompkins underlines how Grey continually transgresses the boundaries between self and the world.

Sexual passion in Grey passes continually in and out of grief, rage, frustration, vengeance, longing, and other, unnameable feelings, which sweep through the life-world of the novel in a continual kaleidoscope of desire. In Grey's prose you have a sense of energy on the loose.<sup>269</sup>

No wonder Grey in real life went through 'lengthy depressions'<sup>270</sup> and also experienced 'changes of mood on a daily and even hourly basis.'<sup>271</sup> Several passages in Grey's novel suggest unconscious elements of the text and thus repressed desire. Early on in the story Venters tells Lassiter that he has a mother in Illinois and wants to go home.<sup>272</sup> One of Venters' nights in solitude reinforces the element of loneliness and thus a sense of longing. The 'same old loneliness beset Venters, the old habit of sad thought and burning unquiet had its way.'<sup>273</sup>

Drawing on Kirsten Campbell's account of Lacan and the four discourses, it is tempting to focus on the importance of how Bess as a woman opens the discourse of the Master by exposing his castration and lack within. The following passage suggests how Bess exposes and opens up Venters for a deeper understanding of the unsolved mysteries of life:

Often, in these hours of dreams, he watched the girl, and asked himself what she was dreaming? For the changing light of the valley reflected its gleam and its color and its meaning in the changing light of her eyes. He saw in them infinitely more than he saw in his dreams.

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<sup>268</sup> Moi, Toril, 101.

<sup>269</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 170.

<sup>270</sup> Goode, Steve, "The King of Westerns".

<sup>271</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 165.

<sup>272</sup> Grey, Zane, p 22.

<sup>273</sup> Grey, Zane, p 33.

He saw thought and soul and nature—strong visions of life. All tidings the west wind blew from distance and age he found in those dark-blue depths, and found them mysteries unsolved. Under their wistful shadow he softened, and in the softening felt himself grow a sadder, a wiser, and a better man.<sup>274</sup>

When Venters explores Surprise Valley, he discovers the enormous cave of the cliff-dwellers. The cave signals some kind of depressive energy, of something being lost forever. ‘The place oppressed him...It had the look of a place where silence had become master and was now irrevocable and terrible, and could not be broken.’<sup>275</sup> This citation says more than it appears to. It can of course be referring to the unknown history of the vanished race. Or, does the place evoke Venters as to give him glances into his unconscious self? Is this an instance of metonymical displacement of repressed desire? Remember that by inflecting a psychoanalytic reading the apparently stable relation between the signifier and the signified concepts starts to unravel which encourages a different reading. I suggest that the unconscious element of this passage is the forbidden desire for the superabundant jouissance of complete happiness of the (m)Other. ‘Silence’, being the Name-of-the-Father, has become ‘master’ forbidding the child to desire the (m)Other. The image of ‘silence’ being ‘irrevocable’ suggests the drainage of jouissance and of something that is lost forever. This might be stretching it too far. Considering the evidence of repressed desire otherwise in the novel, I believe it is plausible.

In fact, Jane Withersteen is the incarnation of the primordial (m)Other in relation to Venters. We know already that Venters has been extremely attracted to Jane. In a passage early in the novel, Venters in his admiration compares Jane with the beauty of the landscape.

...it suddenly resembled the woman near him; only in her there were greater beauty and peril, a mystery unsolvable, and something nameless that numbed his heart and dimmed his eye.<sup>276</sup>

This ‘mystery unsolvable’ and something ‘nameless’ does at least not undermine the notion of the desire of the mother’s body, which is so unspeakable that it numbs his heart and dims his eyes. The desire for the mother’s body is repressed. A few pages later Venters goes on

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<sup>274</sup> Grey, Zane, p 141.

<sup>275</sup> Grey, Zane, p 91.

<sup>276</sup> Grey, Zane, p 15.

contemplating about Jane. He thinks the world of her and believes that no ‘queen could have given more royally out of her bounteous store than Jane Withersteen gave her people, and likewise to those whom her people hated.’<sup>277</sup> The connotation of ‘bounteous store’ to that of superabundant jouissance is likely. Even after Venters has become attached to Bess, Venters’s affection for Jane has not lessened.

His affection for Jane Withersteen had not changed in the least; nevertheless, he seemed to view it from another angle and see it as another thing—what, he could not exactly define. The recalling of these two feelings was to Venters like getting glimpses into a self that was gone; and the wonder of them—perhaps the change was too illusive for him—was the fact that a strange irritation accompanied the memory and a desire to dismiss it from mind. And straightway he did dismiss it, to return to thoughts of his significant present.<sup>278</sup>

Grey explicitly spells out that Venters has been given a glimpse of his unconscious self, ‘a self that was gone,’ something lost forever. He has been given a glimpse of the superabundant jouissance of complete happiness of the (m)Other. Moreover, these forbidden thoughts because of the Name-of-the-Father, was the cause of the ‘desire to dismiss it’ from his mind, which he did immediately.

However, the forbidden sensations are once again evoked in Venters when Jane and Lassiter, on their flight from Withersteen House, encounter Bess and Venters. Here Venters experiences the unconditional love of the primordial (m)Other. Even though Jane Withersteen has been deprived of her worldly goods, she sacrifices the last of her worldly possessions, which she nearly considers her own flesh and blood. Jane insists on letting Bess and Venters have her Arabian horses, Black Star and Night, to enable them to out chase the riders that will be following them. Understanding the emotional tumult of her actions, Venters is given divine insight and finally grasps the truth that ‘Jane Withersteen was the incarnation of selflessness. He experienced wonder and terror, exquisite pain and rapture.’<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Grey, Zane, p 20.

<sup>278</sup> Grey, Zane, p 95.

<sup>279</sup> Grey, Zane, p 221.

And instantly, as if by some divine insight, he knew himself in the remaking—tried, found wanting; but stronger, better, surer—and he wheeled to Jane Withersteen, eager, joyous, passionate, wild, exalted. He bent to her; he left tears and kisses on her hands.<sup>280</sup>

Venters has had a felt experience of the recognition and unconditional love of the primordial (m)Other. He accepts his desire in a tumult of joy, worship, and pain. Furthermore, Jane Withersteen's embrace of Bess touches Venters in a strange and beautiful manner. Bess in a sense is the incarnation of the untouched child or the child within, 'innocent above all innocence in the world.'<sup>281</sup> She reminds him of his own longing to crawl into the bosom of his own mother. 'How inconceivably strange and beautiful it was to see Bess clasped to Jane Withersteen's breast!'<sup>282</sup> When Lassiter, Jane, and the burros depart and disappear into the Pass, 'Venters felt a sensation of irreparable loss.'<sup>283</sup> This 'sensation of irreparable loss' signifies the lack and loss of the symbiotic unity with the primordial (m)Other, something which is lost forever. Bess and Venters ride the ride of their lives and reach safety. Venters recollects what it must have cost Jane to part with her Arabians. He talks of their returning to Illinois and buying a beautiful farm with meadows and springs and cool shade.

"There we'll turn the horses free—free to roam and browse and drink—never to be ridden!"<sup>284</sup>

The images of Jane Withersteen as the incarnation of the primordial (m)Other and Bess as the incarnation of the little child within have rekindled the desire and longing of being reunited with the superabundant jouissance of the mother's body. Like the Virginian on his honeymoon with Molly, the longing and yearning to melt and become one with the virginal paradise of Mother Earth is present in the above citation as a metonymical displacement visualizing horses as images of subjects free of Masters and thus free of the threat of the Name-of-the-Father.

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<sup>280</sup> Grey, Zane, p 221.

<sup>281</sup> Grey, Zane, p 189.

<sup>282</sup> Grey, Zane, p 221.

<sup>283</sup> Grey, Zane, p 223.

<sup>284</sup> Grey, Zane, p 226.



## 4.0.0 Dr. Quinn Breaks the Silence

### 4.1.0 Beth Sullivan

*Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* is a melodrama television series geared to family viewing which depicts a woman doctor on the frontier town of Colorado Springs in the late 1860's. The series debuted in 1993 and became surprisingly an immediate success. I have chosen to include episodes from *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman, The Complete Season One*. I will in particular be giving references to the following episodes which appear chronologically in the following order in the series: *Pilot, Epidemic, The Visitor, Law of the Land, Bad Water, The Great American Medicine Show, and Portraits*. Why have I chosen *Dr. Quinn* as part of my thesis? First of all, the series fits the description of a Western because of its setting in the Old West. Moreover, instead of relying on a male lead character, *Dr. Quinn* depends on a female lead character. Significantly, the female lead character of Dr. Michaela Quinn emerges as an incarnation of a woman breaking the silence of women as she succeeds in positioning herself as a *female knowing speaking subject of mastery*. The traditional Western answers the question 'What is a man?' Bonnie J. Dow in her *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and Women's Movement since 1970* emphasises that 'Westerns return us to simpler locale, where the stakes are clear and the autonomy of the self is given.'<sup>285</sup> By giving *Dr. Quinn* a foothold in a nostalgic genre, an ultimate context is provided for discovering the authentic self. Dr. Michaela Quinn journeys from Boston to Colorado. 'What she becomes in the West will answer the question that plagues us in the present: "What is a woman?"'<sup>286</sup>

Beth Sullivan herself is a prime example of how a female succeeds in breaking the silence of women and thus occupies a position of a *female knowing speaking subject of mastery*. She has quite a merit list within the film industry before ending up as 'a

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<sup>285</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 177.

<sup>286</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 177.

development/production executive in the television division of Twentieth Century Fox.’<sup>287</sup> Wolf Schneider writes that ‘she is the first woman to single handedly create and executive-produce a successful prime-time network drama.’<sup>288</sup> Sullivan is thus a pioneer herself. Western narratives and films have a history of predominately being created by men. A new dimension has been brought to the screen of the Western in the fact that Beth Sullivan is a woman. Beth Sullivan was granted access to the power corridors of the film industry after the success of her involvement of being co-creator, co-writer, and executive-story supervisor in *The Trials of Rosie O’Neil* (1990-1991). Both *Dr. Quinn* and *The Trials of Rosie O’Neil* are female-lead series.

”I was always fascinated by what was happening with women, post-Civil War. Women had taken a back seat all through the Civil War. They were told, ‘Wait your turn, everything will be fine, and you’re going to get the vote, too. And you’re fighting for enfranchisement including your own.’ Then they were, to their minds, sold out at the last moment...the more research I did, I found it was a very interesting time period...”<sup>289</sup>

Sullivan experienced her work on the *Dr. Quinn* series as rewarding since she was able to do some terrific exploring and thinking of her own.<sup>290</sup> She ‘describes her own management style as “no nonsense” and has no intentions of slowing down with motherhood.’<sup>291</sup> Sullivan projects her convictions onto the film screen. At the computer Sullivan created the lead female and male characters of Michaela and Sully as well as all the other characters of the mining town of Colorado Springs.

Beth Sullivan in *Dr. Quinn* has a feminist agenda as she strides to portray a winding power struggle for female emancipation. The nineteenth century was as we know a difficult era for a woman like Michaela Quinn. The Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention of 1848 focuses on how the patriarchal order of men have historically deprived the female sex of equal rights including the right to an education of her own choosing. Patriarchy did not believe that

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<sup>287</sup> Schneider, Wolf.

<sup>288</sup> Schneider, Wolf.

<sup>289</sup> Schneider, Wolf.

<sup>290</sup> Schneider, Wolf.

<sup>291</sup> Schneider, Wolf.

women had the intellectual capacity for education. Law and Medicine were not fit for women because women were considered emotional. Moreover, the medical field occupied by men was determined to exclude women. Within these circumstances Beth Sullivan creates her lead character and heroine Dr. Michaela Quinn. Sullivan uses a gender role-reversal technique and parts thus with traditional Westerns, which predominately had a man as its lead character. In *Dr. Quinn* the female gender role has been expanded to allow for female emancipation. Bonnie J. Dow believes that Beth Sullivan has provided Dr. Michaela Quinn with ‘a ready-made constituency to champion.’<sup>292</sup>

#### **4.2.0 The Female Knowing Speaking Subject of Mastery**

Michaela Quinn is the youngest of five sisters. When Michaela was born her father was hoping for a boy and had planned to call him Michael. Being a girl she was thus called Michaela and given an unusual upbringing for a woman of her period. Her father projected unto Michaela his hopes and expectations that he would have had for the son he was hoping for. Judith Butler is correct when she emphasises how gender roles are socially constructed. Significantly, Michaela is raised like a boy and even given a boy’s name, which has empowered Michaela and equipped her with a strong will and voice. She is determined to attend medical school, but none will admit women. Nevertheless, she finally succeeds in earning a medical degree by graduating from a female medical college in Philadelphia. She receives substantial support and training from her father who is a famous surgeon in Boston. Together with her father they run their medical practise. Both her father and fiancé, also a doctor, die. They are both the only two who supported her quest to practice medicine. Because Michaela’s patients are gone with the death of her father and because she rejects a conventional life for a woman of her period, which normally would be a life of homemaking

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<sup>292</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 176.

and bearing and rearing children, she travels west. The year is 1867. She leaves Boston, her family, and the only life she has ever known. She travels to ‘the frontier, a place where people made new beginnings, a place where her (my) services would be needed, where her (my) skills would be appreciated, where she (I) finally would be accepted as a doctor’<sup>293</sup> rather than a woman.

The role-reversals of *Dr. Quinn* are striking when compared to both *The Virginian* and *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Owen Wister in *The Virginian* repeatedly denigrates the female sex by belittling and ridiculing women. Like Owen Wister, Beth Sullivan uses humour to ridicule the opposite sex. However, in the case of *Dr. Quinn* it is the male sex that ultimately is being ridiculed and denigrated. Bonnie J. Dow focuses on how some of the ‘white male characters in *Dr. Quinn* are flawed through bigotry (Loren, Jake, Hank) or weakness (Horace, Reverend Johnson).’<sup>294</sup> Dow reveals her surprise of not having read popular criticism that has focused on the shabby treatment of some of the male characters in the series.

It surprises me that I have not read popular criticism of *Dr. Quinn* that lambasts the drama’s shabby treatment of white male characters, who approach caricature at times in the exaggerated bravado, machismo, prejudice, and disdain for femininity. These kinds of characterizations have a lot of resonance for me, and even I have found it excessive.<sup>295</sup>

Several scenes in different episodes are at times hilarious. On arriving in Colorado Springs, Michaela is the one to initially be ridiculed and mocked. Michaela meets with the Reverend Timothy Johnson. He is in shock because he was expecting a male doctor. No one in Colorado had ever heard of a woman doctor and he says they will of course pay her fare back to Boston. Michaela is met with hostility and mockery in her meeting with both the townsmen and the landscape. She arrives and steps off the coach all dressed up in a civilly Eastern female outfit, which is not appropriate for the conditions of the frontier territory. Her first step onto the soil is muddy. A while later, trying to keep up with the Reverend, she trips and lies

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<sup>293</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *A Different World*.

<sup>294</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 194.

<sup>295</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 195.

face down in the mud. This is a first attempt to ridicule the female sex, which especially aligns with the ridicule of the female sex in *The Virginian*. Beth Sullivan succeeds in drawing attention to how traditional Westerns have denigrated and silenced women. From the very first meeting with Colorado Springs, Michaela even though humiliated by the landscape, keeps her head up high and refuses to be told what to do. She speaks up for herself and is determined to hold on to the position she has received as Doctor of Colorado Springs. She is ready for the power struggle between herself and the townspeople, especially some of the white male community. Already in the beginning scenes of the first episode *Pilot*, Michaela sets out to prove her position as a *female knowing speaking subject of mastery*.

Before giving a more detailed account of how Michaela positions herself as a knowing speaking subject it is essential to make space for the destabilizing efforts that Sullivan employs in her portrayal of gender roles. Judith Butler points to the hegemony of the symbolic language of men. She emphasises the need for women to recapture their female voice and speaks of the cost of identity's straitjacket. The role of women is socially constructed and she believes that identity is a trap, a hardening into rigid, binarized categories of much fluid and heterogeneous possibilities. Thus, she calls for actions that will "resignify" our received meanings.<sup>296</sup> Because of those naturalised and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony it is essential for women to start reprogramming themselves, to initiate a resignification process. Significantly, Butler calls for a loosening of the categories of gender, which is exactly what Beth Sullivan is doing when creating the *Dr. Quinn* series. Before turning to a detailed outline of Michaela as a *female knowing speaking subject of mastery*, I will focus to envelope how Sullivan succeeds in loosening the categories of gender by turning to the white male population of Colorado Springs.

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<sup>296</sup> Leitch, Cain, Finke, Johnson, McGowen, Williams, *The Norton Anthology, Theory and Criticism*, p 2486.

The denigrating female attitudes of the townsmen are in a sense overturned and result in the men themselves being ridiculed and denigrated. In the scene *On the Frontier* of the first episode *Pilot*, Reverend Johnson is determined to send Michaela back to Boston. He explains that there are not any respectable single women in Colorado Springs whereupon Michaela fires back that then there should at least be one. The Reverend explains that the widow Charlotte Cooper, running a boarding house, does not even allow women borders. When Michaela is warmly greeted by Charlotte, saying that there is always an exception to the rule, she hands the live hen she is holding in her hands to Reverend Johnson. We remember how Owen Wister used the hen Em'ly to ridicule and denigrate the female sex. Moreover, we remember how Em'ly was portrayed as being hysterical, shrieking, acting up, and making a lot of noise for nothing. Em'ly gave associations to the Hysterical in the discourse of the Hysterical. Beth Sullivan in this scene succeeds in portraying the male sex personified as Reverend Johnson as being hysterical, acting up, and making a lot of noise for nothing. By welcoming Michaela into her house and at the same time handing the hen over to Reverend Johnson, Beth Sullivan through Charlotte succeeds in telling her audience that the Reverend's protests have been in vain and that he has in fact been acting up for nothing. Beth Sullivan herein succeeds in firing back at the male sex by telling her audience that what you observe in the Other is actually a part of the self. The image of the flapping and shrieking hen in the hands of Reverend Johnson suggests that it is the male sex that is the target. This scene is indeed funny and is one of the first scenes Beth Sullivan creates to ridicule and denigrate the male sex.

Another scene that succeeds in loosening the categories of gender and denigrates the male sex involves the barber Jake Slicker. He tells Reverend Johnson that Dr. Mike needs to be put on the first stage back to Boston. Michaela and Charlotte are out walking and upon passing Jake Slicker, Charlotte explains:

Charlotte: Mr. Jake Slicker, he's pulled a few teeth, he's lived a few wars, and that makes him a doctor.  
Dr. Mike: I see the competition.<sup>297</sup>

It is obvious that neither of the women have much respect for his doctoring capabilities. We see here how the roles are reversed. In *The Virginian*, we remember the Tall Tale the Virginian was telling to deceive his lower quality male audience by using a ridiculous woman as the vehicle of mockery. We remember how the woman used an Indian stone to suck out the poison from the bit he had received from the rattlesnake. Just as soon as she was portrayed as being capable of curing the Virginian, he reversed his tactic and ultimately ridiculed and denigrated the woman. In the above dialogue we witness that it is the male sex that is being ridiculed, and denigrated by the dialogue of the two women commenting on Jake Slicker's medical competence.

Michaela experiences again and again being shoved aside by Jake Slicker and the townsmen when the townspeople are in need of medical assistance. Practicing as midwife, Charlotte calls on Michaela for assistance. Even though she saved the lives of the female character Emily and her baby, no patients come to her. In the scene *Drastic Measures* of the episode *Pilot*, Michaela decides to go to drastic measures to win the confidence of Jake and the townspeople. The Hysteric is frequently a position assigned to women. Having had difficulty making up his mind, Lacan actually later in life 'identifies the discourse of science with that of hysteria.'<sup>298</sup> Dany Nobus writes that the Hysteric goes at the master and demands that he shows his stuff, proves his mettle by producing something serious by way of knowledge.<sup>299</sup> Jane as "hysteric" medical expert goes at Jake Slicker and tells him she is in need of his professional services. She hopes he has time for her in his busy schedule. Jake tries to make a joke and says he doesn't cut women's hair. Michaela corrects him and tells him it is his medical services she is in need of. She tells him of her toothache and would like a

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<sup>297</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Wanted: Residence*.

<sup>298</sup> Nobus, Dany, p 35.

<sup>299</sup> Nobus, Dany, p 34.

second opinion, one doctor to another. Jake invites her in. Even though the tooth is perfectly fine, Jake tells her it looks bad and suggests that it needs to be pulled. As the townspeople are watching, Jake has an image to uphold. Michaela says that she “trusts herself entirely to his estimable care.”<sup>300</sup> He does not understand whereby Michaela tells Jake to pull the tooth. Jake puts all his strength to the task. Michaela endures the treatment without screaming. On leaving, one of the men hands back her tooth whereupon she replies that she figures she earned it. The townspeople and Jake are impressed. Charlotte laughs when hearing about the tooth-pulling-scene and understanding why Michaela let Jake pull out a perfectly good tooth.<sup>301</sup> This whole scene using humour manages to expose the illusion of Jake’s medical competence. Michaela succeeds in fooling Jake. She uses fine language, which Jake does not comprehend. Michaela does not even attempt to explain what she means. Instead she replies with simple language that she knows he will understand: “Pull it.” Herein Beth Sullivan continues to denigrate masculinity and succeeds in subordinating Jake in relation to Michaela. Michaela uses the tooth-pulling-scene to also comment on the infection of Jake’s hand and offers him ointment to heal the infection. When Jake experiences its healing effect, Michaela has won an important battle of recognition which helps her to position herself as a *female knowing subject of mastery* being a subject of medical expertise.

It is no coincidence that Beth Sullivan creates a lead female character occupying a role, which until then was kept from women. The medical field occupied by men was determined to exclude women. More than any other profession, a doctor is highly esteemed symbolizing notions of intellect, knowledge, and power. Creating a female physician lead character is a mode for the female sex to position herself as a knowing subject of mastery, which enables her to break the silence of women and stop the discourse of the Master. It is no coincidence that Beth Sullivan has chosen the frontier as the setting for her melodrama. The

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<sup>300</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, episode: *Pilot*, scene: *Drastic Measures*.

<sup>301</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, episode: *Pilot*, scene: *Heartbreak*.



frontier is usually associated with male space. By situating a lead female character in a frontier setting, the male characters are shoved aside giving space for women, which enables the female sex to recapture her voice. It is no coincidence that Beth Sullivan has chosen the Western genre for her television melodrama series. Westerns have a history of usually silencing women. Choosing the Western genre for *Dr. Quinn* is a perfect mode of rewriting history and un-silencing the female sex.

There are so many additional episodes, which denigrate masculinity. In the episode *Law of the Land*, there are scenes that excessively unravel the illusion of mastery. In the scene *Interviews* Sullivan succeeds in caricaturing the male sex and the traditional cowboy hero. Because of the theft and slaughtering of a cow belonging to the ranch owner Olive, storekeeper Loren Bray's sister, the townsmen are in a fury wanting to hang the thief Jon, a fatherless and impoverished Swedish immigrant. The situation is getting out of hand and Michaela and the Reverend set out to hire a sheriff who can deal with the vigilance of the townsmen. A lot of young men apply for the position. Interviews expose them all as incompetent being all an antithesis to the traditional cowboy hero. Their moral integrity is shaky and they all seem unintelligent. Finally, they are asked to show their skills in gun-shooting. They shoot in different directions and miss all the targets. In the midst of this spectacle the aging and ailing Kid Cole, played by Johnny Cash, steps forth as the perfect gunman, and out-conquers them all. Kid Cole is offered the position as sheriff.

Kid Cole: Looks like the only way I'm gonna have me a quiet peaceful little town is to make me one.  
Reverend: I'm surprised you'd be interested in such a position.  
Kid Cole: Well, truth be told...The only thing I really wanted to do was to find a quiet place to put out some rose bushes. Maybe break up a saloon fight once in a while.  
Dr. Mike: Mr. Cole...will you excuse us for a moment?  
Kid Cole: Yes, Ma'am.  
Dr. Mike: Thank you all for showing up. The committee has reached a final decision and we're going to hire Mr. Cole.  
Kid Cole: Sorry, fellers...  
Reverend: We'd like you to start immediately by moving the boy to the safety of the jail.  
Kid Cole: What's the salary?

Loren: Say two bits a day?  
 Kid Cole: Make that four bits a day and we have a deal.  
 Dr. Mike: Then we agree Mr. Cole. (*Dr. Mike takes over the negotiating.*)  
 Kid Cole: Just one thing else... You ain't gonna be my boss, are you? (*Dr. Mike smiles and laughs.*)<sup>302</sup>

Beth Sullivan here creates a scene, which illustrates the illusion of the master position of the cowboy hero and the male sex. It is no coincidence that Johnny Cash has been chosen to co-star as Kid Cole. In the iconography of American pop/country music, Johnny Cash is the incarnation of the ultimate image of masculinity. In real life Johnny Cash even has a history of being a jailbird. The cowboy hero in *Law of the Land* that finally stands forth and out-conquers the rest is growing old and most of all wishes to retire. This fact suggests that the traditional image of the cowboy hero is outliving its day. In the first scene *Shootout* of the same episode *Law of the Land*, Kid Cole is forced to draw on a young cowboy who is set on proving himself as a man. Kid Cole wins the dual by shooting him in the shoulder. Dr. Mike is naturally on the spot and treats the young man. The following dialogue between Michaela and Kid Cole reinforces the illusion of mastery of the cowboy hero.

Kid Cole: How much do I owe you?  
 Dr. Mike: Five dollars.  
 Kid Cole: It'd be cheaper to bury.  
 Dr. Mike: You still might have the opportunity...he's very weak.  
 Kid Cole: Well, excuse me, Ma'am. But I don't wish any man's death.  
 Dr. Mike: Then, why did you become a gunfighter?  
 Kid Cole: It wasn't my choice. I killed a man in Texas a long time ago. He had the reputation of bein' fast...so...I got one too. Then people started comin' after me...How's the air around here?<sup>303</sup>

The image of the cowboy hero and gunfighter here personified by Kid Cole is built on a lie. Kid Cole never chose to be a gunman. Circumstances gave him a reputation he has tried to hide and escape from ever since. The image of the cowboy hero is falling apart. Even his physical health is deteriorating as he is suffering from a bad coughing condition, bronchitis. Kid Cole can shoot, but otherwise he is far from being portrayed as the perfect male protagonist as is the case of the *Virginian* and *Lassiter*. The illusion of mastery of the cowboy

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<sup>302</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *The Law of the Land*, Scene: *Interviews*.

<sup>303</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *The Law of the Land*, Scene: *Shootout*.

hero and male sex is a fact. Beth Sullivan reinforces the illusion by even feminizing the man. In the scene *Interviews*, Kid Cole reveals the ‘truth’ that the only thing he really wanted to do was to ‘find a quiet place to put out some rose bushes.’ At the end of the same scene Michaela ultimately ends up as the negotiator and thus literally breaks the silence of women. Because of the position taken by Michaela, Kid Cole addresses Michaela with the question: ‘You ain’t gonna be my boss, are you?’ This last utterance verifies a destabilization and loosening of the traditional hierarchal order of gender roles, which enables women to recapture their voice.

The episode *Bad Water* more than any other episode demonstrates how the traditional cowboy hero is caricatured. The town’s water supply turns out to be polluted with mercury. Many townspeople become sick. Sully and Michaela set out on a mission to take samples of the tainted water in order to prove that Clay Warding, an arrogant miner, is polluting the town’s water supply. Warding sends out a warning against trespassing. When a horse rides into town with a dead man over its back and with a warning note attached to the dead man, the townspeople are alarmed.

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Olive:    | Dr. Mike and Sully left yesterday to get a sample of the water near Warding’s mill. We gotta warn ‘em. Who’s ridin’ with me? |
| Reverend: | But you’re not feelin’ up to it, Olive?  |
| Olive:    | Neither were you.  |
| Robert E: | I’ll go.   |
| Grace:    | But we promised to look after the children.  |
| Horace:   | I’ll go.   |
| Hank:     | And you’ll go get shot is what.  |
| Olive:    | Just cause you ain’t brave.  |
| Hank:     | I’m not stupid.  |
| Olive:    | Well, that’s a matter of opinion.  |
| Reverend: | Well, I’m goin’. Jake, what about you?   |
| Jake:     | I got the shop here.   |
| Loren:    | Oh...you can’t just let Dr. Mike get shot.   |
| Jake:     | What if someone’s out to need a haircut.   |
| Olive:    | Dr. Mike’s done an awful lot for the folks in this town.   |
| Hank:     | Jake’s yellow.   |
| Jake:     | Yeh...well, who’s yellow? I’ll go if you go.   |
| Hank:     | How ‘bout you old man...get-y-up.  |
| Loren:    | You bet... <sup>304</sup>  |

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<sup>304</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *Search Party*

This dialogue is taken from the scene *Search Party*, which initiates passages that become increasingly hilarious. By repeatedly switching back and forth from passages of the search party to the two main protagonists, Michaela and Sully, Beth Sullivan creates an effect, which humorously denigrates the white male community of Colorado Spring. By juxtaposing Michaela to the mocking and ridiculing traits of the white townsmen, Michaela and Sully both emerge convincingly as the perfect female and male heroine and hero of *Dr. Quinn*. Understanding the danger that Michaela and Sully might be in Olive in the above dialogue initiates getting together a search party. Upon hearing the different excuses for not wanting to go, Olive speaks up for Michaela when she says that: “Dr. Mike’s done an awful lot for the folks in this town.” The men quarrel back and forth out-daring each other by calling each other yellow. No one wants to be regarded a coward. There is an important code that is being violated here. “Real manly men” would be falling over themselves to go out and rescue Michaela. The party that winds up going is the barber Jake, the bartender Hank, the aging storekeeper Loren, the telegraph operator Horace, the Reverend Johnson, and Michaela’s adoptive son Matthew. In the next passage the townsmen are ready for their search ride.

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Jake:     | What do you think you’re doin’?  |
| Matthew:  | I’m goin’ with you...  |
| Hank:     | This ain’t a job for kids.   |
| Matthew:  | Well, I don’t see any kids. Do you Reverend?   |
| Reverend: | No, I don’t...Let’s ride. Well, when I’m gonna want to stop. I’m gonna pick up my arm like this. Alright? Let’s go. <sup>305</sup> |

Pretending to be the leader of the search party the Reverend demonstrates how he plans to signal them to stop. The first thing that happens is that the Reverend is knocked off his horse when he bumps his head riding into a sign in town. Olive kneels down to ask if he is alright whereupon the Reverend sits up, replies, and falls right back down knocked out completely.

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Reverend: | I don’t think so.  |
| Hank:     | That’s one down. ( <i>Sarcastically</i> ) <sup>306</sup> |

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<sup>305</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *Search Party*.

<sup>306</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *Search Party*.

This passage is indeed funny. Matthew, Loren, Jake, Hank, and Horace ride off without the Reverend.

When the men finally find a place to camp for the night they act like little boys and make comments as if they are not used to being in the wilderness. Loren suddenly sees a skunk. Horace has laid down his blanket whereupon Jake steals his spot.

Matthew: Better make camp before it gets dark.  
Jake: I'm sleepin' here.  
Horace: Hey...that's my spot.  
Matthew: Keep your voices down. Now...no fires...We'll be spotted.  
Loren: Look...skunk.  
Matthew: Just leave it alone...it's not gonna bother us.  
Jake: I don't like skunks.  
Hank: It makes skunk noise.  
Matthew: Skunks don't make noise.  
Hank: Get...get...  
Matthew: Be careful...You'll scare him.  
Loren: What are you doin'?  
Horace: Hey...man...  
Hank: (*Bends down to pick up a stone to throw on the skunk...*)  
Horace: Don't kill it man.  
Hank: Oh...skunks are just bully.  
Loren: What are you doin'?<sup>307</sup>

This passage is one of the most hilarious passages of all *The Complete Season One* episodes of *Dr. Quinn*. The skunk lifts up its tail spurting and spreading out its gruesome odour. The men frantically attempt to protect themselves, but of course this is in vain. Sullivan does not stop here with the skunk. An instance of gender role reversal is seen in what happens next. The men wind up in the river doing their own laundry washing their clothes and themselves. Beth Sullivan uses excessive humour to ridicule the male sex. The whole *Search Party* scene reinforces the notion of loosening up the categories of gender. Loren wearing his hat and garbed in his long buttoned underwear is a sight smelling his clothes.

Loren: Oh, Lord...The smell ain't ever gonna come out of this.  
Horace: I told you... (*in long underwear and bowled hat*)  
Hank: (*laughing...*)<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *Search Party*.

<sup>308</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *Search Party*.

The men, except Matthew, wind up appearing in the long buttoned underwear for the rest of the episode. The next time we encounter the townsmen is in the scene *Uphill Climb*. They do not have a clue where they are heading and are quarrelling about which direction to take. While the others are putting on their shoes, Matthew, the youngest, gets on his horse and is no part of their quarrelling.

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Loren:   | Which way do you reckon...?   |
| Horace:  | That way to the right.  |
| Jake:    | No...it's to the left.  |
| Loren:   | That's right... left.   |
| Horace:  | Well, I see it on the map.  |
| Loren:   | Oh...you know most maps are worthless.  |
| Hank:    | Take the right...I know the river.  |
| Jake:    | You know skunks.  |
| Loren:   | I'm takin' left.  |
| Matthew: | You guys...I think we should go this way.   |
| Hank:    | Now...what do you know?   |
| Matthew: | I know enough to still have my clothes on. If we go this way we save half a day. <sup>309</sup> |

Sullivan continues to ridicule the male sex. Matthew rides off in his own direction whereas Jake takes the lead of the opposite direction. The men including Horace follow Jake. In the scene, *Wrong Turn*, the search party is completely lost, tired, and hungry.

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| One of the men:        | Get-y-up...   |
| Horace:                | What I wouldn't give for some hot biscuits.                                     |
| Loren:                 | Scalops...  |
| Hank:                  | Rabbit stew with brown gravy and even white cake for desert.                    |
| Loren:                 | Hey...look...the same rock.   |
| Jake:                  | What the hekk.  |
| Hank:                  | How we ended up her again?  |
| Loren:                 | Oh, we must have got turned around back in the woods.                           |
| Horace:                | I told you we should have stayed by the stream.                                 |
| Hank:                  | Told you...should have stayed by the stream.<br>( <i>ridiculing Horace...</i> ) |
| Jake:                  | We've been ridin' around all this time and we ain't got nowhere.                |
| Hank:                  | Why we're doin' this anyhow? Whose brain idea was this?                         |
| All the men in chorus: | The Reverend.   |
| Hank:                  | Succors...  |

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<sup>309</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *Uphill Climb*.

Jake: I bet his faith run into that sign...Probably never meant to come.  
 Hank: The Doc...if she didn't go pokin' her nose into where it don't belong...<sup>310</sup>

The excessive mocking of the male sex continues:

Loren: I say we go home.  
 Horace: Empty handed?  
 Loren: Who cares...  
 Jake: We'll never live it down.  
 Hank: I ain't sure now which way home is...  
 Chorus of men: That way...  
 Wolf: Wuff...wuff...  
 Hank: That's Sully's wolf?<sup>311</sup>

After Loren's suggestion of going home Horace worries about returning empty handed. Loren does not care whereas Jake cannot endure the thought. Hank responds by admitting that he is not sure where home is. The three other men reply in chorus all pointing in different directions. And as if this does not suffice as ridicule, Sully's wolf appears whereupon they follow the wolf. In the scene *New Venture*, the search party finally meets up with Dr. Mike.

Jake: What are we doin' followin' a wolf.  
 Hank: Shut up... you've done nothin' but get us lost.  
 Loren: Hey...we must be headin' north...look...look at that moss in that tree.  
 Horace: That ain't moss...that's mole...  
 ...  
 Hey...Dr. Mike! Hey boys...!  
 Dr. Mike: Horace...  
 Horace: We found 'em!  
 Jake: You're hurt?  
 Dr. Mike: Fell down and broke my wrist...that's all.  
 Loren: Dr. Mike...we've been searchin' for you for ever...for days.  
 Sully: That's what Matthew told us.  
 Hank: Folks in town worryin' you'd get shot.  
 Dr. Mike: Well, thank goodness you found us.  
 Horace: Come on boys...let's take 'em home.  
 Loren: That ain't the way...  
 Sully: Why don't I lead the way...Come on...<sup>312</sup>

Beth Sullivan gives her audience a great laugh throughout the episode of *Bad Water*. Sullivan does go at length to demonstrate a 'shabby treatment of white male characters.'<sup>313</sup> Lassiter

<sup>310</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *Wrong Turn*.

<sup>311</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *Wrong Turn*.

<sup>312</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *Bad Water*, Scene: *New Venture*.

and Venters spoke to Jane and Bess on a not equal level as if to a child. The same is true here only the gender roles are reversed. Michaela as if speaking to children lets the men believe that their search party really found them. Sully supports Michaela and in a nice manner as if speaking to children suggests that he leads the way back to town.

By excessively denigrating and mocking the white males of the town, Beth Sullivan creates an effect that enhances the superiority of Dr. Michaela Quinn. Bonnie J. Dow writes that ‘the shortcomings of these men allow Dr. Mike’s moral leadership to triumph.’<sup>314</sup> Even though Matthew in a sense is the real hero of this expedition he is so being congenial to Dr. Mike as he is her adoptive son. Michaela gradually earns the respect of the townspeople and positions herself as a moral authority of Colorado Springs. From the very start Michaela speaks up for herself and for the townspeople. By gradually proving her doctoring abilities and positioning herself as a *female knowing speaking subject of mastery* she wins the townspeople’s confidence one by one.

Michaela’s encounter with the male protagonist, Sully, is also a key to why Michaela’s leadership triumphs. He is the perfect male partner for her. The relationship between Lassiter and Jane resembled the relationship between that of the Analyst and the Analysand in the discourse of the Analyst. Lassiter did not resist the desire of mastery of the Analyst. He continually told Jane that she was blind. Upon realizing the truth about herself she became extremely attached and dependent on Lassiter and thus repositioned herself as the Other in the discourse of the Master in relation to Lassiter. Even though Sully at times is there to rescue Michaela, Sully also often resists the desire of demonstrating his mastery of the wilderness in relation to Michaela. In the first episode *Pilot*, Sully does help her out by offering her to rent his homestead. When Sully shows Michaela the homestead, Michaela falls when getting off her horse. Sully does not laugh and he does not come to her rescue. He in a sense gives her

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<sup>313</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 195.

<sup>314</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 195.



the reigns and the opportunity to become her own master. He tells her something that definitely violates the male-female “mastery code”:

Sully: If you’re gonna survive, you’re gonna have to learn to make it on your own.<sup>315</sup>

Sully does not help her out with the horse when it attempts to run off. He does not help her to drag the horse back. In fact he leaves Michaela at the homestead by herself. In the beginning of the scene *Luck*, when Charlotte finds out that Sully left her all alone she tells Michaela: “I don’t know how you found your way back to town by yourself. I’d like to ring Sully’s neck.”<sup>316</sup> By leaving Michaela by herself Sully helps Michaela in coping with the wilderness and becoming independent.

Sully does, however, come to the rescue when real danger emerges. He is like a shadow lurking in the background ready to assist Michaela when she needs physical, muscular, and moral support. Sully is not like the traditional western cowboy hero. He is quite unusual. Dow portrays him as ‘practically a token positive white male character, and his whiteness is camouflaged by his strong ties to the Native American community.’<sup>317</sup> He is an outdoorsman and knows the wilderness. He never uses guns, but is always equipped with a knife and a tomahawk. Sully has been given feminine characteristics. He hides the fact that his first name is Byron, a name that gives connotations to the late Lord Byron, the famous English poet and author who was to have been bisexual because of his supposedly practice of homosexuality.<sup>318</sup> In the episode *Law of the Land*, Sully and Brian, Michaela’s youngest adoptive son, have been out hunting and encounter an injured deer that Brian persuades Sully to bring home for Michaela to treat.

Sully: You’re askin’ for trouble.  
Dr. Mike: You’re the one who brought trouble back here. He can talk you into anything.  
Brian: What should we name it? Is Sully your first name?

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<sup>315</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Wanted: Residence*.

<sup>316</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Luck*.

<sup>317</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 194.

<sup>318</sup> Elwin, Malcolm, p 127.

Sully: No...  
 Brian: Well, what is?  
 Sully: It's not a good name for a dear.  
 Brian: Come on...I promise I won't laugh.  
 Sully: It's not even a good name for a man.  
 Brian: Please...  
 Sully: Byron  
 Brian: What?  
 Dr. Mike: Byron...  
 Brian: Byron...<sup>319</sup>

Sully is obviously embarrassed by his name and underlines that it is not a good name for a dear and not even a good name for a man. Brian does not laugh as he promised, but Michaela smiles and tries to keep herself from laughing. Already in the scene *Secret Patient* in *Pilot* Sully is given feminine traits when Sully admits to Brian that he is afraid of horses.

Brian: Ain't you ridin' with them, Sully?  
 Sully: Nop...  
 Brian: Why not?  
 Sully: Afraid of horses.  
 Brian: Really?  
 Sully: Yep. Always have been. Everybody's got somethin' they're afraid of.<sup>320</sup>

Beth Sullivan loosens the categories of gender in her portrayal of the man that Michaela learns to love. Sully is, however, depicted positively and emerges as the perfect male protagonist even though he admits being afraid of horses. We acknowledge that Sully in some respects is an antithesis to the traditional cowboy hero and emerges as a synthesis of both feminine and masculine qualities. The fact that he admits being afraid of horses suggests that he is in contact with his feminine sides, his emotions and the unconscious elements of his psyche. Bonnie J. Dow reinforces the feminine and masculine aspects of the character Sully.

Dr. Mike also has a steady, heterosexual love interest with whom her relationship is emotionally, although not physically, intense. He is, in fact, quite a feminized character in many ways, making him a suitable partner for an idealized representative of contemporary feminism. Sully, a mountain man and sometime Indian agent, is sensitive, caring, and supportive of Dr. Mike; most importantly, her higher status in the community does not threaten him. More than any other character, Sully supports Dr. Mike's moral vision of the community. However, these feminized aspects of his character are compensated for by his other, hypermasculine traits, illustrating what Lynne Joyrich has called "an excess of 'maleness' that acts as a shield" against the implications of feminization...He is handsome and

<sup>319</sup> Dr. *Quinn*, Episode: *Law of the Land*, Scene: *A Job*.

<sup>320</sup> Dr. *Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Secret Patient*.

muscled, and dresses in rough furs and leather. He is also a quintessential outdoorsman who lives in the wild, speaks only when he has something important to say, and feels most comfortable in his group of all-male Cheyenne companions. Many of the townspeople view him as something of a savage, and only Dr. Mike and her children truly understand him.<sup>321</sup>

The clue to why Sully is the perfect male partner for Michaela is the fact that her knowledge in the field of medicine does not threaten his own position. And vice versa, Sully's knowledge of the wilderness does not threaten Michaela's position. Sully respects what Michaela stands for as the doctor of Colorado Springs. And, Michaela respects Sully for his knowledge of the wilderness and for his moral integrity of negotiating peace with the Cheyenne and the U.S. Cavalry. They both in a sense complement each other, respect, and allow each other to position themselves as *knowing subjects of mastery* in each their own field. Sully repeatedly helps clear the way allowing Michaela to perform her medical duties. In the episode *Epidemic* Sully helps rip off the planks that are blocking the entrance to the boarding house. Michaela needs a place that will serve as hospital because of the influenza that has broken out. While the rest of the townsmen are watching, Sully paves the way for Michaela. Many lives are saved through the efforts of Dr. Mike. When she herself falls ill and there is no medicine left to reduce the fever, Sully intervenes and uses his knowledge of the Cheyenne to restore her health. Cloud Dancing, the Cheyenne medicine man, treats her with a Cheyenne tea brew and dances his medicine dance. Michaela's health is restored. This passage of the episode *Epidemic* reinforces the complimentary gender roles of Michaela and Sully.

Still, it is Dr. Michaela Quinn that is the lead character of the series. Furthermore, it is the female sex that traditionally has been suppressed and thus is in the need of being emancipated. Repeatedly, we witness how Sully steps aside and lets Michaela position herself as the *knowing speaking subject of mastery*. Not only does she gradually become recognised as a doctor, but by proving herself as competent in her medical field, she also emerges as a moral authority of Colorado Springs. Moreover, the turn of events on her arrival in Colorado

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<sup>321</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 175.

Springs plunges her professional struggles within a family context. In the first season of *Dr. Quinn*, the opening credits that depict Dr. Mike on her journey west includes: “I was told a woman doctor couldn’t survive alone on the frontier. But I won’t give up—and I’m not alone anymore. I’ve inherited a family, and that may be the biggest challenge of all.” My task is not to answer the feminist question “Can women do it all?” Nevertheless, even though Michaela is inexperienced with motherhood and homemaking, she gradually manages to cope with the challenges of her new position as well as function as doctor of Colorado Springs. The central place of her children creates episodes where she both as a mother and professional doctor emerges as the moral authority of the town. Bonnie J. Dow points to how ‘it is always the case that Dr. Mike’s expertise as a doctor is enhanced by her sensitivity and relationship skills as a woman and, in particular, as a mother.’<sup>322</sup> In this sense Dr. Michaela Quinn enhances the significance of the domesticity of motherhood. Michaela equips both the professional woman and the maternal woman with a voice.

After Charlotte Cooper died and left her children in the care of Michaela, the children are having difficulty adjusting. Brian, the youngest, runs off to find Sully who is with the Cheyenne. Michaela rides off to search for Brian. She gets lost and is found by the Cheyenne. In the scene *Risk* of the episode *Pilot*, Sully tells her that the Cheyenne and he will search for Brian the next morning. Michaela wants to go along.

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Dr. Mike: | How long before we’re going.  |
| Sully:    | You’re not going. Women stay in camp.   |
| Dr. Mike: | Not this woman.   |
| Sully:    | You know that the Cheyenne believe that if a woman acts like a brave she’ll become one. |
| Dr. Mike: | I’ll risk it. <sup>323</sup>  |

Michaela will not accept her limitations of a woman and insists on being part of the search hunt and takes the risk of being perceived as a woman with masculine traits. In the *Hunting Party* everyone is out searching, the Indians, Michaela and Sully, Matthew and the townsmen.

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<sup>322</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., pp 180, 181.

<sup>323</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *The Risk*.

The townsmen run into the Indians and inform the Cavalry. Sully and Michaela find and rescue Brian who has broken his leg. Dr. Mike is in control telling Sully what to do. When Michaela, Sully, Brian catch up with the Indians, the Cavalry is ready to attack. Dr. Mike intervenes by positioning herself in between the Cheyenne and the Cavalry. Sully also makes a move to protect Michaela, but Michaela steps forward and takes over.

Colonel:                   Damn it woman. You are interfering with government business.  
Sully:                     Wait...  
Dr. Mike:                 No, we're not. This is a search party, sir. My boy was lost and these people helped me try to find him.  
Colonel:                 The Cheyenne have broken Federal Law by leaving their reservation in a number greater than two.  
Dr. Mike:                 That's my fault. Please accept my apology.<sup>324</sup>

In this sequence it is Michaela that takes the speaking position negotiating with the colonel and thus literally breaks the silence of women. The cavalry departs. Brian lying in the grass expresses his admiration by telling Michaela: "You sure told them, Dr. Mike!"

Another passage from the scene *No Women Allowed* from the first episode *Pilot* portrays Michaela when walking into Hank's saloon to look for Myra, one of the saloon girls.

Hank:                     I'm gonna have to ask you to leave, Miss.  
Dr. Mike:                 And I'm going to have to refuse...Where can we talk? (to Myra)  
Hank:                     Ladies ain't allowed.  
Dr. Mike:                 I'm not a lady. I'm a doctor.<sup>325</sup>

She speaks with authority. Still the men laugh and treat her disrespectfully.

Dr. Mike:                 Sit down....What's your name?  
Myra:                     Myra.  
Dr. Mike:                 I'm Dr. Quinn.  
Myra:                     I liked what you said out there 'bout not being a lady.  
Dr. Mike:                 I don't approve of male hypocrisy.  
Myra:                     No, me neither.<sup>326</sup>

When Michaela finishes examining Myra she tells her that she can't work for a whole month. By justifying sex-workers as "workers", Michaela is also giving Myra a voice. Michaela walks into the saloon to tell Hank.

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<sup>324</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Hunting Party*.

<sup>325</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *No Women Allowed*.

<sup>326</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *No Women Allowed*.

Dr. Mike: I'll check on you in a week. (*to Myra...*)  
Hank, I've given Myra orders to be chaste for a month.  
Hank: Chaste?  
Dr. Mike: She doesn't work.  
Hank: She works for me.  
Man in saloon: Less you wanna take her place lady... (*Men laugh*)  
Dr. Quinn: I'm afraid that's not my line of work, gentlemen. As I said, I'm a  
doctor. (*Pronounced with authority*) I expect to be hearing from any  
of you foolish enough to spend time with Myra before that month's  
over.  
Hank: Get out!<sup>327</sup>

The same man blocks her way and tells her they are not finished with her yet. Sully comes to her rescue. Even though part of the plots are about Sully turning up to bail her out, he turns up enabling Michaela to emerge as a woman that does not hesitate to speak up for herself and to side with those more unfortunate in life.

The resolution of the episode *Law of the Land* in which the townspeople decide to hire a sheriff 'demonstrates the superiority of maternal insight over law and order.'<sup>328</sup> The passage below is from the scene *Trial by Proxy*, which contains a significant speech that Michaela gives in defence of Matthew and Jon for stealing Olive's cow. Michaela hereby exposes her sensitivity and relationship skills as a woman and a mother.

Dr. Mike: He (Matthew) and John stole a cow. They know what they did was wrong, but they did it because someone they both cared for was starving. I don't know what it's like to be hungry—so hungry I'd steal. I hope I never know. If that day came, I'd hope that my friends and family would see me in need and help me. I've come to love this town and the people in it. I want it to be a good safe place for my children. And what we're deciding today is what kind of a place this town will be, a place where we all look out for ourselves or a place where we look out for one another. And that means all of us, whether we've been here for ten years, or one month, whether we're from Ireland, Sweden, or Boston.<sup>329</sup>

Olive is touched by Michaela's speech whereby she drops the cattle-rustling charge. The sheriff Kid Cole, functioning as judge in the trial, clearly recognizes Dr. Mike's moral authority and decides to move on. The symbolism is apparent when he resigns and turns in his badge to her, leaving the fate of the town in her hands. Bonnie J. Dow suggests that 'the

<sup>327</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: Pilot, Scene: No Women Allowed.

<sup>328</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 179.

<sup>329</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: Law of the Land, Scene: Trial by Proxy.

extension of maternal reasoning from the private into the public realm often is the key to Dr. Mike's battles to improve and to preserve the town, and it is a central element in her function as a moral authority.<sup>330</sup> Repeatedly Michaela's maternal moral superiority benefits the town. Moreover, repeatedly Michaela's medical expertise benefits the town and the oppressed groups. When Michaela saves the life of Chief Black Hawk, the Cheyenne recognise her knowledge by naming her Medicine Woman. Thus, repeatedly Dr. Michaela Quinn succeeds in positioning herself as a *female knowing speaking subject of mastery*.

#### 4.3.0 The Voice of the Colonized Other

Significantly it is the case that Michaela emerges as the moral authority because she speaks up for and identifies with the oppressed Others or images of the oppressed colonized Others of the community. By giving the oppressed Others a voice she emerges as the *knowing speaking subject of mastery*. One by one the oppressed Others support and align with Dr. Michaela Quinn. Michaela's 'expectations of a warm reception were vastly disappointed. Apparently the prevailing opinion of a woman doctor was no better in Colorado Springs than it had been in Boston.'<sup>331</sup> However, already in the first episode *Pilot* we witness how the oppressed Others seek medical assistance from Michaela. We also witness how Michaela speaks in their defence. In the passage from the scene *Wanted: Residence*, Charlotte and Michaela are on their way to buy a horse from the blacksmith Robert E. Charlotte is warning Michaela of the difficulty of being a single woman on the frontier.

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Charlotte: | Bein' a doctor, that's one thing. Bein' a woman, that's another. And bein' an unmarried lady, that's another. You've got enough black marks to get you to last for a while. What you don't understand is, there's some people around these parts...Well, they don't even treat women as like they're humans. |
| Dr. Mike:  | But, didn't we just fight a war to prove we're all created equal?  |

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<sup>330</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 179.

<sup>331</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *On the Frontier*.

Charlotte: I hate to tell you Doc...but nobody here much cared about that war. They're too busy killin' Indians.<sup>332</sup>

Michaela and Charlotte have just walked out of Mr. Loren Bray's store. On the bulletin board they were met with a sign that read 'NO DOGS OR INDIANS'. Not only do women experience being denigrated, the Indians are literally denigrated and compared to dogs. When Sully walks in together with his wolf and the Chief of the Cheyenne, Loren Bray points to the sign whereupon Michaela speaks up for the Indians by removing the sign. Colonel Chivington, also present in the store, tells Michaela that the sign is private property and hangs it up again. Sully throws his tomahawk and splits the sign in two. At supper at the boarding house the previous day, Michaela also speaks up for the Indian community by initiating a conversation with Colonel Chivington.

Dr. Mike: So, Captain Chivington. How is the treaty progressing?  
Colonel: Colonel Chivington.  
Dr. Mike: I beg your pardon...How are the Indians fairing?  
Colonel: The only reason I'm sitting out there in the dirt is because Congress has been listening to a bunch of bleeding hearts and never let eyes on an Indian.  
Dr. Mike: I believe that their reasoning is that the Indians were here first.  
Colonel: They're standing in the way of progress, Miss.  
Dr. Mike: Progress for whom?<sup>333</sup>

In this passage Michaela explicitly questions the moral authority of the U.S. Cavalry. By speaking up for the Indians, Michaela furnishes the colonized Other with a voice.

Not only does *Dr. Quinn* furnish the Indians with a voice. Like a colonized Other, the oppressed, violated, and enslaved women in *Dr. Quinn* also experience Michaela's support and are thus given a voice. The very first woman Michaela bonds with, is introduced in the scene *On the Frontier* in the episode *Pilot*. The widow Charlotte Cooper fits the description of a woman having been violated by the male sex. In an intimate conversation between the two women in the scene *Heartbreak* in the same episode, Charlotte confides in Michaela telling her that her husband is alive and kicking. When her husband went bust he disappeared and left

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<sup>332</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Wanted: Residence*.

<sup>333</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Wanted: Residence*.



her impoverished depriving her of all her money. The next woman Dr. Mike bonds with is Emily. When Emily is giving birth in the scene *Luck*, Michaela saves the lives of both mother and child. Emily is married to a dominating and abusive husband. The body language of Emily reminds one of the body language of the enslaved Mormon women in *Riders of the Purple Sage*. In a scene outside the church Michaela approaches Emily to ask how her baby is doing. Emily is brutally dragged away by her dominating husband. Like Mormon women, her head is bowed and her lips are locked. This scene reinforces the notion of how women intake the position of the Other in the discourse of the Master.

Also other women outside the church are kept in close surveillance by their husbands and are not allowed to approach Michaela. In other scenes the storekeeper Loren Bray repeatedly refuses Michaela to treat his wife Maud who is suffering from a heart condition. The whoring saloon girl Myra is the female that more than any other female character in the series exemplifies the denigrating and humiliating enslaved position of the female sex in the Master's discourse. Dr. Mike treats and supports the saloon girl Myra who has a one year contract left working for her owner the bartender Hank. In the position of the Other in the discourse of the Master, Myra experiences like a colonized Other to be humiliated, denigrated, abused, and exploited by the White male community of Colorado Springs. The Master himself, Hank, exhibits the ultimate exaggerated prejudice and disdain for femininity through his resentment and treatment of Myra and other oppressed townspeople.

In the *Dr. Quinn* series, the Black community of Colorado Springs is the ultimate group of townspeople that traditionally are linked to the image of the colonized Other. Robert E, the blacksmith in town, is a former African slave. Michaela's first encounter with Robert E is when she and Charlotte walk over to Robert E's Blacksmith to purchase a horse. Jane

Tompkins's portrayal of the horse being like a colonized Other<sup>334</sup> is enhanced and reinforced when Robert E is juxtaposed to Michaela and Charlotte who are examining the horses.

Charlotte: Mornin' Robert E... Well, any of these fine horses here for sale?  
Robert E: Who's buyin'?'  
Charlotte: I'm just askin' a simple question.  
Robert E: Paint and the brown.  
Charlotte: Ah... Paint an' the brown.  
... Nice strong back.  
Dr. Mike: Wonderful teeth.  
Charlotte: They're rotten.  
Dr. Mike: I like this one.  
Charlotte: Too old.  
Dr. Mike: He looks like he's got... heart.<sup>335</sup>

This passage gives connotations to the slave market where the slaves are examined and humiliated being treated like animals. Moreover, the passage gives connotations to *Riders of the Purple Sage* and Lassiter's descriptions of Jane being "a woman, fine an' big an' strong..."<sup>336</sup> Later, Michaela once again approaches Robert E who is suffering from arthritis.

Dr. Mike: Good morning.  
Robert E: Mornin'.  
Dr. Mike: I just wanted to thank you for selling me such a fine horse.  
Robert E: He's old.  
Dr. Mike: But he's sound.  
Robert E: He's sound.  
Dr. Mike: That kind of work must be hard on the joints?  
Robert E: Yup.  
Dr. Mike: Certainly would aggravate a case of lumbago?  
Robert E: Yup.  
Dr. Mike: I heard you had a touch of that yourself?  
Robert E: Yup.  
Dr. Mike: Would you mind if I just took a look at that?  
Robert E: Dons wants no woman doctor!  
Dr. Mike: Of all the men in this town I thought you would know what it is like to be judged unfairly.<sup>337</sup>

In this passage Beth Sullivan explicitly spells out the link between women and that of the colonized Other. This passage together with the first encounter with Robert E thus establishes the notion of horses, women, and slaves all being images of the colonized Other in the discourse of the Master. The emphasis on antiracism in Dr. Quinn is an indication of the

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<sup>334</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 101.

<sup>335</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Wanted: Residence*.

<sup>336</sup> Grey, Zane, p 125.

<sup>337</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Pilot*, Scene: *Departure*.

linkage of antiracism and feminism resulting from the influential work of feminists of colour.<sup>338</sup> Dr. Mike is always at the centre of disputes concerning the oppressed groups in her town. In the last episode *Portraits* Michaela of course ensures that a celebratory town photograph encompasses all the town's inhabitants.

A significant passage from the scene *Cattle Rustling* in the episode *The Law of the Land* serves to demonstrate the linkage between the groups that are oppressed in Colorado Springs. The vigilant uprising of the townsmen because of the cow theft involving the immigrant Jon seeking asylum in the church, serves as ultimate proof of how the oppressed groups in the series identify with each other and thus are all images of the colonized Other. Reverend Johnson is sweeping outside the church when Jon runs into his arms.

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Reverend: | Let's get you inside...   |
| Jake:     | Move aside, Reverend.   |
| Reverend: | He's a child.   |
| Hank:     | He's a cow thief.   |
| Reverend: | The boy has asked for sanctuary in the Lord's house and he's gonna get it.            |
| Hank:     | He's gonna meet the Lord alright...jerked up to Jesus.                                |
| Dr. Mike: | You can't kill a man for trying to feed his family.                                   |
| Hank:     | Yeh...  |
| Olive:    | You'd better step aside.  |
| Reverend: | I'm sorry, Olive. If you're gonna want me to move, you're gonna have to make me move. |
| Dr. Mike: | Me... too.  |
| Robert E: | Me...too. <sup>339</sup>  |

Michaela steps up, makes her speech, and sides with the Reverend. One by one images of the colonized Others identify and side with the oppressed Swedish immigrant. Dr. Mike states her position and they follow one by one, first the former African slave Robert E, second the enslaved saloon girl Myra, and third the oppressed and silenced mother and wife Emily. One more puzzling person is standing together with the group identifying with the colonized Others, namely the telegraph operator Horace. We remember Jane Tompkins's words that the

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<sup>338</sup> Dow, Bonnie J., p 176.

<sup>339</sup> Dr. Quinn, Episode: *The Law of the Land* Scene: *Cattle Rustling*.

'horse, like a colonized subject, makes a man a master.'<sup>340</sup> Horace is a character in the series that is portrayed as being loyal and easily led. Moreover, Horace has unusual facial features. He actually looks like a horse! And finally, the pronunciation of the name Horace is easily perceived as the word horse. In the above passage Beth Sullivan by allowing the colonized Others to join forces, equips the oppressed people of Colorado Springs with a strong voice that breaks the silence of the colonized Others.

#### **4.4.0 New Discourses for Women**

The above passage exemplifies how Beth Sullivan takes on the project of deconstruction. *Dr. Quinn* offers alternative history, which destabilizes assumptions about a mythical, harmonious past. Moreover, Beth Sullivan succeeds in offering alternative history by introducing discourses of feminism and multiculturalism. Kristin Campbell like Lacan is concerned of how it is possible 'to create a political discourse that does not reproduce the Discourse of the Master.'<sup>341</sup> The position of the Master in the Master's discourse is an illusionary position since this position is based on the perception of only the conscious elements of the psyche. It is crucial for the Master to master its self, its others, its desire, and its unconscious. 'For Lacan, the Master wishes to dominate that which it excludes from its discourse.'<sup>342</sup> It is essential to show no weakness and to hide having succumbed to castration. In fact the Master does not believe that it is castrated. The feminine subject is often subjected to the position of the Other. Women do not have the phallus and are thus in a position of lack and castration. The feminine subject thus reminds the Master of the lack and little child within. Lacan stresses the consciousness of the discourse of the Master as a defence mechanism that repudiates the unconscious. The knowing subject of the Master is thus an imaginary illusion since all subjects consists of both conscious and unconscious elements.

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<sup>340</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 101.

<sup>341</sup> Campbell, Kristin, page 76.

<sup>342</sup> Campbell, Kristin, page 65.

The male subject defines its masculine position through the exception of castration such that his 'all' is defined through an other position of 'not-being-all'. This other position is that of castration, which is the feminine position of a being that does not have the phallus. The phallus is the master signifier by which the masculine subject refuses the (lacking) body. The masculine subject structures his lack-in-being through the castration of the other...That displacement of ontological loss through the representation of castration in a symbolic function allows the masculine the illusion of mastery.<sup>343</sup>

Beth Sullivan with *Dr. Quinn* frequently manages to stop the discourse of the Master of the male sex because she exposes the illusion of mastery of the male community of Colorado Springs. By exposing men's illusion of mastery the male sex is emasculated, which lessens their threat towards women and which enables women to engage in new feminine discourses of political change. The White male population of Colorado Springs is continuously denigrated and ridiculed. Several of the men in *Dr. Quinn* are given feminine characteristics and are thus in touch with their emotions and the unconscious. The male protagonist Sully admits being afraid of horses. Moreover, the travelling Dr. Jackson in the episode *The Great American Medicine Show* admits to Michaela when she asks him to perform surgery on Myra that he is afraid.<sup>344</sup> Upon leaving town, Michaela urges him to stay, as she believes he is a fine surgeon. She goes on telling him that she believes he could teach her a lot. Dr. Jackson tells Michaela that: "Well, you taught me something about myself. And I thank you for that."<sup>345</sup> This scene when the male doctor admits the influence of Michaela reinforces how the Hysteric opens up the discourse of the Master.

Horace in a sense is a key character that Beth Sullivan creates to demonstrate that the Master (Hank) does not succeed in silencing the oppressed Other (Horace) and thus the self. In the episode *The Great American Medicine Show*, Horace stands up for Myra who he has become extremely fond of. Hank and Horace wind up fighting. Myra has fallen seriously ill because of a tumour and needs surgery. In the scene *It's Time*, Hank tells Horace that he will not let Dr. Mike perform surgery.

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<sup>343</sup> Campbell, Kristin, p 69.

<sup>344</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *The Great American Medicine Show*, Scene: *Sober Him Up*.

<sup>345</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *The Great American Medicine Show*, Scene: *The Procedure*.

Hank: She's my property and I ain't lettin' her get cut.  
Horace: She's havin' the operation and that's that.  
Hank: Listen up, lover boy. Myra belongs to me. I got a contract says so and I say she takes the medicine.<sup>346</sup>

The two men once again wind up fighting. Horace ends up with two black eyes and a split lip being on the one hand a caricature of a cowboy who traditionally is Master of Others and self. On the other hand Horace is an image of a horse and thus also an image of the colonized Other. The scene of Horace receiving blows gives associations to the scene when Balaam abuses the horse Pedro. Jane Tompkins underlines how the 'cruelty meted out to horses is an extension of the cruelty meted out to men's bodies and emotions...The abuse of horses is part of a sadomasochistic impulse central to Westerns which aims at the successful domination of emotions.'<sup>347</sup> The same psychoanalytic explanation can be used to explain what is going on when men are abusing women. All through the terrible abuse against Horace, he is not silenced. He keeps defending Myra. In fact, he sits watching over her with a black eye while tears are running down his cheeks. The horses that men variously drive, command, subdue, and often kill are an analogue to the child within.<sup>348</sup> Beth Sullivan with her feminist perspective does not allow the little child within to be silenced. Thus, in a sense she disarms the male sex and succeeds in enabling new discourses for women.

'Lacan argues that the discourses of the Hysteric and the Analyst create new positions of epistemological enunciation and a new position of subject to object.'<sup>349</sup> Both the discourses of the Hysteric and the Analyst are in touch with the unconscious elements of the psyche. However, Kristin Campbell emphasises the feminine position of the Analysand in the discourse of the Analyst as the solution and position to create new discourses for women. By suppressing the desire of mastery of the Analyst in the discourse of the Analyst, the Analysand emerges as Master of self and is thus given the opportunity to reach knowledge

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<sup>346</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *The Great Medicine Show*, Scene: *It's Time*.

<sup>347</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 107.

<sup>348</sup> Tompkins, Jane, p 122.

<sup>349</sup> Campbell, Kristin, page 77.

through her own reasoning. In fact, Beth Sullivan experienced her work on the *Dr. Quinn* series as rewarding in the sense that she was able to do some terrific exploring and thinking of her own.<sup>350</sup>

All the main female characters of *Dr. Quinn* are portrayed positively and emerge as all taking more and more control of their lives. The first woman Michaela bonds with, is Charlotte Cooper. Despite being deprived of all her money because of her unfaithful husband, she manages to regain control of her life and independently runs a boarding house in town. Her occupation enables her to support her children and herself. The ranch owner Olive, storekeeper Loren Bray's sister, is depicted as a strong masculine woman who has managed to position herself significantly in relation to the population of Colorado Springs. Grace, a former African slave, opens up her own café with the moral support of Olive, Colleen, and Robert E. The lowest of the low on the social rank is Myra, one of Hank's whoring saloon girls. Despite her humiliating and enslaved position she is in the process of being emancipated. She falls in love with Horace, and chooses thus to marry the right man. Last, but not the least, Michaela throughout the series makes her own choices. She *chooses* against odds to become a doctor, she *chooses* to travel West determined to be acknowledged as a doctor and not as a woman, she *chooses* the right man, and she *chooses* to become a mother when Charlotte dies and asks Michaela to care of her children.

Michaela's profession as a doctor and acceptance of maternal responsibility for Charlotte's children, enable Michaela to emerge as a role model for her adoptive daughter Colleen. Beth Sullivan succeeds in enabling new discourses for women by creating a role model character like Dr. Michaela Quinn. The very first time Colleen meets Dr. Mike is in the first scene of the episode *Pilot*. Colleen is impressed to hear that Michaela is a real doctor and asks if she really went to college. Colleen continues to show her admiration for Dr. Mike in

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<sup>350</sup> Schneider, Wolf.

the scene *Miss Olive is Back* in the episode *Epidemic*. Upon hearing about the death of her best friend Charlotte, Miss Olive returns from New Mexico. When Michaela is introduced to Miss Olive, Colleen leans her head proudly and affectionate against Dr. Mike's chest saying: "She's a real doctor all the way from Boston."<sup>351</sup> In one of the last scenes *Inspiration* from *Epidemic*, Colleen reveals literally how much she admires Dr. Mike and identifies with her: "Dr. Mike, all this week I watched you, the way you care for people. I wanna be a doctor when I grow up, like you."<sup>352</sup> Dr. Michaela Quinn does serve as a role model, not only for her adoptive daughter Colleen, but also for all generations of women who have had the privilege of watching the melodrama of the *Dr. Quinn* series. Recognizable markers of feminist import run through the drama. Its premise is that of a journey toward emancipation. Beth Sullivan in her creation of Dr. Michaela Quinn succeeds in invoking women to not give up on their dreams in a world of patriarchy. In the scene *Follow Your Dreams* in the episode *The Visitor*, Michaela and Colleen are having a conversation about the prospects of women in a man's world. Colleen reveals that she wants more than just being married and having children. The advice Michaela gives Colleen will serve as a final conclusion of my thesis reinforcing my belief that Dr. Quinn has indeed broken the silence of women.

"There are no rules, Colleen. Look at me. Never hide behind the fact that you're a girl—a woman. And don't give up on your dreams just because you're afraid you won't achieve them in a man's world. You just have to fight even harder to make them come true."<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Epidemic*, Scene: *Miss Olive is Back*.

<sup>352</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *Epidemic*, Scene: *Inspiration*.

<sup>353</sup> *Dr. Quinn*, Episode: *The Visitor*, Scene: *Follow Your Dreams*.



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