

The present MA thesis explores the concept of a female body and voice and their transformations as presented by various American writers. The chosen male authored works include *Washington Square* by Henry James, *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway, and *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon, for these writers delineate their heroines Catherine Sloper, Lady Brett Ashley, and Oedipa Maas in a turbulent period of their lives when they attempt to break with the obsolescent roles of passive and obedient daughters, partners, and wives. These fictional agents use different kinds of resistance, but as women, they are, nevertheless, mediated through the dominant male and masculine discourse that pervades the fictionalized societies in which these female agents appear.

As for fictional work by female writers, without the assumption that the gender of the writer makes any literary work more or less “feminine”, I have chosen *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton, a short-story “Good Country People” by Flannery O’Connor, and *Blood and Guts in High School* by Kathy Acker. The female heroines of the selected literary works bear a number of traumas women have had to endure under the patriarchal order and this thesis will address those traumas, their manifestation in the female psyche, and how the female characters cope with them.

French feminist, psychoanalytic theory of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous is employed in order to explore those traumas, the effect of the male-dominated society on the female voice and body, and the ways women have tried to subvert the restrictive and dangerously authoritarian order. The particular French theorists have been chosen because of the way their works interact and when taken together, they allow for a complex discussion of the role of women in society, of the importance of female language, and of the treatment of the female body in representations of a capitalist society based on the exchange culture of women among men. Together our theorists make up what Toril Moi calls “the new holy Trinity of French feminist theory”.

This thesis will analyze the changing role of women in their fictionalized societies with special focus on the role of language. Applying relevant theoretical strategies and close reading of the selected literary works, this thesis will address the complexity of female experience in a patriarchal order, which has oppressed the feminine and its radically creative potential.