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This Eve rejects the apple and Adam picks it: Performativity through
gender roles in Pat Barker's Life Class

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1. Project Report

The following essay deals with a feminist analysis of Pat Barker's novel *Life Class* (2008). The main reason behind the choice of applying a gender perspective to this historical novel deals with the fact that the field of gender studies is necessary in our society. In my opinion, it deserves more attention not only by scholars, but also by students who will be teachers in a near future. But, what is also important is that I have always wanted to do an exhaustive research in gender issues. Throughout the whole degree, there are not many opportunities of giving/ using critical knowledge for the analysis of an entire novel. It is definitely challenging, but also rewarding.

The main goals expected from this project were quite many. First, to prove that any sort of novel, a historical one in this case, and similar texts can be analyzed from a critical and feminist point of view (when having the proper tools, in this case, tools are achieved through researching). Second, to deconstruct stereotypes regarding gender, and of course, making readers aware of the myths that govern our –still very patriarchal- society. Third, to show people that feminism, and the scholars who study it, can be as serious and productive as any other field of research. Fourth, to warn society against the false reality given by the media in general, but especially, statements regarding feminism that tend to be imprecise and subjective. Lastly, to achieve a better understanding of problematized and confusing terms in relation to historical novel and gender issues.

The process involved in the research of this project has been tedious but, unexpectedly, highly satisfying. I have learned a lot by reading, although all the knowledge acquired

might not be seen in this paper (I would need more words for giving a more exhaustive analysis); I will definitely have it in my inner capacities as a linguist.

Firstly, the process started by reading the main novel which was an entertaining thing to do, actually. During the reading, I used the strategies of close reading I have learned from my Literature lesson at University. Also, I underlined the main dialogues between the characters because I wanted to focus on the interrelations they have between them. I paid special attention to the elements that showed performativity and artificiality in the characters. In the same way, I read carefully the clues in relation to the historical *milieu*. By doing that, I realize about the presence of terms as *suffragist*. This notion has been very important in the research of bibliography because I really wanted to contextualize all these clues and details in order to create a coherent essay. In the same way, the discovery of actual characters as Henry Tonks among others helped me a lot for the contextualization.

Then, I divided the research in two parts: the first part was focused on emphasizing the knowledge of historical novels as a genre; the second part was devoted to gender studies. Fortunately, both parts are very interrelated so that a feminist approach was relatively easily approachable. The main problem throughout the researching process was the difficulty in deciding whether the information given by a book or article was efficient and adequate enough. Precisely, I could find the two main sources used in this project: *The Historical Novel* (2010) by De Groot and Plain and Sellers' *A History of Feminist Literary Feminism* (2007). These two works form the main structure of the project because they deal with a great amount of notions and; in the case of *A History of Feminist Literary Feminism*, every chapter has a different author. So, many varied ideas could be used.

Considering all the research and previous expectations, I believe that this project has fulfilled its own potential since all the objectives have been achieved. However, the results obtained prove that Butler's theory of performativity is real and that, if it can be seen in Life Class, it can be applied to any other area of real life. The results also show that although there is a certain awareness of the difficulties that engage warfare for all genders; present time society does not learn from the mistakes of the past. But, after all, I agree with Barker's idea that there is not such a thing as past.

2. Introduction

This essay will deal with the different types of masculinities and roles of women presented in Pat Barker's *Life Class*. The social circumstances, which take place in the Great War, affect the life of every character throughout the novel in a way that relationships between them also change. The analysis is focused on the characters' relationship by considering gender roles' notions. Why a woman is expected to behave in a certain way is a question that performativity might shed a light on. But also, the possible reasons that lead a man to make decisions in society has an important role throughout the essay, and all these ideas are presented in a Neohistorical novel. This means that the contextualization and the setting in the novel brings an old past back to life again. In fact, this has the effect of a sort of educational purpose that could be even used in a History lesson at school.

The novel presents different stages –like pre-war– that will be analyzed through the characters' behaviour according to gender studies. Also, the spheres presented as outer and inner ones can improve the understanding of the different roles performed by men and women in wartime. And, the consequences that the World War I brings for each of them.

3. Theoretical Background

Throughout this part of the essay, the most relevant concepts, used as a source of explanation for the analysis of the novel *Life Class* by Pat Barker, will be pointed out. There are two main subdivisions of concepts: approaches referring to Neohistorical novels and its problematized definitions; secondly, approaches concerning gender notions, that will highlight a feminist view upon the characters relationships in Pat Barker's work.

3.1 Neohistorical Novel

The term Historical in literature seems to create several misconceptions and even mistaken associations. So, the idea that which features are actually essential in order to define a novel as a historical one may be confusing for scholars. As it can be seen in De Groot's *The Historical Novel* (2010), the author manifests the idea that "the historical novel (...) [requires] realism, development of character, authenticity". (De Groot, p. 4). His idea regarding factuality and authenticity as required elements in this type of fiction also appears in Woolf's thoughts with her work *Orlando*, as De Groot (2010) points out: "Woolf clearly desired a kind of authenticity" (Ibid, 2010, p. 43). In fact, he addresses to the importance she gave to the correctness of "the profound historical knowledge to which these pages owe [referring to *Orlando*]" (Woolf, as cited in De Groot, 2010, p. 43). Thus, Virginia Woolf has shown to be a key figure in the search "for a new way of writing novels" (Ibid, 2010, p. 41). However, it seems that historical fiction "has often been associated with a female readership, and (...) [stereotypes regarding femininity] as love, romance and domestic intrigue" (Cooper & Short, 2012, p. 2) which have undergone a series of critiques regarding

lack of accuracy. This idea also affects the image of historical novels since people –especially male audience– felt less interested in them. The main reason “is due to a patriarchal literary history” (De Groot, 2010, p. 45). What it is suggested is that historical novels used to belong to a “male domain” that have rejected that genre because they do not want to be associated with any “female scribblers” (Wallace, 2004, p. 9).

Other misconceptions that involve historical novels are that they tend to be related to “nostalgic, reactionary genre” (Wallace, 2004, p. 4). This is associated to a sort of predilection for living and remembering a “better” but, fictitious past. However, it can be understandable that women –authors and readers– find in the historical novels a warming shelter since “History has traditionally excluded women” (Wallace, 2004, p. 3). So, this apparent ownership of the genre can be interpreted as a revenge against the patriarchal system that is disguised as “History”. In the same way, terms such as “popular” (Wallace, 2004, p. 3) had been attributed to historical novels due to the previous idea that the genre was “feminine”. No matter whether these conceptions are inappropriate since “the historical novel has been one of the most important genres for women writers and readers in the twentieth century” (Wallace, 2004, p. 3). Due to this, “male writers were moving away from the genre” (Ibid, 2004, p. 3). Equally important, women dare to use the genre as a “political tool” (Ibid, 2004, p. 2). This is highly remarkable due to powerful position and firm voice that women can get through literature and, especially, through a genre that was considered “man’s land” since according to Wallace (2004) “only real history [apparently introduced by Scott, was] associated with “scientific research, is “masculine” enough to save literature [from women]” (Ibid, 2004, p. 3). In the eighteenth century, Sir Walter Scott promoted the diffusion of Historical novels although his attempts for creating the genre

made “a clear and heavily gendered distinction within the genre” (Cooper & Short, 2012, p. 2). Because of his views, the consequences were that the stereotypes in historical writing placed women to a “marginalized [position] and featured solely as romantic interests” (Cooper & Short, 2012, p. 2). Nevertheless, Cooper and Short (2012) point out that “men were lauded as great explorers, heroes and adventurers” which would lead to a “male agency and female passivity.” (Cooper & Short, 2012, p. 2).

However, this passive role of female characters did not impede female authors from vindicate their disagreement with their submissive situation. And again, Woolf showed in her work *A Room of One's Own* “the linguistic difficulties for women writers in trying to explain feminine subjectivity [because] (...) language have already excluded them” (Goldman, 2007, p. 74). Her sense of denunciation and desire to acknowledge the reliability of her future colleagues –female writers– flourished in many posterior female writers as Pat Barker. She also proves the accuracy and research done behind a historical novel and demystified the negative connotation regarding female authorship in historical novels: “it was always very important to me that I didn't change anything about historical characters, that they did and said what I've said they thought and did on a particular day” (Barker, as cited in De Groot, 2010, p. 104). In fact, she uses real-life characters in *Life Class* as Henry Tonks and Lady Ottoline Morrell, who actually existed. In regard to the idea that “For Waugh, metafiction demonstrates that the novel as a form has become aware of its own innate artificiality, that is a construction of a type of reality” (De Groot, 2010, p. 120). This means that historical novels might have some elements that cannot be discernable as “real” or “false”. In the same way, the Slade School of Fine Art in London is –and was– also an actual current institution that is mixed with a bunch of fictional characters in Barker's

work. Moreover, Derrida's postmodernist approach might elucidate the ambiguous situation of what is real in the genre: "the fact that systems are non-stable structures but in a constant state of flux" and that would explain why "truth" in historical inquiry was (...) impossible" (De Groot, 2010, p. 185).

A relevant figure in the study of historical novel is Georg Luckács because of "the dominance of the model of what [he] called the "classical historical novel" developed by Scott (...) that exclude[s] many forms of the woman's historical novel from critical attention" (Wallace, 2004, p. 3). In fact, Wallace (2004) denounces the fact that Luckács did not take into account female authors in any possible way (Wallace, 2004, p. 8). However, she points out something that was historically for Luckács: The Great War (Wallace, 2004, p. 25). Despite his views over women and female authors, the war made women aware of their consciousness of existence within History (...) for the first time" (Wallace, 2004, p. 25). All this sentiment of self-consciousness in women creates a sense of identity search and the necessity of identifying oneself in society. That is why "national identities and "British" are problematic" since "wars are important in defining our identities" (Korte & Schneider, 2002 p. 2). The search of someone's own identity in wartime seems to be a challenging process for any human being as it can be expressed in the characters of historical novels. The feeling of discovering identities can lead –especially in war-time– to an increased patriotic nationalism, widely spread by several means of communication, as writing historical novels and the media. So, regarding these views, the term "Britishness" can be associated to a patriotic connection within the country and the individual. In fact, "Britishness still seems to pass inexorably through the blood and mud of the trenches" (Harvie, 2002, p. 182). But, World War One not only provided that sense of

unification of the nation and boastful attitude of one's land (Korte & Schneider, 2002 p. 4); it also gave women "the vote, the symbol of citizenship for which suffragists had been struggling since the mid-nineteenth century" (Wallace, 2004, p. 26). The voting rights are considered as a reward after all the service given at war. This is perceived very clearly in the *Life Class*' character, Mrs. Neville (Kit Neville's mother). She is deeply interested in politics and she even considers herself as suffragist (Barker, 2008, p. 41). Ironically, her husband, Kit Neville's father, has different views regarding politics. The use of the term suffragist in *Life Class* creates the authenticity and historical reality of the period. Pat Barker shows the research that the writing process in historical novels require. In the same way, according to Wallace (2004), "Any historical novel is historical in at least four senses: (...) fictional setting; (...) historical moment (social, cultural, political and national); (...) in [the relationship the writer has with the specific period]; and, in its relation to literary history". Given these points, Pat Barker accomplishes many of these requirements, as her relationship with First World War period is intense. Her grandparents were at war and she had the chance of taking into account their views.

Neither of them spoke about the war. But my grandfather had sustained a horrific bayonet wound which I saw every week when he got stripped off at the kitchen sink for a wash before he went for his night out at the British Legion. My stepfather had been gassed. He was disabled and never worked in all the time I knew him. So there were wounds and there was silence and that silence invited imaginative exploration. Also, of course, the war which had ended decades before was still a potent force in

their lives, and in the lives of their relatives. The past wasn't over. It wasn't even the past.¹

Her words can enlighten the significance of the personal experiences in the development of historical fiction. And also, how the passage of time seems to be imprecise and the limits of time perception are unclear and vague. This idea is related to “[the suggestion that] (...) the world is innately subjective and unstable” (De Groot, 2010, p. 185). However, in historical novels “the author is writing from research rather than personal experience” (Johnson, as cited in De Groot, 2010, p. 50). So, it is suggested that the process of writing within the genre concerns an amount of factors that should be deeply reflected upon an exhaustive research. De Groot agrees with Pat Barker’s conception of an undefined past. He asserts that “personal history, experience, can make past live” (De Groot, 2010, p. 103). Similarly, this idea suggests the immortality of time and people’s actions throughout History in historical fiction (White, 2009). Again, it seems that Pat Barker’s use of actual characters might enhance the sense of a revival of the past and bring it into the present time. According to White (2009, p. 10), the impression of veracity in stories “reside[s] in the correspondence of the story lived by real people in the past”. In the case of De Groot, he prefers to establish a dichotomy between past/present and reader/participant (De Groot, 2010, p. 103). In other words, he explains that there is an association between these concepts since past and present are only terms which human beings have made up in order to develop a more active role in History. And, this can be achieved through historical novels.

¹ Pat Barker talks in an interview about how the First World War challenged long-held stereotypes of Masculinity. Retrieved June 13, 2018, from <http://www.foyles.co.uk/pat-barker>

Life Class, among other historical novels, makes clear that the consequences of the war in individuals are real. The precise descriptions of injuries clearly affect characters only physically –at least at first sight- but later on, the worst consequences are the psychological ones. The damage caused to the soul. This is explained in De la Torre (2018): “The dominant imagery throughout *Life Class* (...) is (...) putrefaction [;] (...) images of disease (...) descriptions of wounds, smells, bodily secretions, (...) amputation[s], deformity and infection” (De la Torre, 2018, p. 50). So, these images would lead to traumatic experiences, those as explained above by Pat Barker referring to her grandparents, that are still quite present in them. In fact, De Groot (2010, p. 102) asserts that historical novel’s authors find the possibility in the contexts of war of “understand[ing] extremes of human behavior, such as suffering, trauma, possibly heroism” (De Groot, 2010, p. 102). In the same way, De la Torre (2018) considers that that peculiar behavior people can have in overwhelming situations can be due to the fact that “no moral values seem stable in the midst of the collapse (physical and moral)” (De la Torre, 2018, p. 55). This can be seen in *Life Class* when during the attack to Ypres, they shelter under the table in Paul’s apartment and, unexpectedly; they have sex. It seems a weird and dangerous situation to do something like that although the possibility of dying soon governs the encounter. Elinor’s sense of *carpe diem* in an extreme situation seems to flourish as she says to Paul: “Make love to me” (Barker, 2008, p. 190). The imperative mood suggests the urgency and dangerous atmosphere around them, but also the powerful position of Elinor as she dictates the command. Another shocking moment in *Life Class* is when Paul finds a British soldier dead, and he realizes how futile life can be. However, not only wise and analytical reasoning can be excluded in stressful circumstances, but also women are especially the ones who were excluded in wartime as well. As De la Torre (2018) points out London

became a sort of “no-man’s land for women [at the outbreak of the war].” (De la Torre, 2018, p.53).

So, it seems that historical novel as genre “is not history, but it is often better than history (...) that will probably succeed in making a period live in the imagination when text books merely give us dry bones” (Baker, as cited in De Groot, 2010, p. 47). And, what remains clear is that “Neohistorical fiction basically differs from [the new historical novel of the early twenty-first and late twentieth centuries] by the embracing of realism as a narrative mode of choice” (De la Torre, 2018, p. 38). Given these points, this genre can be applied to an educational level since it is way more “entertaining” than traditional History books. But, at the same time provides a firmly realist view of events throughout actual experiences in yesteryear.

3.2 Gender Notions

In order to perform a critical analysis of the novel *Life Class* by Pat Barker, it is essential to recognize several gender notions so as to provide the necessary tools for the study of Barker’s work from a feminist perspective.

First, the term “feminist” or “feminism” is a concept that even people who consider themselves as such, might have difficulties in order to define. This is the case of Virginia Woolf who already considers the word as “corrupt” and “obsolete” in her essay *Three Guineas* (Goldman, 2007, p. 69). Then, other scholars might suggest that feminism cannot be explained without taking into account its relation to men, and that “feminism is “man-made” (Thomas, as cited in Plain & Sellers, 2007, p. 103). This statement is related to the

concept of *patriarchy*. According to Lacan, “patriarchy is an arbitrary social construct” (Sprengnether, 2007, p. 251). Thus, the suggestion is that patriarchy is reduced to a human being creation that people have made it up to promote male’s supremacy over women. In other words, these ideas imply that the confrontation against the patriarchal system might be what, after all, has created feminism. In some way, Woolf might back this idea up unconsciously in *Three Guineas* through her use of irony. She implies that the word “feminism” is useless since women have already carry out her goals regarding equality in the British job market. Obviously, as Goldman (2007) points out “Woolf observations on the achievement of the right to work remain ironical, to say the least” (Goldman, 2007, p. 69). Thus, the use of irony creates the effect of a weapon against the patriarchal system. But, Woolf’s irony might hide a sort of contradictory statement: feminism is –and was– still necessary since the patriarchal system keeps existing. As a result, there might be a correlation between feminism and patriarchal system. However, the notion of patriarchal system and its damaging effect can be explained through feminist studies. That is to say, society can be aware of the existence of the patriarchal system and its constant perpetuation thanks to feminism. So, it can be seen as a powerful tool to warn society. Later on, in Woolf’s essay, she asserts that although the term feminism might not be the most appropriate –ironically–, she confesses “boast it seems had an element of brag in it” (Woolf, as cited in Gubar, 2007, p. 339). So, according to Plain & Sellers (2007) one of the main goals of feminism is to explain first, “how men have come to [established the patriarchal society model]; and second, [why they] replicate the destructive patterns of patriarchal masculinities” (Plain & Sellers, 2007. P. 103). And, feminist research’s aim is to find out about these questions.

Another problematized term is the word *woman*. This notion is controversial in gender studies since, again, patriarchal system seems to own and pervert the meaning of words. Biologically, a woman is a female human being although in gender studies the implication of that word is more transcendental. In fact, Woolf's thoughts about the notion of woman are limited to "a signifier in patriarchal discourse, functioning as part of the symbolic order, and what is signified by such signs is certainly not the lived, historical and material experience of real women" (Goldman, 2007, p. 75). The idea deals with the fact that Woolf considers that *woman* has lost its inner meaning as it does no longer represent reality. She also denounces the perversion of society regarding the term woman by wondering: "How it is possible for women to be represented when *woman*, in poetry and fiction, is already a sign of something else?" (Woolf, as cited in Goldman, 2007, p. 74). This statement proves that media (books in this case) can influence in people's conceptions. The image that female characters show to *real women* (due to patriarchal notions) only impoverish their critical knowledge and make them behave in a submissive way. So, it would lead to a confrontation of terms: woman vs. women. This can be seen in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband (Woolf, as cited in Goldman, 2007, p. 74).

These dichotomy of terms – woman and women– are also treated by Judith Butler. She reduces the notion of woman to a simple creation of society and she focuses on *gender* instead. This idea can be seen as “Butler transforms our understanding of the category of woman through (...) [the suggestion] that gender is a series of repeated and stylized acts that create the illusion of a bodily ground” (Love, 2007, p. 308). Once the notion of gender is inserted in feminist studies, the word woman became even more problematized as Butler points out on Monique Wittig’s thoughts: “because women were defined by their position in the heterosexual matrix, lesbians were not women” (Wittig, as cited in Love, 2007, p. 307). This statement denounces the lack of fluidity in society regarding gender roles and demystifies the conventional heterosexual model established by patriarchal roles. And, the previous idea –Wittig’s– that women are defined by men is related to the concept of *hetero-reality*. As Raymond (2001) states: “the norms of hetero-reality have intended woman for man and not man for woman (...) within hetero-reality, woman is ontologically for man; that is, she is formed by him and cannot do without him” (Raymond, 2001, p. 10). The dependence on women upon men can be manifested in several characters (Teresa especially) in the novel *Life Class*; it can show how the patriarchal system is presented in relationships and feminism can help society to realize about its dominant supremacy.

Another entity that is controversial in gender studies is marriage. It tends to be associated an illusory “perfect couple”; meaning only a heterosexual union. Again, the entity of marriage itself promotes Raymond’s hetero-reality as “marriage is the effect of a patriarchal system since it is tied to a heterosexual origin that enforces the idea [of male’s ownership of a woman.]” (Jackson, 1997, p.340). This leads to the commodification of women by men. In fact, in *Life Class*, Teresa is the best example of a woman limited to a physical entity that

is used by men's entertainment. And, the tendency for the commodified women is to feel a dependence on men's approval constantly; which results in an unstoppable vicious circle. In relation to this, the Freudian concept of *scopophilia* might shed a light on this issue. The relationship between commodification of women –by men– and scopophilia is clear since the latter can be defined as “[a] controlling gaze of the male character and the visual pleasure of looking at the body of the female character” (Marshment, 1997, p. 141). In fact, the “power of looking” by men towards women place them as inferior beings; clearly dominated by their male counterparts. Actually, throughout *Life Class* Paul commits to this use of scope in order to suppress the “rebellious” attitude of Teresa. In the same way, the Foucaultian concept of *Panopticon*, previously coined by Jeremy Bentham, is related to the use of sight as a way of controlling people (Bak, 1994). So, panopticism can be explained as “an instrument of power and observation [that] would provide the interned with a clean, well-lighted, and relatively pleasant environment, and the warden with the most efficient means of control through minimal effort (...) [and] power was irreversible” (Foucault, as cited in Bak, 1994, pp. 40-41). To put it differently, the concept refers to –in gender studies– a woman that is “prisoner” while a controlling figure –man– stares at her. The woman is aware of his controlling gaze all the time as she is a captive figure although she cannot see her “keeper”. That situation leads to the frustration of the woman as she has no control of the circumstances at all. She ends up with a completely passive attitude.

Gender studies also deal with the notion of identities. As it was commented above, several terms that might seem clear, at first sight, can be problematized. Terms like woman, feminism and so on. This situation is due to the fact that members of society are the ones who create the reality – a patriarchal system– where people live in. And, the way human

beings behave concerns gender studies, as many theories exist that are related to those issues. For example, Judith Butler's performativity theory deconstruct the idea that women and men behavior due to naturalistic reasons; she defies these notions and substitutes them (Love, 2007). In contrast, she asserts that human beings act because of arbitrary pre-established ideas, imposed by the patriarchal system, that make people act in a highly artificial manner. So, "subjects are called on to perform strict gender roles and punished when they step out of them" (Butler, as cited in Love, 2007, p. 308). This is frequent in *Life Class*; many of the characters are obliged to do what a paternalist society expects from them. Other concepts related to identity of the individuals are used by gender research. For example, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis is used in order to explain certain behaviors on the individuals relating gender issues. That is the case of Freud's concepts such as *female castration*, *penis envy* and *Oedipus complex*. It is important to emphasize that these ideas date from 1950s; the post-war era, in which the search of stability was quite desirable for almost everyone. That is why, Freud's ideas were highly welcomed (Gubar, 2007). Gubar (2007) comments that when women left their "wartime jobs", they were expected –Butler's performativity could explain that– to take care of "the feminine arts of housekeeping and child-rearing" (Ibid, 2007, pp. 238-239). And, the media –the TV– encourages that "ideal vision" by showing "the ideal of the nuclear family [that leads to a (...) new kind of "bunker" mentality]" (Ibid, 2007, pp. 238-239). Under those circumstances, Freud's idea of women's envy to the penis might not be that exaggerated. In other words, some women might not have wanted to let go the opportunity of having a job because it was the *obligatory* and, contradictorily, *desirable* thing to do. And basically, because they were women and not men. As Wallace states: "the war had liberated many women as they moved to the public world to take "men's jobs" [and] (...) [they gained]

freedom (...) [together with] an earned income” (Wallace, 2004, pp. 25-26). In Freudian and Lacanian theories, the idea of the mother is significant. That idea is related to the concepts of Oedipus complex and castration anxiety. In gender studies, Freud’s ideas of *id*; *ego* and *superego* can be applied. As Sprengnether (2007) comments: “the child’s ego is self-contained, or narcissistic. [So], a baby develops selfhood in the context of its relationship with its earliest caregiver(s), typically the mother.” (Sprengnether, 2007, p. 242). To put it simple, the *id* is related to the more primitive wishes; the *ego* is related to a social mask; and, the *superego* concerns the system that ensures the individual behaves as expected (Freud, 1990). In contrast, Lacan conceives “the primitive ego as undefined (...) [and it needs] a “mirror stage” (...) [to] conceives itself as a (falsely) coherent entity (...) through the reflection of its mother’s gaze, or through (...) an actual mirror” (Sprengnether, 2007, p. 251). Thus, the image of the mother is essential throughout childhood and the development of identity. However, as it happens to some characters in *Life Class*, this fact can lead to traumatic experiences. This is especially the case of Paul as her mother passed away when he was a child; the feeling of rejection that he might feel is extraposed to the rest of female characters in the novel. Due to this, his relationships with women are highly superficial, and a friendship between them is almost impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, women also have troubles in order to make a healthy friendship between themselves. Fortunately, this is not always the case as it is reflected in Raymond’s *A Passion for Friends* (2001). Raymond explains that female counterparts can create a real friendship through the concept of *gyn/affection*. He defines it as “a synonym for female friendship [and also] connotes the passion that women feel for women [and the love] for the original vital Self” (Raymond, 2001, p. 7). This notion can be applied also to family members, as mothers and daughters and so on. And, the most similar idea that involves a sort of

friendship between men is called *homosociality*. According to Kimmel (2001), “Masculinity is a *homosocial* enactment. [Men] test [them]selves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because [they] want other men to grant [them their] manhood” (Kimmel, 2001, p. 275). However, this relationship between men deals more with a sort of tacit agreement than an actual friendship. One of the main reasons have probably to do with the notion of masculinities. According to Connell (2001), there are two main brands regarding masculinities: “hegemony, domination and complicity on the one hand, marginalization/authorization on the other” (Connell, 2001, p. 42). So, men have to *perform* their acts in order to fit in any of these main categories. This scholar defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (...) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Ibid, 2001, p. 38). However, although men might suffer from the requirement of fitting in the hegemonic masculinity, they also “benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (Ibid, 2001, p. 40). In the same way, in this type of masculinity, men are expected to act as the *breadwinner* of the family. Although the figure of the breadwinner is connected to gain a salary (outer sphere), it is also connected to the idea of family. This can be seen in Morgan (2001), “[t]he dominant form of masculinity does not focus exclusively upon the public sphere (although this may provide some of the most dominant and potent images of masculinity)” [also] (...) between private family [as] (...) the breadwinner.” For example, in Pat Barker’s novel *Life Class*, Mr. Brooke (Elinor’s father) is the one who provides everything the family needs and, he is especially relevant since his wife, Mrs. Brooke, is sick. On the other hand, Derrida (2005) in his work *Politics of Friendship* (2005) comments on the existence of two concepts that are interrelated: Host

and Guest. These concepts suggest that within a property (house), there is a host (controlling and “old” figure) and a guest (“new” figure that invades the property). So, the guest is perceived by the host as a parasite and, a confrontation of power can be developed (Derrida, 2005). And, these concepts together with the notion of *breadwinner* are interrelated because the inner and outer spheres confront. In the same way that the hegemonic masculinity pervades the possibility of men to become friends; instead of a threat. A sense of anxiety is also provoked by entities or feelings that people prefer to avoid. That is called *abjection*, a term given by Julia Kristeva in her essay *Powers of Horror* (1982). Some characters in *Life Class* experiences this sensation due to the performativity of roles. Some of them are obliged to act in certain ways because society (and the patriarchal system) wants so.

Another reason why performativity and hegemonic masculinities function nowadays is due to the stereotypes. In fact, Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1953) demystifies many of them regarding women. She explains that there are misconceptions in relation with the image of women as women only as mothers; the terrible stepmother; the Holy Mother and so on. According to Fallaize (2007), De Beauvoir myths are:

myths, in which women are always subsidiary (Eve as Adam’s rib and subordinate); fecundity myths which identify women with a passive body and with nature (woman as earth, man as the plough); virginity myths, in which virginity is prized in young women but feared as unmastered sexuality in older women; femme fatale myths, in which women are held responsible for the sins of the flesh and for tempting men (Eve; the figure of the mermaid; woman as vampire, symbolically castrating the male); myths of the Holy Mother (Mary, the inverse of Eve), in which Mary is apparently glorified but only in return for her role as servant of God, and myths of the evil mother, in which fear of mothers is channelled into stepmother stories (Snow White, the goddess Kali); the Pygmalion myth, expressing the male desire to model and educate his wife; the myth of feminine mystery (Freud’s dark continent),

which permits men to ignore women's real needs and what they have to say (Fallaise, 2007, p. 89).

In the same way, one of the most important myths related to women is the Angel in the house. It is well-known as a Victorian image of ideal woman, mother and, wife especially. It is mentioned and critiqued in Virginia Woolf's essay *Professions for Women* (1942). She wants women to develop a more active role and suggests that women need to be economically independent. Basically, the deconstruction of the Angel in the house is achieved and, the conception of woman as synonym of wife is demystified in Woolf's essay.

4. Performativity and trauma with the mother in *Life Class*' characters

Focusing on the analysis -through a gender perspective- of the main characters in Pat Barker's novel: *Life Class*, it is important to emphasize the relationship they share. Elinor Brooke and Paul Tarrant belong to different spheres of society. This idea is implied in Wallace (2004) as she comments that "[during war] women moved into the public world (...) [and] they worked in munitions factories, in the services (...), as nurses and ambulance drivers on front line" (Wallace, 2004, pp. 25-26). Although the position of Elinor regarding the war has been peculiar, she kept working (painting). That is to say, character's lives are not only different because of their gender distinctions, but also, due to social class issues. It seems that since the outbreak of the Great War, the position of women could be reduced to three: first, if she wanted to be involved it could be achieved to marriage; second, working in war-jobs; third, adopting a position of not involvement in war. The first option is manifested by Calder (2002) with the actual story of a girl called Naomi Haldane. She felt excluded from war so a way to be included was through men and marriage (Calder, 2002, p. 163). In fact, this woman even seemed to regret her decision since she accepted the proposal of marriage "to the first man in uniform" (Ibid, 2002, p. 163). However, Elinor's position would be the third one. Her position is actually Virginia Woolf's. She adopted a "position of outsiderism from the cause of war" (Korte, 2002, p. 6). This is quite noticeable specially when compared with the rest of the characters in the novel. In fact, Elinor overcomes the pressure of performativity, and deconstructs her world. Importantly, Teresa Halliday introduces many signals of the way social class and gender roles can affect someone's expectations. This idea is based in Feuerbach's idea that "Man thinks differently in a palace and in a hut" (Feuerbach, as cited in Engels, 2016). Although she is the less

economically powerful, she is the most economically independent. She does no longer depend on her husband although the patriarchal society makes things complicated for her. This is quite important as Virginia Woolf expressed in *Professions for women*. This is related also to *Loci of Britishness* (De la Torre, 2018). The confrontation of indicators of social classes can be seen in Teresa's accent: "he's *gunna* kill you" (Barker, 2008, p. 23). In the same way, Paul refers to her accent: "her accent was very strong" (Ibid, 2008, p. 21). The confrontation between places of living (referring to accommodations) is emphasized, as Teresa lives in a (dangerous due to her husband) basement in contrast to the rest of the characters.

Likewise, the dichotomy between outer and inner spheres is presented in the novel. In the first place, male characters seem to be placed in an outer sphere. In fact, this is the case of Paul and other men counterparts throughout the story. It is significant how gender roles in the first part of the book (pre-war) might not change in a great way. This means that the role of women and men develop in a similar manner before the outbreak of the Great War. Up to this point, both groups of people have a sort of analogous importance dealing with outer spheres in the pre-war stage. That is to say, some women characters – at least in the novel- show that they do not behave in a Victorian *Angel in the House* way, but more as actual independent women who are their own breadwinner. This is suggested in Virginia Woolf's essay *A room of one's own* in which she talks about the importance of women being economically independent. This is the case of Teresa, Paul's grandmother, and Elinor. However, Elinor's economic independence is achieved slowly throughout the novel. In contrast, the case of Teresa and Paul's grandmother is different, while Elinor's experiences related to work are limited since her father, who is a doctor, is the breadwinner.

So, she can afford her studies in The Slade and her apartment in London. Teresa's case is rather opposite. Her work as a model in the life class seems to be not enough to afford a comfortable apartment in the British capital. However, she lives in a basement *on their own*. This pun to Virginia Woolf's essay *A room of one's own* as it suggests that it is more important for women to have material things achieved by their own rather than managing someone's control over themselves and their decisions –especially when the controller are men–. In fact, Teresa is the clear example of a woman who depended –emotionally and economically- on a man's will. Teresa's husband, Jack, is a misogynist person who harass her since they got married at an early age. In fact, he uses scopophilia on her when she stays in her apartment with Paul. The power of looking by him makes Teresa feel uncomfortable and nervous. It is also related to the notion of the panopticon as Teresa's basement acts as her prison as well. She cannot see who is watching her although Jack can control her all the time. And, she made the decision of breaking up with him because of his repeated abuse and violent attitude. Also, he fits in the profile of a batterer. This can be seen in Teresa's words referring to the lack of help a woman got when her husband hit her: "I'm his wife. I could go in with a couple of black eyes and a broken nose wouldn't worry them" (Barker, 2008, p. 18). Teresa experiences "tales of male violence and exploitation (...) about love matches and arranges ones" (Jackson, 1997, p. 337). So, this leads to the idea that being in love is not a warranty of having a happiness; it deals more with the idea of being able of becoming an independent person (especially in women). In order to back this idea up, Still (2007) thinks that "[w]omen need to become their own independent ('virgin') subjects before they can enter into the desirable nuptial relationship with another independent and distinct subject" (Irigaray, as cited in Still, 2007, p. 274).

As can be seen, marriage seems to be a double-edged sword in the novel. For Elinor, the pressure of marriage is almost null. She decides in several occasions (Neville's proposal) whether to ignore it, or, to refuse directly (Paul's case). In fact, Elinor seems to be the type of woman described by Jackson (1997): "some women are able to exercise more real choice over whether to marry as a result of greater financial independence". She prefers the independence since she does not need the economic stability because she already has it at home (with his father). On the other hand, Teresa is officially a married woman although her actual life is more similar to a single lady. However, this does not mean that her life is not governed by men. This is related to the concept of heteroreality; Teresa's life is always related to men's opinions and orders. After her father's death, his mother re-married and there are suggestions of sexual and emotional abuse by Teresa's stepfather towards her in the novel. Also, her mother's doctor seems to be an abusive figure as well. To put it in other words, this man, not only as an hegemonic masculinity role, but also as a scientifically powerful figure makes Teresa to behave as an obedient caretaker. Also, the fact that Teresa's mother re-married highlights the apparent necessity of women –established by hegemonic masculinity and society– to have a man around. At least, society in the novel seems to back up this idea. The lack of support that everyone in society gives Teresa can be astonishing. However, this proves the community's thoughts regarding domestic violence.

The idea of trauma is presented in *Life Class* in diverse ways. Again, *Loci of Britishness* is presented. The most obvious one, since the novel deals with the period of WWI is the trauma of war. The other traumatic memories are ones that are sort of hidden, but are important as well. That is to say, gender-like traumas. The character of Teresa, as it was

explained, suffers from emotional trauma that because of her gender she had to face with. This is related to the trauma with the mother. In fact, Paul lives with the “shadow” of memories of her mother. He repeatedly throughout the novel remembers her as someone who has stolen part of his identity and, it seems likely that his trauma with the mother became in a more widespread trauma with a misogynist connection. He takes advantage of women; he only considers them as commodification. However, he also develops a dependence on women. He needs to be in a love relationship because he cannot stand the idea of staying on his own. This is seen when almost at the end of *Life Class*, he proposes to Elinor; but, she rejects him because she says “I don’t think you can love a woman” (Barker, 2008, p. 246). The rest of the characters also develop similar traumatic experiences that altogether with difficulties of war-time, they are obliged to confront. This is the case of Kit Neville’s and his father. He constantly searches for his father’s approval, but he seems not to find it. It leads to frustration. He also has problematic issues with other men; including his male counterparts. His relationship with Paul is one of men as competitors, especially for the love of a woman. There is a sense of a love triangle between Paul, Elinor and Neville. The latter even dares to say: “men come in twos (...) she wouldn’t fancy either of us if it wasn’t for the other” (Barker, 2008, p. 207). Importantly, Pat Barker’s interest in war times make the possibility of giving a gender perspective on how characters perform their roles even in the most horrific situations. For example, Paul realizes that the mother of the sick child has just killed him, because she knew she could not take care of him as she had more children. Again, the image of a mother who, contradictorily, gives birth to his son; she has to kill him. And, Paul associates the idea of the trauma with the mother. He seems to think that mothers can be dangerous and abandon their children.

So, focusing on outer and inner spheres, gender roles can be reflected. Importantly, it seems necessary to distinguish two periods in the novel in order to explain that idea: Pre-war and the war itself. The Pre-war period could be understood to be the one since the beginning of Pat Barker's work *Life Class* until Paul's admission to The Belgium Red Cross. In fact, in the book this separation is clear; there is a part One and part Two.

The case of female characters such as Elinor's mother and Elinor's sister suggest the inner sphere as the dominant one for women. However, other women in the novel such as Elinor, Teresa, Elinor's friend –Ruthie Wilson–, could fit more in an outer sphere. This type of sphere tends to be a man's domain. Many of the jobs that are presented in the novel are related to art. But, not all of them. In fact, the medicine world is represented too by Elinor's father and her brother, Toby. So, there is a continuity of hegemonic masculinity. The importance of the figure of a male doctor can be significant from a gender perspective.

The following tables might shed a light upon this issue.

Male Characters	Pre-war job	War job
Henry Tonks	Professor at the Slade	Surgeon
Elinor's father	Doctor	Doctor
Kit Neville's father	Army (Colonel)	Army (Colonel)
Toby (Elinor's brother)	Medicine Student	Soldier
Paul	Student at Slade	Ambulance driver
Neville	Student at Slade	Ambulance driver
Charlotte's father	Dentist	Prisoner

Female Characters	Pre-war job	War job
Elinor	Student at Slade	Artist (painter)
Ruthie Wilson	Student at Slade	Nurse
Charlotte	Student at Slade	Exile (?)
Elinor's mother	Housewife (sick)	Housewife (sick)
Elinor's sister	Housewife	Housewife (motherhood)
Teresa	Life Class model	Coming back home (inner sphere)

So, Elinor is the only one who is not affected by performativity. The rest do what they are expected to do. Maybe, Teresa is also less affected by the performativity of gender roles because of her decision of not sharing her life with her husband anymore.

Turning back to the traumas caused by gender relations, Paul can be a determinant case of study. His relation with his mother seems to be problematic. Her death was a milestone in his life. In fact, throughout the novel there are several moments in which she turns up in his dreams –or even nightmares–. There might be a constant sense of unresolved feelings from Paul's side towards her mother. Moreover, the idea of Paul's as an abandoned child is shown in the novel. So, there are suggestions about how difficult his relationship with women are because of his trauma with the mother. Under those circumstances, his relationship with women tend to a toxic one because of his possible fear of being abandoned –as his mother did because of her death–. This fact might make him an insecure

character who depends on women to be loved or needed. Actually, at the end of the novel, Elinor suggests this idea to him: Paul seems to conceive women as tools to be used so that they cannot hurt him –as his mother might actually did–. This seems to indicate the idea of women as the *enemy*. It is important to realize that Teresa precisely did what Paul was scared of the most; that is being abandoned. She breaks up with him in a non-conventional way. In fact, there is a sense of Teresa trying to escape from him; she repeats the pattern of leaving him abandoned. Ironically, he seems to think that he lives in a world where woman dominates him and left him behind. So, he might think that women are the ones who actually use him, especially the femme fatale or New Eve (new source of temptation for Paul). In his case, it is suggested that he is tired of the perpetuation of a matriarchal system, where he is always rejected by women.

Notably, Paul's relationship to other women seems to be limited to a love relationship. The suggestion of the impossibility of women and men to share a true friendship is presented in this character. In fact, the conversation between Kit Neville and Paul sharing Kit's thoughts about women models support this idea. He refers to them as "loose, you mean? Yes, a lot of them are, thank God" (Barker, 2008, p. 16). So, this points out the idea of women as dangerous and non-trusted beings who men should be scared of. And, an unnecessarily generalization of women is made. Consequently, Paul's affair with Teresa brings him ideas about the possibility of being ridiculed and deceived by women. The concept of Mad woman (Gilber and Gubar, 1979) in the attic appears in that situation. So, this would make him lose his role of hegemonic masculinity –when he suspects Teresa deceives him with Jack's letter–. This can be related to the idea of men's relation to science, power and empirical facts instead of women's relation to feelings, art and

submissive role. Paul's conception of Teresa as *femme fatale* –Simone de Beauvoir– is also suggested in the novel. In fact, she is a commodified character whose main focus is body-related. Actually, her modelling is a way of emphasizing how important is her body to make a living.

Teresa's character can be also related to a kind of New Eve since Paul might relate her to a source of temptation. Another key point seems to be the introduction of Teresa in *Life Class*. She is not only commodified, but also presented as a non-white skin person. So correspondingly, the notion of Black Madonna is suggested. Because of the problematized the character of Teresa is, she is even infantilized by Paul and by his husband. However, Teresa is a contradictory character because of her dichotomy between “infantilization” and *femme fatale*. Her abortion is a proof of that. Besides, there is a contrast between Teresa and Elinor since they lack from *gyn-affection*. There is a sense of competition among them throughout *Life Class*.

Not surprisingly, Kit Neville also develop a sort of complicated relationship with his mother. Paul and him share a trauma regarding the maternal figure. In fact, the relationship with the mother is problematic in the case of Elinor and Teresa as well. However, their cases are quite different. On the one hand, Elinor's trauma with her mother is related to her mother's overprotection towards her. She wants to organize Elinor's life: she wishes her to get married; to be her caretaker... So, *gyn-affection* is not found, not even with her sister. On the other hand, Teresa's relationship with her mother is rather opposite. Her mother seems to be different from Elinor's because of her behavior towards her daughter. To put it simple, there is a suggestion of Teresa as an abandoned child due to her mother's disease. Significantly, there is a connection between Paul and Teresa regarding their mothers; they

are both abandoned children, or, at least, even unconsciously, they might feel that way. Similarly, Elinor's mother seems to be very protective with her son Toby as well. She ends up being quite worried because of Toby's decision to enlist in the army. Elinor's relationship with Toby seems to be a good one. In fact, she even recalls good memories with him in their childhood. Importantly, it is suggested that she is connected to him in a real and truthful way since he is her biggest support in the family. In fact, he might be her only relative who does not pressure her with her decisions. This idea can reflect the contrast with Kit Neville's idea of the stereotype regarding the impossibility of a healthy and real friendship between men and women. However, they have family ties so this might change that perception. Furthermore, family ties do not matter when gender roles are established in society. On the contrary, it might be surprising how this conception was not always like that. As a matter of fact, the idea of *kinship* presented in *Beowulf* might elucidate a possible dichotomy between gender and family.

In other words, the importance given to family, that is presented in a pagan society in the fifth century as in *Beowulf's*, is still shown in three groups of people in the novel: Elinor and Toby; Teresa and her aunt; and Lewis –Paul's friend in the Belgium Red Cross- and his mother. Significantly, according to gender studies these characters can elicit crucial notions. For example, it is important to realize about Paul's relationship to men in the novel. As a problematic character, –because of his gender and emotional trauma- he could fit in the stereotype of men among them as competitors. The possible reason to explain this idea is related to the way hegemonic masculinity is introduced in his actual society –as in nowadays' still is as well-.

So, Paul might be a character who is scared of showing his own identity since it is mainly modelled by a sort of unconscious rules and behaviours tacitly taught. In fact, there is always a sense of automaticity in his actions, especially towards the end of the novel. This can be due to performativity of roles. He seems to look for a reason to keep going with his life due to traumatic events. Actually, one of the gender trauma Paul has is the absence of a true relationship with any character in the novel, since women are left to a commodified and emotionally depended area and men as mere rivals. However, he gets –too late though– a real and profound relationship with one of the characters, Lewis. However, he realizes about this connection when he is already dead.

In regards to male characters, he proves this idea with several masculine characters: his father, –barely mentioned in the novel– Kit Neville and his colleague, Lewis. The suggestion of Kit and Paul as competitors for women is established through a sort of love triangle between both of them and Elinor. However, his relationship with Lewis develops in a different way throughout the novel. When they first met in the Belgium Red Cross, Paul feels annoyed all the time with Lewis's presence, but then, there is a true connection between them. And, definitely, this is the most enhancing feature in the protagonist, that after all has surpassed one of his fiercest fears: not feeling abandoned after the death of someone he loves, and not to be in a *toxic* love relationship.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the notions of historical novel together with gender approach have created an interesting analysis of Pat Barker's *Life Class*. Historical novels have passed by a tortuous process until the point that it is a genre on its own that takes into account that female and male authors can take advantage of this genre. It is not anymore a gendered divided style of novels. However, it seems important to remind readers of the challenging process until this point, especially tough for female authors. Regarding gender notions, it is noticeable to underline the self-discovery of identities in *Life Class* characters.

Finally, Elinor's acceptance of her desire to remain single and refusal of the patriarchal system is impressive, together with Paul's realization of what true friendship is, both can be some of the most precious moments in the novel that may be more understandable through gender notions' studies.

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