



Hipatia Press
www.hipatiapress.com



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://mcs.hipatiapress.com>

Writing Men: Recognising the sociological value of counter-hegemonic masculinities in American fiction

Peter Ferry¹

1) Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom

Date of publication: June 21st, 2013

To cite this article: Ferry, P. (2013). Writing Men: Recognising the sociological value of counter-hegemonic masculinities in American fiction. *Masculinities and Social Change*, 2(2), 146-166. doi: 10.4471/MCS.2013.27

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/MCS.2013.27>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to Creative Commons Non-Commercial and Non-Derivative License.

Writing Men: Recognising the sociological value of counter-hegemonic masculinities in American fiction

Peter Ferry

Queen's University Belfast

Abstract

This article sets out to stimulate discussion on the sociological value of fiction in the wider study of men and masculinities in society. Identifying masculinity as a major theme of the American literary tradition, this article engages in a case study analysis of canonical writers of contemporary American fiction, namely Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, and Bret Easton Ellis. Engaging with Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity to analyse critically the protagonists of these authors allows a range of issues to emerge - namely the impact of fatherhood, the influence of the male peer group, and the impact globalization of the performance of masculinity. Gendering our reading of fiction in this manner succeeds in illustrating that these authors are intent on not simply depicting masculinity as a social and historical construction but that they seek to challenge the established ideological image of hegemonic masculinity by writing counter-hegemonic narratives.

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity, American Literature, Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis

Escribiendo Hombres: Reconociendo el Valor Sociológico de las Masculinidades Contra- hegemónicas en la Ficción Norteamericana

Peter Ferry

Queen's University Belfast

Resumen

Este artículo tiene la intención de estimular el debate sobre el valor sociológico de la ficción en un estudio amplio sobre los hombres y las masculinidades en la sociedad. Dicho artículo se basa en el análisis del estudio de un caso práctico de escritores canónicos de ficción contemporánea norteamericana, concretamente de Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, y Bret Easton Ellis, identificando la masculinidad como un gran tema de la tradición literaria norteamericana. Se analizan de forma crítica los protagonistas de estos autores relacionando el concepto de masculinidad hegemónica de Raewyn Connell, lo que permite que emerjan una variedad de asuntos, como el impacto de la paternidad, la influencia de los grupos de iguales, y el impacto de la globalización en la representación de la masculinidad. Leyendo la ficción desde una perspectiva de género se logra ilustrar como estos autores tienen la intención no sólo de representar la masculinidad como una construcción social e histórica sino que también tratan de retar la imagen ideológica establecida de la masculinidad hegemónica escribiendo narrativas contra-hegemónicas.

Palabras clave: Masculinidad hegemónica, literatura norteamericana, Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis

2013 Hipatia Press

ISSN 2014-3605

DOI: 10.4471/MCS.2013.27

In a recent “By The Book” interview for The New York Times Sunday Book Review, Jonathan Franzen is asked, “What’s the best thing about writing a book?” The answer Franzen is profound and to the point: “The meaning it temporarily lends to my existence” (Jonathan Franzen: *By the Book*). Writing fiction has a dual focus: meaning and the self. It is an intense exercise of self-reflection and self-actualisation. Don DeLillo underlines the fact that writing is also an act of self-separation: “Words on a page, that’s all it takes to help [the writer] separate himself from the forces around him, streets and people and pressures and feelings. He learns to think about these things, to ride his own sentences into new perceptions” (Begley, 1993). Exploring the social impact of these “new perceptions” of men and masculinities in literature is the central drive of my research. As this article will strive to illustrate, the act of writing men is a sociologically charged exercise in understanding of the discourses that shape the everyday performance of masculinity. Through the case-study analysis of a selection of key contemporary writers of American fiction, this article will underline the fact that by gendering our reading of works of fiction we can see that literature can challenge hegemonic ideology by presenting counter-hegemonic alternatives for everyday men.

The idea of fiction affecting wider social change is slowly becoming a central thread of the field of Masculinity Studies¹. As scholars working interdisciplinarily in the fields of Literary Studies and Masculinity Studies we have the responsibility to present the power of fiction in the study of men and masculinities. Clearly it is not possible to explore fully the complexities, contradictions and convolutions that characterise the objectives of this grand project within the restrictions of a single article. What I hope this modest contribution will achieve, however, is to help stimulate discussion in both the fields of Literary Studies and Masculinity Studies on the potential for the novel to make an impact on our greater understanding of men and masculinities in society. To use the words of Richard Gray (2011), literature offers “the chance, in short, of getting ‘into’ history, to participate in its processes, and, in a perspectival sense at least, getting ‘out’ of it too – and enabling us, the readers, to begin to understand just how those processes work” (p.19). Writing fiction is an act of engagement; it is a form of reflection on the processes the connect society and the self. The key to

appreciating fully the sociological value of representations of men in fiction is a methodological framework that investigates the concepts of power and change on the male individual. The methodological framework that shapes my research, and that which I wish to present in this article, is Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity².

Raewyn Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity underpinned the formation of the field of Masculinity Studies in the 1980s and early 1990s³. Appropriating the term "hegemony" from Antonio Gramsci's study on class relations in Italy in his Prison Notebooks, Connell defines "hegemony" within the context of the social theory of gender as a social ascendancy achieved in a dynamic system of gender relations. In her much referenced quotation she states:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell, 1995, p.77).

Male dominance is shaped by what Connell calls the "pattern of hegemony," that is the production and reproduction of social forces that constantly reproduce and re-constitute the hegemonic category. Connell's early conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity was the first to recognise the existence of various, often competing, male groups representing diverse ideas of what it means to be masculine. The early developments of the concept were crystallized in a landmark article, "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity" (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee 1985) which asserted that hegemonic masculinity, in contrast to sex role theory, acknowledges that the concepts of *power* and *change* are central in understanding relationships both *between* and *within* genders. Demetrakis Z. Demetriou (2001) built upon this to suggest the existence of two separate forms of hegemony: "internal hegemony," that is to say, "hegemony over subordinated masculinities" (p.341); and "external hegemony," in other words, "hegemony over women" (p.341).

Connell's concept underlines the fact that in making visible the hegemonic group we are able to identify the impact of the ideology of hegemonic masculinity on the everyday male individual. This is pivotal in the understanding of the processes that shape the influence of hegemonic masculinity and that leads to the study of the sociological value of fiction in potentially presenting "counter-hegemonic" alternatives for men. To fully illustrate the sociological value of reading men and masculinities in fiction, I will now present a selection of case study analyses of key works of American fiction that affirm how fictional narratives propose alternatives for men in society.

Writing American masculinity

My research in the field of Literary Studies focuses primarily on contemporary American fiction. This has proven particularly apt, as the American novel is in many ways the cornerstone of cultural investigation into the shaping of American society. To quote Leslie A. Fiedler's famous remark, "Between the novel and America there are peculiar and intimate connections. A new literary form and a new society, their beginnings coincide with the beginnings of the modern era and, indeed, help to define it" (p.23).

The study of men and masculinities in American fiction must surely start with Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). Fiedler's study of masculinity and male sexuality in the classics of the American literary tradition gendered the canonical works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain. Fiedler may not have been the first to do so – that accolade must go to D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) – but what makes Fiedler's study stand out is the stirringly provocative, almost inflammatory, tone of his challenge to the academic establishment that considered the novel as a self enclosed work of artistic genius. What Fiedler was concerned with was what made the American novel distinctly *American*; in other words, what underpinned the evolution of the American novel from the European prototypes that arrived on the shores of the New World. Fiedler's answer to this question flew in the face of the critical dogma of New Criticism that dominated the field of American Literary Studies of the time. Fiedler

proclaimed the American novel as a sociohistorical document that critically investigated the historical construction of race, class, gender, and, above all, masculinity and male sexuality. What emerged as the central theme of the canonical American novel for Fiedler was the American male's rejection of the hegemonic ideal of "sivilizing" society in search of counter-hegemonic alternatives. *Love and Death in the American Novel* is not only an influential text in the study of American literature, but also in the study of masculinity in American literature twenty years before the formation of the field of Masculinity Studies. Fiedler's provocative and confrontational approach to reading fiction illustrated the power of revisiting and reinterpreting the novel to fully appreciate the sociological value of depictions of men and masculinities.

The field of Masculinity Studies is slowly beginning to acknowledge the sociological value of literary representations of men and masculinities. Researchers such as Ben Knights, Berthold Schoene, and Josep M. Armengol have illustrated how fictional representations of the everyday performance of men contribute to our understanding of the social construction of masculinities. Underlying Ben Knights' *Writing Masculinities* (1999) is his belief that studies of literary masculinities contribute to the wider understanding of cultural politics of gender. Knights argues strongly for the act of writing masculinities as an act of self-reflexive analysis: "the study of narrative texts may feed back into a necessary reflexive consciousness about the narratives in terms of which we all experience and act out our own lives" (p.2). Building upon this, the act of writing masculinities "constitutes an invitation to a particular kind of reflexive consciousness, to dwell in a social dialogue" (p.3). Texts are not just mimetic (just simply describing worlds) but play an active role in the performance of themselves and the representation of masculinity contained therein. By writing masculinities authors are engaging in a form of deeper meditation on the everyday processes that shape the social construction of masculinity.

The strength of Berthold Schoene's *Writing Men* (2000) lies in his methodological approach: to analyse the historical development of the literary representation of masculinities in the British novel, Schoene presents a series of case studies that analyse critically the wide range of issues that emerge when gendering our reading of works of fiction. The central thread of Schoene's study that connects these case study

analyses is crucial: Schoene proclaims the novel as a tool for challenging the dominant ideology of hegemonic masculinity by illustrating the “emancipatory impact” (p.101) that feminist and pro-feminist thought has had on writing in the British novel. Schoene makes the intriguing point that it is due to this cultural shift that “male authors have become highly self-conscious of the gender-specificity of their writing” (p.101) and, as such, are using their writing as a form of reinterpretation of the role of the modern male. Although I would argue that Schoene may be over-emphasising just how “gender aware” male authors are, masculinity politics are a feature in their works. The great contribution that *Writing Men* makes to the development of the study of literary masculinities is the central argument that fiction offers counter-hegemonic alternatives for men.

The blueprint for the exercise of gendering fiction is Josep M. Armengol’s *Richard Ford and the Fiction of Masculinities* (2010). Armengol sets out to question “the widespread assumption of Ford’s fiction as genderless, an assumption shared, as we shall see, by the author himself” (p.2). Armengol’s re-reading to this stalwart of the American canon is unquestionably innovative; gendering Ford’s novels not only underlines the centrality of masculinity in his works but illustrates without question the wide range of men’s issues that pervade these narratives: in his fiction Ford challenges the dominant ideology of the self-made man, discusses intimacy and romance in male friendships, explores the impact of the role of father on the American male’s understanding of his masculinity, investigates the formulation and reformulation of male sexualities, and revises the links between masculinity and violence. The absurdity of the suggestion of Ford’s writing as genderless is evident.

The studies of Knights, Schoene and Armengol set out the tripartite model that underpins the study of literary representations of masculinities: to posit masculinity as a central theme of literary works of fiction by actively gendering our reading of the novel; to recognise the novel as a self-reflexive device for challenging patterns of hegemony through the illustration of counter-hegemonic models of masculinity; and ultimately, to realise the sociological value of literary representations of masculinity in wider discussions on the social construction of gender. Put simply, these commentators on the

contemporary experience of the American male are not merely interpreting masculinities but are writing masculinities.

Writing (counter-) hegemonic Masculinity

The innovative nature of the engagement with the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the study of men and masculinities in fiction must not be underestimated. Recent research has underlined the under appreciation of hegemonic masculinity as a methodological approach to analysing the sociological value of men in fiction. James Messerschmidt (2012), in his recent study on the appropriation of the reformulated⁴ concept of hegemonic masculinity, found that the usage of the concept in the field of Literary Studies made up only 3% of the total number of articles that employed hegemonic masculinity as a core concept from 2006 to 2010 (p.57-58). There is an evident gap in our knowledge, therefore, of the value of hegemonic masculinity in the study of masculinity in literature. Hegemonic masculinity allows us to identify narratives that move away from the well-trodden path of the hegemonic ideal. These counter-hegemonic narratives present opportunities for men to engage in self-reflexive analyses of the everyday performance of their masculine identities. As I aim to show in the subsequent section, gendering our reading of key works of contemporary American fiction points to the fact that these authors are not only writing the experience of everyday men but with their counter-hegemonic narratives are underlining the power of fiction to potentially inspire social change by challenging the controlling power of hegemonic ideals of authentic American manhood.

The writers whose work I will analyse critically in this article are Paul Auster, Bret Easton Ellis and Don DeLillo. I have selected these writers as first and foremost Auster, Ellis, and DeLillo are critically acclaimed writers both inside and outside the academy. While their novels receive generous media attention, are revered as works of acute social commentary, and are often made into movies, likewise, these writers are often automatic selections on graduate and postgraduate courses of contemporary American fiction. Despite the popularity of these authors amongst professors and students alike, masculinity remains an overlooked area of critical study. Gendering these writers underscores the fact that Auster, DeLillo, and Ellis are white,

heterosexual, middle-class educated men writing white, heterosexual, middle-class educated men⁵. It was Michael Kimmel (1993) who stated: "to men ... gender often remains invisible. Strange as it may sound, men are the "invisible" gender. Ubiquitous in positions of power everywhere, men are invisible to themselves" (p.29). Building upon this, as much as it is crucial to study the representations of marginalised and subordinate masculine groups, there is the need to challenge this privilege of invisibility that many men enjoy. As such, a case-study analysis on this select group of authors highlights the range of issues related to masculinity that underpin the central narratives of their fiction.

Fatherhood and Masculinity in Auster's fiction

As one of the most studied American authors of the past thirty years, Paul Auster is firmly established in the canon of contemporary American fiction. The numerous critiques of Auster's work focus on the postmodern preoccupations that underpin his novels. Masculinity, as might be expected, has been criminally overlooked. This attitude is best reflected by Mark Brown (2007) who comments, "gender does not figure significantly in Auster's work as a theme" (p.159). In contrast to the customary argument that Auster's texts are spinning, self-referential narratives disconnected from their social and historical context, gendering our reading of Auster's fiction uncovers the fact that from its very beginning Auster has written sociologically charged texts that examine the impact of fatherhood on the American male.

Fatherhood is a central theme in Auster's first published prose work. The methodical and meticulous case study analysis of his father, Sam Auster, in *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), introduces Auster's interest in the discourses that shape the performance of the American father. The title of the first part, "Portrait of An Invisible Man," proves to be loaded in terms of Auster's critical investigation of the social construction of masculinity. As Auster's portrayal of his father illustrates, the great irony that characterised the American male of this era was that in their eagerness to become the hegemonic ideal of the "self-made man" they actually became invisible - to others as well as to themselves. Building upon this, it is the second part of *The Invention of Solitude*, "The Book of Memory," that marks Auster's foray into fictionalising the impact of

fatherhood on the contemporary American male's negotiation of his masculinity. Auster's decision to fictionalise his experience as a father underlines the self-reflective nature of his writing; in other words, Auster's objective is more than simple storytelling – it is a form of meditation on the conflicts that shape the American father's sense of his masculinity. Auster makes an important comment on his gradual realisation of the power of fiction at the time of his emerging role as father:

It is interesting to find that I didn't begin to write novels until after becoming a father. Despite my efforts, I didn't manage to do this before the birth of Daniel. I think that there's a link between these two facts. (De Cortanze, 1995, p.21)

Auster explores various counter-hegemonic models of fatherhood that subvert the traditional image of the absent uninterested father. The first is the desire to be a father. As Marco Fogg, the protagonist of *Moon Palace* (1989) comments, "I wanted to be a father, and now that the prospect was before me, I couldn't stand the thought of losing it" (p.272). Following Marco Fogg, Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night* (2003), and even Ben Sachs in *Leviathan* (1992), Morris Heller in *Sunset Park* (2010) reflects that despite a failed marriage, fatherhood has proven to be absolutely "necessary" in the development of his masculinity: "it was about creating a son, and because that son was the single most important creature in the world for him, all the disappointments he'd endured with her had been worth it – no, more than worth it, absolutely necessary" (p.61).

The second narrative that features in Auster's depiction of fatherhood is the regret of losing the father role. This first emerges with Quinn in *The New York Trilogy* (1987). What haunts Quinn, as he walks the streets of Manhattan, is the loss of his life as a father. Even though he tries not to think about his son, "every once in a while, he would suddenly feel what it had been like to hold the three-year old boy in his arms" (p.5). The loss of the father role continues as a major element of the performance of masculinity of the male figures in Auster's fiction.

The third strand of the theme of fatherhood in Auster's fiction is the self-actualising power of second-chance fatherhood. This is a major feature of the narratives of Nathan Glass in *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005)

and August Brill in *Man in the Dark* (2008). In light of the missed opportunities of being a father to his daughter Rachel, Nathan Glass takes on the father role to Lucy. Nat decides to assume the responsibility of being a father to her in the city: “I cross Pamela’s name off the list and appoint myself as Lucy’s temporal guardian. Am I better qualified to take care of Lucy than Pamela is? No, in most ways probably not, but my gut tells me that I’m responsible for her - whether I like it or not” (p.169). They grow closer and Nat begins to appreciate their relationship: “I never once regretted taking her in” (p.227). Throughout his oeuvre Auster not only suggests the complexity of the father figure in contemporary American fiction but also underscores the benefits of adopting a counter-hegemonic active father-role. The sociological power of Auster’s fiction, ultimately, lies in his desire to demonstrate the benefits of active and engaged fatherhood in the American male’s understanding of his masculinity.

Masculinity and the male peer group in Ellis *American Psycho*

Since its publication in 1991, the reading of the performance of masculinity of Patrick Bateman in Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho* (1991) has been somewhat erroneous. The furore that surrounded the release of the novel is well documented and so there is no need to cover old ground here⁶. What I would suggest as the unwarranted perception of *American Psycho* as a “controversial” novel, however, has endured. This critical stance features in the recent surge of studies on Ellis and his fiction (Mandel & Durand 2006; Mandel 2011; Baelo-Allué 2011). Mandel (2011) even introduces her reading of *American Psycho* by stating: “*American Psycho* is easily one of the most controversial novels of the twentieth century” (p.1).

This controversy has centred on Patrick Bateman’s performances of his masculinity. Up to this point, critiques of Bateman’s masculinity have been focalised through the prisms of the gothic, grotesque, or serial killer traditions in American literature⁷. Attempts to ground the novel within its wider social and cultural context have been markedly few⁸. Many see the protagonist as a figure representing what has become somewhat of a cliché: the contemporary “crisis of masculinity” (Storey, 2005, p.58). This view of the disintegration of Bateman’s masculinity

brings mind the often-used quotation of Elizabeth Young's (1992) reading of the character:

Patrick is a cipher; a sign in language and it is in language that he disintegrates... He is a textual impossibility, written out, elided until there is no "Patrick" other than the sign or signifier that sets in motion the process that must destroy him. (p.119)

Certainly Patrick Bateman is a character that Ellis uses in his satirical critique of the Manhattan male of the era, but it is too simple to shatter Patrick Bateman and read him as a fragmented subject. Rather, placing the character in context and reading his performance through Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity sets Patrick as the exemplar of the young Manhattan male experiencing the pressures of trying to attain the unattainable: the contemporary ideal of hegemonic masculinity. The crux of this problematic obsession, however, is that Patrick's masculine status can only be affirmed in the eyes of his peers. As a novel about status, and the affirmation of masculinity in homosocial relations, "Because... I... want... to... fit... in" (p.228) stands as the resonating line from the novel. Ellis reaffirms this view on two occasions in a recent interview in *The Paris Review* by stating that the novel is "pretty much 385 pages of a young man in a society he doesn't believe in and yet wants to be a part of" (Goulian, 2012, p.183). Moreover, speaking of Patrick's obsession with the 1980s pop artists that appear in the text, Ellis states, "the reason that Patrick loves this music, and wants to tell us about it in excruciating detail, is because he wants to fit in" (p.176). The central concern of the novel, then, is the paradox that shapes American masculinity; that is man's desire to write his individual narrative while simultaneously seeing masculine status as something that can only be affirmed through the recognition of this status by male peers.

The social scenes in the bars, clubs, and restaurants comprise the key scenes in the novel. Ellis uses the chapters "Harry's," "Pastels," and "Tunnel" to explore in greater depth and detail the group dynamics of Patrick and his peers. It is in Pastels that one of the pivotal scenes in the novel takes place. One of the key images from *American Psycho* is the business card as an indicator of status. The episode that ensues at the

dinner table at Pastels is loaded with sociological significance. Patrick, sick of being ridiculed by his peers, decides to pull out his business card to impress the others at the table, “to even up the score a little bit” (p.42): “‘New card.’ I try to act casual about it but I’m smiling proudly. ‘What do you think?’” (p.42). With its bone colour and silian rail lettering, Patrick’s peers do admire his card. The competitiveness that underpins the dynamics of the group, however, begins to surface at this point. Van Patten, who Patrick sees as “the jealous bastard” (p.42), takes out his card, which Timothy Price endorses by stating, “‘That’s really nice’” (p.42). Patrick’s reaction?: “A brief spasm of jealousy courses through me when I notice the elegance of the colour and the classy type” (p.42). Once again Price expresses his admiration stating, “‘this is really super. How’d a nitwit like you get so tasteful?’” (p.43). Patrick’s jealousy grows: “I’m looking at Van Patten’s card and then at mine and cannot believe that Price actually likes Van Patten’s better. Dizzy, I sip my drink then take a deep breath” (p.43). However, the hierarchy of the group is established once again when Timothy brings out his business card, which Patrick admits begrudgedly is “magnificent” (p.43). Patrick is fully aware of the admiration for Price’s card: “Suddenly the restaurant seems far away, hushed, the noise distant, a meaningless hum, compared to this card, and we all hear Price’s words: ‘Raised lettering, pale nimbus white...’” (p.43). For Patrick this attempt to assert his masculinity has been a spectacular failure and Patrick can only sit and reflect, “I am unexpectedly depressed that I started this” (p.43).

In the second half of the novel Patrick becomes the serial killer stalking the streets of Manhattan. These scenes should be read figuratively as Patrick’s attempt to understand his identity in the urban metropolis. Critical readings of the graphic violence in *American Psycho* have focused almost exclusively on the acts of sexual violence committed by Patrick on the female characters in the novel. Reading *American Psycho* sociologically as a literary representation of the existence of multiple competing masculinities in Manhattan points to the arguably even greater significance of the acts of violence that Patrick commits on the male characters in the text. And yet the complexities that define Patrick’s position toward other men and masculinities in Manhattan are evident in Patrick’s seemingly sincere counter-hegemonic beliefs. When the group discuss what they view as

Paul Owen's undeserved luck at handling the prestigious Fisher account, Preston calls him a "lucky Jew bastard" (p.35), to which Patrick replies, "Just cool it with the anti-Semitic remarks" (p.35). Later, when Tim Price asks Patrick what bothers him about a joke Preston tells about a "nigger" (p.37), Patrick again replies, "It's not funny...it's racist" (p.37). It is often overlooked that Patrick comes to the defence of the other male groups in the novel. Reading *American Psycho* sociologically, therefore, underlines the fact that this novel is far from a straightforward depiction of the 1980s Manhattan male. Conversely, it sets out the contradictions that define the public and private performance of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic masculinity in this era.

Globalization and Masculinity in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

Don DeLillo inhabits the paradox of being detached and yet assimilated into American culture. To use the words of Frank Lentricchia (1990), DeLillo's mode "is the sort of mode that marks writers who conceive their vocation as an act of cultural criticism," that is, they "invent in order to intervene," they make "an effort to represent the culture in its totality," and are ultimately driven by the "desire to move readers to the view that the shape and fate of their culture dictates the shape and fate of the self" (p.240). DeLillo's aim, therefore, is to not only depict social discourses but to critique their impact upon the individual. Building upon this, the social construction of masculinity is a central concern of DeLillo's critique of the global hegemonic male in contemporary Manhattan in *Cosmopolis* (2003)⁹.

Cosmopolis is the story of Eric Packer, a twenty-eight year old multi-billionaire asset manager and currency trader. Eric is the epitome of the global hegemonic male. The narrative takes place over the course of one day in April 2000 as Eric travels from one side of the island of Manhattan to the other. Packer's narrative is a self-reflexive examination of his Manhattan roots as he travels from the heights of his East Side penthouse narrative to the working class origins of his family name "Packer" in Hell's Kitchen. DeLillo's novels focus on the web of connections and contradictions, the complexities and nuances of processes and systems. The point to make is that DeLillo challenges the

macro through the micro; in other words, DeLillo's channels these critical analyses through the narrative of the individual. Packer, therefore, is not simply a stock character created by the multitude of discourses of the increasingly globalized and globalizing Manhattan; Packer is a complex individual and the figure through which DeLillo explores the impact of globalization on the Manhattan male's perception of his masculinity.

Critical readings of *Cosmopolis* rightly frame the novel within the sociohistorical context of globalization. The gendered nature of globalization, however, has not emerged as a point of discussion. Raewyn Connell (1995), over the course of her research, has developed and championed the move toward the "global dimension" in the study of men and masculinities. In the last thirty years, masculinity scholarship, despite being diverse in subject matter and social location, has concentrated on localised case studies. Connell (1998) terms this as "the ethnographic moment" in masculinity research: "in which the specific and the local are in focus" (p.4). Connell argues for the need to move beyond the local character and consider the shaping of local masculinities in a world context. Put simply "to understand local masculinities, we must think in global terms" (p.7).

The narrative plot centres on the dichotomy between the global and the local that envelopes the performance of Packer's masculinity in the novel. As Packer exclaims: "I'm a world citizen with a New York pair of balls" (p.26). DeLillo's movement of Packer from the upper reaches of Manhattan, both physically and figuratively, into what will reveal itself to be the chaotic streets of Manhattan emphasises the tension between the global and the local. Read sociologically *Cosmopolis* is a journey that resonates on three interconnected levels: first, the main premise of the novel is Eric's journey from the upper-class East Side of Manhattan to the working-class area of Hell's Kitchen on the West Side of the island; second, it is a journey into Eric's past as he returns to his roots to remember where both he and his father came from; and third, it is also a journey into Eric's sense of his masculine selfhood.

Cosmopolis, ultimately, is Eric Packer's journey toward counter-hegemonic enlightenment. Inside the white stretch limo Packer's masculinity is characterised by his literal and figurative detachment from other individuals in Manhattan. It is the act of stepping outside of

the limo that Packer not only begins to “see” other people in Manhattan, but also to see himself. At first reading, Packer’s wish to get a haircut on the other side of town appears absurd; and yet, by approaching the novel as an illustration of the contemporary hegemonic male, the desire to get a haircut appears as Packer’s desire to look beyond his place at the centre of a system and understand where he came from and who he actually is. Gendering our reading of *Cosmopolis* underscores the gendered nature of globalization and the impact of this upon the American hegemonic male’s performance of his masculinity in the globalized and globalizing island of Manhattan where Eric comes face-to-face both literally and figuratively with his global hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion

Building upon the findings of this article, we have two major responsibilities as scholars of literary masculinities. First, it is absolutely crucial that we strive to integrate scholarship on literary representations of men and masculinities in fiction into larger debates within the field of Masculinity Studies. Messerschmidt’s (2012) finding that only 3% of articles from his sample that employed hegemonic masculinity as a core concept were from the field of literary studies (p.58) highlights the under-appreciation of Connell’s concept. This is clearly something that needs to be addressed and I would like to think that even within the limited scope of this article, the value of Connell’s concept of shaping or understanding of the counter-hegemonic narratives in these novels has been evident. Masculinity Studies is a field still very much in its infancy, and future research strategies can facilitate the integration of literary representations of masculinities by forging interdisciplinary projects that enrich the study of the ways in which patterns of hegemony are legitimised at local, regional, and indeed global levels. Despite Messerschmidt’s finding that the majority of the articles that employed hegemonic masculinity as a core concept focused on studies at a local level – fifty-five percent (p.60) – the ever-increasing globalizing world will lead to a shift in the strategy of masculinity scholars. With the focus of Connell’s studies of men and masculinities moving toward global systems, and Messerschmidt echoing Connell’s

call for a turn toward the global, this change is gathering momentum. The development of interdisciplinary networks working on transnational projects will drive this development of projects on global masculinities. It is this research strategy that will work toward informing masculinity scholars from various disciplines of the greater sociological value of representations of men and masculinities in literature.

With the study of masculinity in the American novel remaining a clearly underdeveloped branch of American Literary Studies, the second responsibility that we have as scholars is to continue the project of illustrating that masculinity is a central concern of the major works of the American literary tradition. This can be achieved by gendering our reading of the novel; recognising the novel as a self-reflexive device for challenging patterns of hegemony with counter-hegemonic models of masculinity; and ultimately, realising the sociological value of these counter-hegemonic narratives in wider discussions on the social construction of masculinity. The exercise of gendering the works Auster, Ellis, and DeLillo and reading the performance of their protagonists alongside Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity illustrates clearly that these authors are intent on challenging the established ideological image of hegemonic masculinity by writing counter-hegemonic narratives.

Notes

¹ The study of men and masculinities is often referred to as Men's Studies or Masculinity Studies. These are seemingly interchangeable terms but I prefer the term Masculinity Studies as, in my view, it emphasises that the focus of this research field is on the social construction of masculinities.

² Previously known as Robert W. Connell, R.W. Connell, or Bob Connell in various publications, she is now legally known as Raewyn Connell, and prefers to be referred to, even in the past tense, as a woman. See [Wedgwood 2009](#).

³ For critiques of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity see [Donaldson 1993](#); [Clatterbaugh 1998](#); [Whitehead 1999](#); [Demetriou 2001](#); [Connell & Messerschmidt 2005](#); [Howson 2006](#); [Moller 2007](#); and [Messerschmidt 2012](#).

⁴ "Reformulated" makes reference to the reconsideration of the concept of hegemonic masculinity published by Connell and Messerschmidt 2005.

⁵ Ellis has been cleverly ambiguous in the media regarding his sexuality, something that he continues to play up to with his media persona

⁶ An extremely useful source on the controversy created upon the release of the novel can be found online. See [Brien 2006](#).

⁷ See Freccero 1997; Heyler 2000; Baelo-Allué 2002; and Mandel 2011. Also see Seltzer 1998.

⁸ The possible exception to this trend is Georgina Colby's *Bret Easton Ellis: Underwriting the Contemporary* (2011).

⁹ Masculinity is not a major change to focus of studies on DeLillo's fiction. One article that does look specifically at the representations of masculinity in DeLillo's writing is Ruth Heyler's "DeLillo and Masculinity" (2008). Although useful, Heyler's study is more of an overview rather than an in-depth analysis of masculinity in DeLillo's novels.

References

- Armengol, J. M. (2010). *Richard Ford and the Fiction of Masculinities*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Auster, P. (1982). *The Invention of Solitude*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Auster, P. (1987). *The New York Trilogy*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Auster, P. (1989). *Moon Palace*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Auster, P. (1992). *Leviathan*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Auster, P. (2002). *The Book of Illusions*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Auster, P. (2003). *Oracle Night*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Auster, P. (2005). *The Brooklyn Follies*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Auster, P. (2008). *Man in the Dark*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Auster, P. (2010). *Sunset Park*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Baelo-Allué, S. (2002). Serial Murder, Serial Consumerism: Bret Easton Ellis' American Psycho. *Miscelánea. A Journal of English and American Studies*, 26, 71-90.
- Baelo-Allué, S. (2011). *Bret Easton Ellis's Controversial Fiction: Writing Between High and Low Culture*. London: Continuum.
- Begley, A. (1993). The Art of Fiction No.135: Interview with Don DeLillo. *Paris Review*, 128, 274-306.
- Brien, D. L. (2006). The Real Filth in American Psycho: A Critical Reassessment. *MC Journal: A Journal of Media and Culture*, 9 (5). Retrieved from <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0610/01-brien.php>
- Brown, M. (2007). *Paul Auster*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Carrigan, T., Connell, R., & Lee, J. (1985). Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity. *Theory and Society*, 14 (5), 551-604.

doi: [10.1007/BF00160017](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00160017)

- Clatterbaugh, K. (1998). What is Problematic about Masculinities? *Men and Masculinities*, 1(1) 24-45. doi: [10.1177/1097184X98001001002](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X98001001002)
- Colby, G. (2011). *Bret Easton Ellis: Underwriting the Contemporary*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. (1998). Masculinities and Globalization. *Men and Masculinities*, 1 (1), 3-23. doi: [10.1177/1097184X98001001001](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X98001001001)
- Connell, R., & Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society*, 19 (6), 829-859. doi: [10.1177/0891243205278639](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639)
- De Cortanze, G. (1995). Le monde est dans ma tête, mon corps est dans le monde. Trans. Carl-Carsten Springer. *Magazine Littéraire*, 338, 18-25.
- DeLillo, D. (2003). *Cosmopolis*. London: Picador.
- Demetriou, D. Z. (2001). Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique. *Theory and Society*, 30 (3), 337-361.
- Donaldson, M. (1993). What is Hegemonic Masculinity? *Theory and Society*, 22 (4), 643-657.
- Ellis, B. E. (1991). *American Psycho*. London: Picador.
- Fiedler, L. A. (1960). *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press.
- Franzen, J. (2013, April 26). By the Book. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/books/review/jonathan-franzen-by-the-book.html?smid=tw-share&_r=0.
- Freccero, C. (1997). Historical Violence, Censorship, and the Serial Killer: The Case of American Psycho. *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, 27 (2), 44-58.
- Goulian, J.-J. (2012). Bret Easton Ellis: The Art of Fiction No. 216. *The Paris Review*, 200, 168-196.
- Gray, R. (2011). *After The Fall: American Literature since 9/11*. London: John Wiley.
- Heyler, R. (2000). Parodied to Death: The Postmodern Gothic of American Psycho. *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 46 (3), 725-746.
- Howson, R. (2006). *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*. London: Routledge.

- Kimmel, M. (1993). *Invisible Masculinity*. *Society*, 30 (6), 28-35.
- Knights, B. (1999). *Writing Masculinities: Male Narratives in Twentieth Century Fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.
- Lawrence, D.H. (1923). *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Middlesex: Penguin.
- Lentricchia, F. (1990). The American Writer as Bad Citizen – Introducing Don DeLillo. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 89 (2), 239-244.
- Mandel, N. (Ed). (2011). *Bret Easton Ellis: American Psycho, Glamorama, Lunar Park*. London: Continuum.
- Mandel, N., & Durand, A.P. (Eds). (2006). *Novels of the Contemporary Extreme*. London: Continuum.
- McCaffery, L., & Gregory, S. (1992). An Interview with Paul Auster. *Contemporary Literature*, 33 (1), 1-23.
- Messerschmidt, J. (2012). Engendering Gendered Knowledge: Assessing the Academic Appropriation of Hegemonic Masculinity. *Men and Masculinities*, 15 (1), 56-76. doi: [10.1177/1097184X11428384](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X11428384)
- Moller, M. (2007). Exploiting Patterns: A Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 16 (3), 263-276. doi: [10.1080/09589230701562970](https://doi.org/10.1080/09589230701562970)
- Schoene-Harwood, B. (2000). *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Seltzer, M. (1998). *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Storey, M. (2005). 'And As Things Fell Apart': The Crisis of Postmodern Masculinity in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* and Dennis Cooper's *Frisk*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 47 (1), 57-72. doi: [10.3200/CRIT.47.1.57-72](https://doi.org/10.3200/CRIT.47.1.57-72)
- Wedgwood, N. (2009). Connell's Theory of Masculinity – Its Origins and Influences on the Study of Gender. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18 (4), 329-339. doi:[10.1080/09589230903260001](https://doi.org/10.1080/09589230903260001)
- Whitehead, S. (1999). Hegemonic Masculinity Revisited. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 6.(1), 58-62. doi: [10.1111/1468-0432.00069](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00069)

Young, E. (1992). The Beast in the Jungle, The Figure in the Carpet. In E. Young & G. Caveney (Eds.), *Shopping In Space: Essays on American Blank Generation Fiction* (pp. 85-129). New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Peter Ferry is Teaching Associate and Research Assistant at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom.

Contact Address: School of English, 2 University Square
Queen's University Belfast, Belfast. BT7 1NNA, Northern Ireland,
United Kingdom. Email: pferry01@qub.ac.uk