

Navigating Masculinities in Maggie Stiefvater's *The Raven Boys* (2012)

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INTRODUCTION

The negotiation of femininity and masculinity and the interplay of class differences is a constant recurrence in Maggie Stiefvater's *The Raven Boys*. Published in 2012, *The Raven Boys* is a young adult fantasy novel about a girl named Blue Sergeant, the daughter of a psychic living in the fictional town of Henrietta, Virginia, who has been told that "[i]f [she] was to kiss her true love, he would die" (Stiefvater, 2012: 2). When she discovers that she will meet him in her sixteenth birthday, she meets Adam, Gansey, Ronan, and Noah, or a group of boys also known as the "Raven Boys", who are attempting to wake a dead king named Glendower.

However, in between their rendezvous and explorations outside in their local forest, a particular narration that occurs inside in Blue's house stood out to us: "Now Blue knew precisely how the rest of the day was going to go. would make something sweet. Maura would make something with Butter. Eventually, Calla would reappear and make something involving sausage or bacon" (Stiefvater, 2012: 142). In between narrations of largely "masculine" activities of the Raven Boys and Blue's attempt to join them, this scene entails that a clear division of labor of Blue's family is explicitly stated to present a more subtle but complex problematization of what masculine means in specific spaces.

By utilizing Connell's theory on masculinities, we elaborate on how their interactions may also be rooted in divisions of labor or class, as shown by the previously mentioned scene.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- The Power of Perspective in *The Raven Cycle* by Dumančić and Oklopčić (2017): narration and perspective
- An Analysis of Celtic and Welsh Mythology in *The Raven Boys Saga* by Maggie Stiefvater by Carretero (2018): Welsh and Celtic mythology



METHOD

We will discuss the issues on gender and masculinities that flow in the crevices of the narrative structure through two methods:

1. Young's discussion on women's bodies in *On Female Body Experience* (2005)
2. Connell's theory on masculinities, particularly its with class in *Masculinities* (2005)



FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Blue: Despite the psychic powers of her family, their fear over Blue interacting with the boys is what Young (2005) calls an inhibited intentionality. She argues that when this occurs, the woman “projects the possibilities of that task—thus projects an “I can”—but projects them merely as the possibilities of “someone,” and not truly her possibilities—and thus projects an “I cannot”” (37).

Blue’s attempt to leave her confined feminine space is also an act of owning her agency by projecting an “I can” rather than an “I cannot” previously held by her mother.

Gansey: The novel’s portrayal of Gansey’s frequent collective masculine practices and exploration skills as well as his position as the son of wealthy parents places him as the one who performs hegemonic masculinity or as said by Connell (2005), both the carrier of the cultural ideal and the one who embodies institutional power.

Adam: Adam’s scholarship in Aglionby Academy and joining the Raven Boys is his “way out” of the confinement of his household, or, in other words, his “way out” from marginalized masculinity and “way in” to hegemonic masculinity.



FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In the contrasting circumstances of Blue and the Raven Boys, the novel portrays their interactions as exchanges in which one needs the other in order to negotiate their way into hegemonic masculinity.

Blue's confined space is expanded when she goes against her mother's wishes and she is also able to "explore" outside of this confinement because the Raven Boys have the tools and means of "exploration". Although their language stands in the way of her "understanding" them, Adam becomes the necessary "translator" who lowers the barrier between her and the other boys. In exchange, the Raven Boys need her for her ability to locate and decipher the supernatural activities that will help them achieve their goal of waking up King Glendower.

Within the process of negotiation, we would argue that Blue and the boys utilize this particular dichotomy created by the patriarchal ideology by exchanging their masculine and feminine traits in order to find their way into hegemonic masculinity.



CONCLUSION

Blue, in her attempt to own her agency, has to break out of their confined femininity and the only way that she finds that can help her do this is the hegemonic masculinity that the novel offers through the portrayal of the Raven Boys.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that “[m]asculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (836).

In contrast to Blue’s focalization, the novel portrays the focalization of Gansey, the leader and the novel’s representation of the Raven Boys, through particularly masculine practices and language and within this masculinity, different masculinities are also being accomplished through their social actions.

Adam, the only Raven Boy in the lower-class is a depiction of how the marginalized masculinity also has to negotiate with that of the hegemony in order to survive. Thus, we would argue that, ultimately, the Raven Boys and Blue’s interactions establish a “contract”, one that benefits both of them yet one that is also still ironically formed because of the hierarchy of gender and class relations.



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