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“NATIONS ARE NOT BORN, BUT NURSED”

**The Portrayal of Women in Nursing and
Caring Positions in American Literature**

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Kathrin Csencsics

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1 Introduction

In patriarchal Western society, there is an essentialist connection between women and the concept of nursing or caring. People of the female sex are the ones who have always been responsible for all the work that has to do with looking after and caring for other people, be it as understanding mothers who sacrifice their own needs for the sake of their children, or as nurses who take care of their patients, or as daughters who look after the older ones, or as wives who provide a harbor for their husbands. In other words, women seem to be bound to the private sphere. The question arises: Why is it the case that such tasks have been carried out by women rather than men? Which discourses define such gender roles, and what is the role of literature in creating or enforcing such discourses?

The image of nursing as a female occupation manifests itself in various forms in American literature. This diploma thesis aims at illustrating how American literature of the twentieth century works to construct or deconstruct typical gender roles with regard to the nursing profession. Against the general assumption that "every woman is a nurse"¹ not all female persons can identify with the idea of caring for and looking after other people. The special focus in my analysis of some selected novels will be on questions such as: How are gender roles in the medical realm described and enforced in literature? What happens, if nurses decide not to correspond to their typical roles? Why is it the case that women who reject the gendered role that is ascribed to them in the context of medical institutions are occasionally represented as threatening and evil beings in American literature?

In order to obtain an enhanced knowledge of how gender roles are being produced and how they operate, it will be inevitable to return to certain significant historical events and explore the concept of nation-building and the roles of men and women, as well as the importance of the nursing profession in this process. My investigation of American literature will focus on the

¹ Cf. Nightingale, Preface.

consequences in situations when women decide to deviate from the norms that are expected of them. For instance, I will analyze what typically happens in literature, if a nurse hurts her patient, if a woman exerts power over a man, or if a mother rejects caring for her child. It will also be essential to show in how far particular authors are aware of typical gender roles and how they use these roles in order to convey a certain message. The intention is to expose that in circumstances where a woman's behavior as a nurse does not conform to the norms that society demands from her, the female individual either turns mad, is overwhelmed by men, or becomes a sorrowful, melancholic and depressed character. In contrast, works that make use of typical gender roles are more likely to provide "happy" endings for women in nursing positions (or at least give the impression as if the endings were happy ones for both men and women).

The literary analysis of some selected twentieth century American texts in particular will concentrate on the roles of women as "professional caregivers" (Hawkins and McEntyre, 22). The texts have been chosen due to various aspects. Firstly, the American novels on nursing should not only be restricted to the treatment of physical illness, but also deal with mental disease. Secondly, it seems essential that the literature chosen should not exclusively be texts that focus on the perspective of the nurse through which the fictional world is presented, but also approach texts that are concerned with the point of view of the patient. Thirdly, one of the criteria was to select texts written by both male and female authors in order to see if there is any disparity in the portrayal of the nursing profession.

The aim is also to trace a line from the nineteenth century onwards and see which effects the social and political reality of the United States had on the portrayal of nurses in contemporary American literature. In this respect, it will be particularly interesting to take a look at the literary depictions of women in nursing positions during wartimes. The role of nineteenth century war nurses will be presented with regard to Louisa May Alcott's short story "The Brothers" (1863). The text offers a picture of what was generally regarded as being a "good" nurse during the nineteenth century. However, at the end of the century,

a number of social changes occurred, which will have to be analyzed in some detail. Consequently narratives like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) depicted a new female position which rejected the notion of all women being nurses. The aim is to analyze in how far this revolutionary literary imagery of the nursing profession differed from earlier depictions of women nurses.

At the beginning of the twentieth century – especially during the two World Wars – women had to serve the nation again in their roles as housewives, mothers and war nurses. I have chosen to focus on Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), because it reflects dominant assumptions and beliefs considering the role of women – and nurses in particular – that were prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century. In this respect, a comparison of the portrayal of war nurses in the twentieth century as opposed to how war nursing was described in the nineteenth century will be important in order to figure out certain differences or even contradictions that might lead to revealing conclusions or at least to interesting speculations. During the 1960s, one could argue that there was once more a change in social attitudes. Women started to fight against discrimination and restrictions. Similarly, literary depictions of nurses changed from portrayals of women as healing angels into images of powerful and threatening female individuals. Two novels in which this change in imagery is most obvious is Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and Stephen King's *Misery* (1987). However, at the end of the twentieth century, one could say that more and more literary texts appeared that also portrayed multiculturalist perspectives on the nursing profession. In this context, Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Arabian Jazz* (1993) will be useful in order to elaborate the question of how the role of nurses as well as the function of the nursing profession might be perceived by members of cultural or social communities which do not belong to the white Western mainstream within the United States.

By way of these diverse literary portrayals of women in nursing positions I would like to investigate in how far contemporary literature, on the one hand, reflects actual social circumstances, and on the other hand, in how far literary texts may

also trigger certain social values, attitudes and beliefs.

2 Nursing (and) the nation

My argument is that there exists an essential connection between the concept of nursing and the idea of a nation. In order to understand how this gendered relation came into being, it is inevitable to concern oneself with one fundamental question, namely: What is a nation?

2.1 The formation of an American Nation

Generally speaking, nations are political formations that try to uphold a sense of national identity. Through signifying practices like history teaching in schools, an imaginative identification with the symbols and discourses of the nation state shall be achieved. The reason for this is that human beings think in categories, and see each others as members of certain groups. Benedict Anderson claims that a nation is an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 6). This means that people tend to regard themselves as parts of a larger compound, although they do not really meet or know each other². People have to draw borders in order to constitute themselves and distance themselves from other groups or individuals. Creating a national identity is in many cases an attempt to unify diversity, or to simplify diverse cultures.

As far as the United States is concerned, this nation has often been regarded as the first country that was founded self-consciously with the aim of creating a new political nation³. This is why the United States is often regarded as "the first new nation" (Seymour Martin Lipset, quoted in Looby, 3). The American Nation building process started in the eighteenth century, during the time of the Enlightenment. After the American Revolution, people agreed that the abstract idea of a nation had to be represented in some way or another in order to

² Cf. Anderson, 6.

³ Cf. Looby, 3.

become imaginable⁴. The main reason for a great number of diverse national representations that appeared soon afterwards was that with the birth of a new nation, people should develop a sense of national consciousness.

The following question now arises: What has the process of building a nation to do with the concept of nursing and caring? The answer is that the idea of a nation is necessarily connected to various regulations and standards within a community, including, in particular, formations of gender relations⁵. In visual and metaphorical representations of the nation, gender imagery had always played a major role⁶. Allegorical representations of nations as female persons are a rather old convention. Even as early as the sixteenth century – shortly after America's "discovery" – female metaphors were used in order to give the "new" continent a certain identity. One of the earliest examples is the following painting by Theodor Galle from around 1600.



Galle, Theodor. *America*. Bildarchiv, ÖNB Wien.

The picture shows the encounter of a man, the allegory of Europe, with a naked

⁴ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 174.

⁵ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 174.

⁶ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 174.

woman, the symbol of the New World. This scene is intended to express the need of the "virginal" American land and people to become civilized and cultivated by Europe. The characterization of America as a female character serves to justify Europe's claim over the land in the same way as men were commonly thought of as having the right to dominate women, because male persons were regarded as "masters", who had to control female persons⁷.

The use of female allegories has not only been a frequent phenomenon in the United States, but also in Europe. Examples are the German "Germania" with her sword and white dress, or the French "Marianne"⁸, or the Irish "Mise Éire". However, the most prominent example of female allegories in the United States is probably the Statue of Liberty, which was given to the United States by France in 1886 and serves as a national and international symbol representing the independence of the United States. The Statue of Liberty can be interpreted as a means for identification, not only of New York, but of the whole nation⁹. It is often regarded as some form of ideal¹⁰. At a closer sight, the Statue of Liberty reveals how women become objects for the male gaze. Even though the statue is a tribute to women, one has to bear in mind that female persons are still not equal to male individuals. It can be suggested that female allegories of nations are more often than not connected to the exclusion of real women from political spaces¹¹. Birgitta Bader-Zaar and Johanna Gehmacher claim that in cases where body and family metaphors dominate the picture of a nation, such imagery frequently legitimizes internal hierarchies and enforces patriarchal family structures¹². One might claim that freedom is not portrayed in a female form because women were free at that time¹³. When such symbols as the French "Marianne" – symbolizing the French Republic – or the Statue of Liberty – as the embodiment of the independence and freedom of the United States – were constructed, women were the ones who were NOT free¹⁴. In fact, France

⁷ Cf. Campbell, 205.

⁸ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 174.

⁹ Cf. Warner, 39.

¹⁰ Cf. Warner, 39.

¹¹ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 174.

¹² Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 174-175.

¹³ Cf. Warner, 14.

¹⁴ Cf. Warner, 14.

was, for example, one of the last countries in Europe to grant women their right to vote^{15 16}.

Female allegories symbolize loyalty and purity, opposed to male courage¹⁷. Male and female examples illustrate the typicality of a specific nation and produce suitable masculine and feminine behavior in diverse spaces¹⁸. For instance, in the context of the German-French conflict in the nineteenth century, national stereotypes were being linked to gender characteristics in the way that German women were demanded to be loyal and moral in order to contradict the sensuality and frivolity of the French women¹⁹. Generally speaking, female allegories – no matter which country they characterize – are constructed with the intention to illustrate the nation's need for male dominance. In addition to that, there is a huge number of coins all over the world that either carry the image of (mythical or historical) female persons in order to personify ideal states, or portray queens, for example, who represent certain nations²⁰. In this respect, people everyday take part in an exchange of entities that in some way or other make use of the female form²¹. It becomes obvious how recent female allegories are and how such common female metaphors still influence people's everyday lives²².

The way how nations are represented is in so far essential as representations define who has the power to look at whom and with which effects²³. In other words, representations intervene in social spaces²⁴. They are only seldomly produced without any particular purpose. However, its reception and people's reaction might contradict the initial intention with which a certain depiction was created²⁵. One has to keep in mind that representations are never fixed, but

¹⁵ Cf. Warner, 14.

¹⁶ France granted suffrage in 1945, which was relatively late compared to other Western countries.

¹⁷ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 175.

¹⁸ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 176.

¹⁹ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 176.

²⁰ Cf. Warner, 13.

²¹ Cf. Warner, 13.

²² Cf. Warner, 16.

²³ Cf. Schober, 150.

²⁴ Cf. Schober, 150.

²⁵ Cf. Schober, 148.

rather depend on how they are read, interpreted, experienced and deconstructed by the addressee²⁶. The reading, interpreting, experiencing and deconstructing of messages is not only historically shaped, but also influences history itself²⁷.

Another important concept that is repeatedly used in order to express a nation's collective consciousness, as well as norms, beliefs and values of a certain group and giving stabilization to a particular society, is the creation of myths. In Western societies, myths usually serve to enforce the superiority of men over women. Myths are used as a means to convince people that the existing order is the right one and that this order inevitably implies a domination of men over women.

One example of myths is the glorification of the so-called "common man" that came into being in the United States. It expressed the idea of America being exceptional, brave and even "better" than other nations. In this respect, the United States distanced itself from other countries, which were regarded as inferior. The idea of an "American exceptionalism" originated from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1831)²⁸. Some people claim that the notion of America as exceptional dates back to John Winthrop's idea of a "city upon a hill", which implied that the Puritans in the New World should create a model for other nations²⁹. However, the term "American exceptionalism" only appeared after the Second World War³⁰. According to Seymour Martin Lipset, "American exceptionalism" refers to the politically and socially distinctive character of the United States³¹. He further claims that "[b]eing an American [...] is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those who reject American values are un-American" (Lipset, n.p.). It seems as if the United

²⁶ Cf. Schober, 162.

²⁷ Cf. Schober, 150.

²⁸ Cf. "American exceptionalism". <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/american-exceptionalism.htm>.

²⁹ Cf. "American exceptionalism". <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/american-exceptionalism.htm>.

³⁰ Cf. "American exceptionalism". <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/american-exceptionalism.htm>.

³¹ Cf. Lipset, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/american-exceptionalism.html>.

States were particularly preoccupied with defining its national identity by comparing itself with other nations³². In fact, a nation's ability to claim superiority is only possible in comparison with other nations. As Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out, "without comparisons to make, the mind doesn't know how to proceed" (Tocqueville, quoted in Lipset, www.washingtonpost.com). Categorizations and dichotomies have always been present since the formation of an American Nation, because creating a particular order or hierarchy is a way of guaranteeing the functioning of the nation state. According to Neil Campbell, there is a tendency in the United States to

give undue weight to the experience of specific groups and traditions in explaining America, at the expense of other groups whose experience is, as a result, forgotten or marginalized. (Campbell, 2)

Groups that did not fall into any of the categories provided by the nation were from the beginning marginalized and constructed as the cultural "Other", for example African Americans, Native Americans, women or gays³³. Such Otherness could be caused by various factors including, for example, race, class, religion, or gender. This latter aspect of differentiation becomes obvious when bearing in mind the fact that the history of the United States has frequently been depicted as a succession of heroic figures who are mostly gendered in the masculine.

Generally speaking, myths function to control history. In fact, histories of the past are formed through myths. According to Neil Campbell,

myths are the stories we tell each other as a culture in order to explain complexities and to banish contradictions, thus making the world seem simpler and more comfortable for us to inhabit. (Campbell, 9)

On the one hand, myths can give stabilization, identity or cohesion to a society or to a certain group, but on the other hand, these ties that bind society together have more often than not no reference to actual reality and are therefore mostly

³² Cf. Campbell, 2.

³³ Cf. Campbell, 34.

not in accordance to real experiences. One has to bear in mind that common beliefs and values are not just there from the beginning but produced through discourses. Neil Campbell points out that

discourses [...] constitute [...] reality, and form our concepts about our identity and about what the world means. Discourses organize statements, define texts, promote meanings, representations and stories, position subjects, and are endlessly in competition for our attentions as they *construct* our senses of what is right and wrong, normal and abnormal, important or not worthy of our attention. These competing discourses can [...] become *dominant discourses*, carrying more status, power and social significance. For example, a discourse of American patriotism in a time of war might be a gathering of texts such as the flag, emotional music, images of heroism and sacrifice [...]. (Campbell, 13-14)

In this respect, the historical process of nation-building could be summarized in the words of Christopher Looby, who stated that "NATIONS ARE NOT BORN, but made" (Looby, 1). This is the expression of the logic that general convictions and assumptions of how a nation has to be are shaped by discourses. As Benedict Anderson claimed, "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 7). This strong feeling of belonging together and being one group with similar interests – which is promoted by dominant discourses – triggers the willingness of a great number of people to even risk their lives for the nation³⁴. The idea is that the fate of every nation depends on its virtuous citizens³⁵. A nation demands the duty of both male and female persons. The concept of a nation usually reminds people of politicians representing a political community. In addition to this image, one might imagine soldiers defending a particular nation and symbolically standing for war. These and similar pictures have always dominated people's thoughts about the meaning of a nation. The active part in the nation-building process is habitually associated with male persons who are fighting in war, whereas the passive part is usually connected to female individuals who are at home, taking care of the household and looking after the children. However, it goes without saying that women are undeniably active. They do not only have to look after the household

³⁴ Cf. Anderson, 7.

³⁵ Cf. Fellner, 6.

and care for the children, they are also the ones who produce and nurture the future citizens of the nation and who are – in their roles as nurses – at times responsible for the healing of the soldiers.

In this respect, another question arises: Can one say that nursing "is female" and the nation "male"? In order to provide an answer to this question it is probably helpful to refer to the term "Republican Motherhood", which was coined by Linda K. Kerber, who used this concept in her study *Women of the Republic* (1980)³⁶. The expression refers to the fact that women's main task – especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth century – was educating their sons to make them "good" citizens of the New Republic. Therefore, Kerber's argument is that women should have access to better education in order to be able to train their sons for the newly-emerging public sphere³⁷. According to Astrid Fellner, women's task in the New Republic was to implant "moral and patriotic sentiments into their children" (Fellner, 6). Women soon started to realize their important contribution to the nation³⁸. In contrast, the daughters were only educated for the private sphere and all the works that had to be done at home. A woman's main roles were being a mother and a wife³⁹. As Neil Campbell claims, "it was 'natural' for women to adopt specific roles in society and for men to assume others" (Campbell, 205).

An image of women as nurturer of men – who in turn came to stand for the nation – was enforced over the past 250 years. The seemingly clear-cut account of the nation and of war as being exclusively male domains cannot be made that easily, especially when bearing in mind, for instance, that a number of women nowadays also become soldiers and join the army. It might seem surprising that even during the Revolutionary War there were women who disguised as men and fought in the army⁴⁰. One example is Deborah Gannet Sampson, who is widely imagined as the "American Jeanne d'Arc" (Fellner, 333). She disguised herself as a soldier and went onto the battlefield under the

³⁶ Cf. Cohen, <http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/earlyrepublic/cohen.html>.

³⁷ Cf. Cohen, <http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/earlyrepublic/cohen.html>.

³⁸ Cf. Cohen, <http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/earlyrepublic/cohen.html>.

³⁹ Cf. Fellner, 6.

⁴⁰ Cf. Fellner, 333.

name Robert Shurtliff⁴¹. However, when she fell ill and could no longer hide her real sex, she was "honorably discharged from the service" (Fellner, 334). She furthermore managed to receive "a veteran's pension" (Fellner, 334). In spite of the historical fact that women were also active as warriors, the general conviction that men are supposed to go to work and onto the battlefield, whereas women are expected to stay at home as mothers, housewives, and – in cases of war – nurses and healers of the soldiers was and still is prevalent in most people's minds. Many people feared that a reversal or change of common gender roles would represent a danger for the existing social order.

In so far, one could even go further and rephrase Looby's claim into "nations are not born, but nursed". This means that women in nursing positions – similar to soldiers who are fighting in war – also sacrifice their lives for the sake of the nation in order to ensure the nation's existence. They do not only risk their lives on the battlefield as war nurses, for instance, but are also responsible for the reproduction and education of the nation's future citizens. In this respect, they are the ones who influence the attitude and values of the young generation that is going to give the nation its future identity.

2.2 The formation of the nursing profession and the image of the nurse

2.2.1 Nursing as a typical female occupation

In order to explain how the concept of nursing as a typical female occupation has come into being, it is important to go back in time until the eighteenth century. During this time, the division into private and public sphere began to develop. It was believed that male and female persons had to carry out their obligations in different – although closely connected – spheres⁴². Women started to become responsible for the private sphere, whereas the public sphere was reserved for men only. Mary Roth Walsh claims that

⁴¹ Cf. Fellner, 333-334.

⁴² Cf. Fellner, 6.

[a]s long as women occupied themselves with domestic affairs, submission was relatively easy. [...] Men would hold sway in the world of politics and business, while women, from the vantage point of their position on the pedestal, would rule the domestic scene. (Walsh, 18)

It becomes obvious that there were not many professions that could be fulfilled by women at that time. "[T]here were limits to how, when, and in what manner women could enter the professional public sphere" (Morantz-Sanchez, 8). However, even though female persons were physically restricted to the domestic sphere, particularly in the eighteenth century, their work was considered political, due of the fact that they had the responsibility of educating the future citizens of the New Republic. According to Fellner, "there was a cultural struggle over the meaning of the female body in late-eighteenth-century America" (Fellner, 375). People began to recognize that women played an essential role in the establishment of a national order⁴³. Nevertheless, the Constitution still excluded women from active participation in the politics of the country. In other words, women were in a disadvantaged position⁴⁴. The reason why women were denied the right to vote for such a long time is that the passing of the "natural" border between private and public sphere was interpreted as danger for the coherence of the nation⁴⁵.

At the same time, the idea of men and women having different "natures" emerged⁴⁶. Many argued that female persons would be more morally oriented due to their naturally given motherhood instinct⁴⁷. A "good" woman was considered as behaving according to the "four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (Walsh, 18). Walsh points out that the "qualities of true womanhood [were the virtues] by which a woman judged herself and was judged by others" (Walsh, 18). Those women who acted according to this "cult of true womanhood" were "rewarded" by society^{48 49}.

⁴³ Cf. Schloss, 103.

⁴⁴ Cf. Schloss, 103.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 169.

⁴⁶ Cf. Schloss, 101.

⁴⁷ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 171.

⁴⁸ Cf. Walsh, 18.

⁴⁹ The term "cult of true womanhood" was coined by Barbara Welter (www.pinzler.com/ushistory/culttwo.html). She used this expression to describe typical female characteristics, virtues and

Consequently, the representation of female persons as mothers and nurturers reached a broad consensus⁵⁰. The general prejudice was that women were emotive, easily touched at heart, and especially gifted in emotional qualities such as pity. In particular, this means that "[s]entiment and sensibility were key terms in every definition of femininity in the eighteenth century" (Fellner, 28). Women were furthermore usually considered passive and peace-loving by nature, whereas the dominant image of men was that they were active and aggressive⁵¹.

However, women soon used the notion of "true womanhood" for their own purposes⁵². In particular, they claimed that the virtues that were ascribed to them would be women's weapon against a "degenerate civilization"⁵³. Female individuals themselves made the home the most important institution of the state in that they argued that the experiences that women made at home, would predestine them for particular works in politics, such as all tasks that had to do with welfare and education, as well as social and environmental matters⁵⁴. Especially during the time of industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth century, women started to fight for more rights. These ideals included not only the right for education for women, but also the right to vote, for example. Female persons began to criticize the male dominated state for its egoism, prejudice and hatred⁵⁵.

At the same time, the so-called suffragette movement came into being and soon had many female supporters. Their main aim was to fight for women's right to vote. The suffragettes did not hesitate to defend their goals with radical and violent methods. Their ideas and forms of activism definitely influenced the later international women's movement. However, the suffragettes' militant activism ended when women got the right to vote.

responsibilities that the nineteenth century society inscribed into women.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 171.

⁵¹ Cf. Toussaint, 222.

⁵² Cf. Walsh, 18.

⁵³ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 171.

⁵⁴ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 171.

⁵⁵ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 171.

From the beginning of the First World War until 1960s, there was not really any form of feminist activism possible. The two World Wars triggered a renewed restraint of women to the private sphere. During the men's absence female persons were not only responsible for the usual reproductive and nursing tasks, but also had to take care of the work of their husbands, fathers or brothers, while the male persons had to serve as soldiers in the army. Dominant discourses enforced the picture of the sensitive, lovely, diligent, submissive, motherly caring, self-sacrificing and beautiful woman. Such portrayals reached their heydays in the 1950s.

The situation changed in the 1960s. The rise in life expectancy, the great number of women who went to work and the appearance of the contraceptive pill enforced women's feeling of independence from the commitments of motherhood. Immense changes in demographic, economic and social structures triggered a renewed feminist activism in industrial nations, the so-called second wave of feminism. The feminist movement was concerned with the analysis of the power relations within Western society⁵⁶. However, female persons who participated in any form of feminist activism usually had a very bad reputation in society and were more often than not regarded as masculine and threatening women. This argument will be taken up again when analyzing Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

The historical and social context led to an increased interest of scholars in gender roles and responsibilities and triggered a number of new theoretical ideas. Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, the categories man versus woman started being questioned. Gender developed into an analytical category. Discourse analysis (Michel Foucault) and deconstruction (Jacques Derrida) developed as central tools. People started to realize that both men and women reproduce – through their daily gendered performances – what it means to be masculine or feminine, implying that the way people talk, dress or behave at diverse places and at various times influences the construction of gender roles. In this respect, Judith Butler came up with the famous phrase “doing gender”,

⁵⁶ Cf. Campbell, 11.

which efficiently reveals the fact that gender is continually constructed in everyday processes.

Despite tremendous progress and change in the situation of women, the typical images of men and women in the eighteenth century have not really changed much until the present day. Sensitivity is, for instance, still considered as being a typical characteristic of female persons. If women dare to contradict their typical gender role, for example, if a mother refuses to take care of her child or if a nurse does not passionately devote herself to her patient, they are usually regarded as ill or mad⁵⁷. This will particularly become relevant when analyzing Stephen King's novel *Misery*.

The basis for such culturally shaped assumptions of specific characters and behaviors of men and women is that Western society has been dominated by a two-sex-model since the eighteenth century. Before this period of time, people believed that there existed only one sex and that there were only minor disparities between men and women. The emphasis was clearly on common features between male and female persons, rather than on differentiation. However, during the eighteenth century there was a shift towards an emphasis of difference between the sexes. The biological distinction between male and female was accompanied with a corresponding separation into masculine and feminine. Nowadays, the term gender is used to refer to the socially and culturally constructed differentiation into feminine and masculine, whereas sex indicates the biological separation into male and female⁵⁸. Gender is the product of diverse discourses and practices, resulting in a distinct distribution of rights, power, control and dominance⁵⁹. According to Val Gough,

state institutions such as prisons, schools, the army and the workplace [...] discipline the body, mind and emotions, constituting them according to the needs of hierarchical forms of power such as gender and class. (Gough, 137)

⁵⁷ Cf. Toussaint, 222.

⁵⁸ Cf. Toussaint, 222.

⁵⁹ Cf. Griesebner, 46.

Joan Wallach Scott emphasizes a similar aspect when claiming that “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott, quoted in Griesebner, 44). She claims that the concepts of gender structure the concrete and symbolic organization of people’s lives⁶⁰.

However, one has to be aware of the fact that sex and gender do not have to be identical. A division into sex and gender is necessary to display that certain features which are allegedly biologically given, are actually acquired. In other words, the meaning of being a woman or a man is not just there. It is persistently reproduced. One could speak of myths of femininity, because what it means to be a man or a woman is constructed by discourses. As Gayle Rubin claims,

[e]very society [...] has a sex/gender system – a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human social intervention. (Rubin, 165)

One immediately has to think of the words by Simone de Beauvoir, who stated that "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (Beauvoir, 249). Expressing the intended production of certain gender roles, the quotation inevitably reminds of Christopher Looby's claim that nations are – in the same way as gender roles - not just there, but are created. This means that society and culture force women and men into certain roles. There are a number of basic values – specific idealized norms of behavior and belief which are held by the people who are in the dominant position – that are continually represented, while other possible gender roles are repressed.

The majority of occupations – like nursing – are linked to elements of dominant gender representations⁶¹. Most individuals consciously and unconsciously adjust themselves to normative conventions which seem to fit their “birth classification”⁶². This can be seen in the fact that not all professions have been

⁶⁰ Cf. Griesebner, 45.

⁶¹ Cf. Griesebner, 45.

⁶² Cf. Griesebner, 46.

easily accessible for women. In general, women in the work force could mainly be found in positions that have a rather low status and are therefore low-paid. On the contrary, occupations that have to do with technology and electronics are still part of the male domain. In particular, this means that owing to women's ostensible physical and psychological condition like emotionality, weakness and lack of rationality, the suitable work for them has been perceived in the domestic sphere⁶³. Due to their reproductive capabilities, women are by nature seen as more sensitive and caring, and therefore the profession of a nurse is seen as more appropriate for female persons than for male individuals. Patterson calls this "the feminizing culture of nurturance" (Patterson, 5). It seems only logical that the nursing profession – due to the fact that it is characteristically a women's occupation – is stigmatized by a rather low status and value in the same way as women have a rather low standing in society.

Interestingly enough, women's skills in medical care had actually a high status during the seventeenth and eighteenth century⁶⁴. Their work was honored and women had many opportunities⁶⁵. Most importantly, many women acted as midwives⁶⁶. However, women's status in the medical realm changed in the nineteenth century when medical schools and colleges started to appear⁶⁷. A gap between male and female physicians began to develop, because women had for a long time no access to higher medical education⁶⁸. In other words, women were denied the possibility of becoming certified female physicians⁶⁹. Nevertheless, they were in most cases the only ones who could provide some medical treatment in their families⁷⁰. However, nurses who had received some form of medical training were exceptions until the middle of the nineteenth century⁷¹. It was only then that being a nurse became professionalized to some extent⁷².

⁶³ Cf. Bader-Zaar and Gehmacher, 169.

⁶⁴ Cf. Walsh, 2-3.

⁶⁵ Cf. Walsh, 3.

⁶⁶ Cf. Walsh, 3.

⁶⁷ Cf. Walsh, 3.

⁶⁸ Cf. Walsh, 2.

⁶⁹ Cf. Walsh, 2.

⁷⁰ Cf. Walsh, 2.

⁷¹ Cf. Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/stats/men.htm>.

⁷² Cf. Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/stats/men.htm>.

It was only as late as 1848 when the first medical college for women was founded in Boston by Samuel Gregory⁷³. According to Mary Roth Walsh, "[t]he appearance of the college seemed to signal a new chapter in the history of women in American medicine" (Walsh, 35). She further points out that in order to prevent women – and in particular midwives – from becoming professional physicians, many male doctors referred to the aspect of the separate spheres⁷⁴. Those few female individuals who were nevertheless regarded as doctors mainly worked as war nurses in order to care for the wounded soldiers, or they could be met in rural areas⁷⁵. The reason why there were a great number of female nurses at work on the battlefields was that at these particular places, there were repeatedly too few male physicians present⁷⁶. In such cases, the help of female persons who had undergone some kind of medical education was needed⁷⁷.

What is striking is that general prejudices of the eighteenth and nineteenth century as regards the nursing profession are still prevalent nowadays. For instance, there are still only very few men working as male nurses. This can also be observed from the literary texts on nursing that were chosen for this diploma thesis, because neither of the works portrays male nurses. Therefore, the literary depictions actually mirror the gendered situation in reality. There still exists the general valid belief that being a nurse fits women's inferior role in the private sphere better than men's superior role in the public sphere⁷⁸. Such stereotypes and assumptions serve as explanation why in the course of history only very few men had the courage to enter women's field of nursing⁷⁹. The only place where the first few male nurses could be found was the asylum⁸⁰. The reason for this is that the high number of rather violent patients in an asylum

⁷³ Cf. Walsh, 35.

⁷⁴ Cf. Walsh, 9.

⁷⁵ Cf. Walsh, 4.

⁷⁶ Cf. Walsh, 4.

⁷⁷ Cf. Walsh, 4.

⁷⁸ Cf. Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/stats/men.htm>.

⁷⁹ Cf. Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/stats/men.htm>.

⁸⁰ Cf. Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/stats/men.htm>.

requires the physical strength of male persons^{81 82}.

It is an interesting phenomenon that – although most nurses are female persons – there have been relatively few female physicians. By 1898, there were, for instance, about five thousand female physicians working in the United States⁸³. "[T]hey constituted about 5 percent of the medical profession, a percentage that was not surpassed until the 1970s" (Wells, 8). Those women who in fact were able to achieve the status of a woman physician in the nineteenth century frequently had to suffer from the presumptions that they would practice another form of medicine than contemporary male physicians⁸⁴. Female doctors were regarded as being more sensitive, empathetic, and less keen on doing surgeries⁸⁵.

A woman's major skills were for a long time seen as being her emotional and psychological skills, rather than actual medical care. One might conclude that in the medical realm, women are mostly responsible for all the work that has do with looking after and caring for the patient, as well as showing empathy and advising the patient.

People internalize dominant portrayals of what constitutes being a man or a woman, and they reject new interpretations of myths due to the fact that the old ones are still so much ingrained in their minds. This has the consequence that

⁸¹ Cf. Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/stats/men.htm>.

⁸² According to latest figures, only 10 percent of 2.5 million registered nurses employed in the United States in the year 2006 were male (Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu>). However, the numbers have been slightly rising since the 1930s and 1940s when the lowest amount of male nurses, namely only about two percent, was at work (Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu>). The reason for this phenomenon might be that during the Second World War men primarily had to serve as soldiers in the army.

Today, one can still observe a division between male and female nurses, which means that "men nurses are more common in intensive care units, emergency departments and operating rooms, and less common in pediatric and obstetric nursing" (Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu>).

The situation today is that there are still many more male doctors than female ones, although women nowadays have the same basic opportunities for medical education as men. Even though the percentage of female doctors in the United States has risen from 7.6 percent in 1970 to 27.8 percent in 2006, for instance, they are still a minority group in this area. (American Medical Association, <http://www.ama-assn.org>).

⁸³ Cf. Wells, 8.

⁸⁴ Cf. Wells, 8.

⁸⁵ Cf. Wells, 8.

some bodies are considered pretty, whereas others are regarded as ugly, or that one kind of behavior is seen as correct, whereas another kind of behavior is observed as incorrect, or that a particular profession is thought of as being suitable for a person, whereas another profession is judged as being inappropriate⁸⁶. As regards adequate behavior of women in nursing positions, the famous British nurse Florence Nightingale for a long time served as an ideal model.

2.2.2 Florence Nightingale – the ideal nurse

Florence Nightingale lived in the nineteenth century and had long been perceived as the representative of the "perfect" nurse, even in the United States. She was almost regarded as a "nationalist legend" in her home country (Salih, xxx). Nightingale's initial wish was to study mathematics, but eventually she made the decision to become a nurse instead⁸⁷. Her religious faith was very strong and led to her interest in the healing profession⁸⁸. However, during the nineteenth century, being a nurse was not considered an appropriate occupation for a woman of her background, because nurses were usually considered as uneducated and untrained⁸⁹. Florence Nightingale emphasized a nurse's need for medical education and promoted the creation of schools for nurses⁹⁰. She started her education at a hospital in Egypt, which was run by the Catholic Church⁹¹. She not only became a trained nurse, but also published medical literature, for example her famous *Notes on Nursing* (1860), in which she states that "[e]very woman, or at least almost every woman [...] has, at one time or another of her life, charge of the personal health of somebody, whether child or invalid" (Nightingale, Preface).

Nightingale's main intention was to establish a nursing profession. In her opinion, nurses were subordinate to male physicians. As regards nurses

⁸⁶ Cf. Kossek, 115

⁸⁷ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁸⁸ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁸⁹ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁹⁰ Cf. Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/stats/men.htm>.

⁹¹ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

themselves, she differentiated between professional nurses and ordinary women who carried out nursing tasks. Due to Nightingale's activism, more and more schools for nursing started to appear in the second half of the nineteenth century. These schools were built in order to provide practical medical training for the future nurses⁹². The side effect of the nursing schools was that the female students had to live and be educated in a home-like building, where they had to lead a moral and disciplinary life⁹³. As a matter of fact, the nursing profession developed from a rather disreputable profession to an occupation that was regarded as respectable for the contemporary woman⁹⁴.

Nightingale is also widely known for her contribution as regards the improvement of the sanitary conditions and medical facilities in hospitals, particularly in field hospitals⁹⁵. Her love for mathematics caused her to do statistics and research, which revealed that more soldiers died in hospitals of some kind of epidemic than on the battlefield. Nightingale came to the conclusion that the likelihood for soldiers to die from infection in the hospital was about seven times higher than the probability to die at the front⁹⁶. According to J.J. O'Connor and E.F. Robertson,

these calculations showed that an improvement of the sanitary methods employed would result in a decrease in the number of deaths. By February 1855 the mortality rate had dropped from 60% to 42.7%. Through the establishment of a fresh water supply as well as using her own funds to buy fruit, vegetables and standard hospital equipment, the mortality rate [...] had dropped further to 2.2%. (O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>)

As a consequence, Nightingale tried to establish means to overcome the dilemma in field hospitals. She was called by the British Secretary of War to become a "Superintendent of the Female Nursing Establishment of the English General Hospitals in Turkey" in the Crimean War, where Britain, France and

⁹² Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁹³ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁹⁴ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁹⁵ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁹⁶ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

Turkey fought against Russia⁹⁷. Nightingale's intention was to reform the hospital system⁹⁸. One of Nightingale's most important concerns in this matter was hygiene⁹⁹. Her success triggered the fact that "she was also a consultant to the United States government on army health during the American Civil War" (O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>).

What might have contributed to Florence Nightingale's positive reputation as a healer of the British nation was that she was neither married, nor had children. As she did not have a family on her own, this had probably led to people's belief that Nightingale's only concern in life was to serve God and the nation through her caring and nursing activities.

The (literary) representation of Florence Nightingale as the ideal nurse reached a broad consensus all over the world. She was used as the classical representation of nurses, because the majority of people in the United States had heard of the famous nurse's deeds for the British nation. Therefore, the intention was to use Florence Nightingale as a model for women of the American nation. As a consequence, portrayals of nurses that appeared afterwards were always produced with the image of the ideal European model, Florence Nightingale, in mind. Later depictions of women in nursing positions either enforced the typical ideal representation or deconstructed the common nursing cliché.

In Mary Seacole's autobiography *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857), for example, one can see how the first-person narrator constantly compares herself with Florence Nightingale as if Nightingale were the personification of the ideal nurse. This can be observed in Mary Seacole's following statement in her memoir in which she emphasizes the "Punch, who allowed [her] poor name to appear in the pages which had welcomed Miss Nightingale home" (Seacole, 117). Seacole's idealization of Nightingale represents what the majority of people at that time wanted to hear about the

⁹⁷ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁹⁸ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

⁹⁹ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

almost mythic figure of Florence Nightingale. The fact that Mary Seacole puts Florence Nightingale on a pedestal becomes particularly obvious in the following characterization of Nightingale by Seacole:

I am admitted to Miss Nightingale's presence. A slight figure, in the nurses' dress; with a pale, gentle, and withal firm face, resting lightly in the palm of one hand, while the other supports the elbow [...] Florence Nightingale – that Englishwoman whose name shall never die, but sound like music on the lips of British men until the hour of doom. (Seacole, 82)

Mary Seacole knew that the public loved Florence Nightingale and she used this knowledge for her own purposes. She points out that many people at that time – in particular male individuals – idealized Nightingale. Thus, Seacole also pretends to acknowledge Nightingale and her work very much.

In the description of Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole often makes use of exaggerated and sentimental terminology. Nightingale has the nickname "The Lady with the Lamp" or "Sister of the Brave". Opposed to this, Mary Seacole is called "The black Nightingale" or "The yellow woman from Jamaica". What is obviously implied is the common assumption that Nightingale is the standard and Seacole a deviation from the norm. The diverging nicknames do not acknowledge that Nightingale and Seacole do something similar, namely nursing and caring for others. However, Nightingale and her nurses only carry out tasks such as changing bandages, washing the wounds and feeding the patients in the hospital¹⁰⁰. Seacole, on the contrary, is interested in something else. She is more concerned with establishing an emotional relationship to her patients, touching them, working on the battlefield and being active as regards the process of nursing, rather than relying on a male doctor to do the healing.

Most of the famous pictures that depict Florence Nightingale show her with a lamp in her hand, going to the patients, but hardly touching them. Florence Nightingale is depicted as a slender, delicate, upper-class, saintly, self-sacrificing woman, intelligent, and having power over men in authority. She

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ferguson, 69.

seems to be a mythic figure.



English colored engraving.
The Granger Collection. 1855. New York.
www.britannica.com (6 October, 2008)



Caughley, Jill. Crimean war tableau.
www.florence-nightingale.co.uk
(6 October 2008)

The irony in Nightingale's life story is that she herself became ill during her service in the Crimean War and afterwards could not carry out her profession as a nurse in the same way as before¹⁰¹. She was then mainly at work as a writer and teacher¹⁰².

2.3 Literary texts as the link between nursing and the nation

The most important question that arises now is: How does literature create the connection between the process of nursing and the concept of a nation? First of all, language and literature have always played a significant role in the United States as regards the construction of the nation. Especially in the period during and after the American Revolution, nationalism became one of the most important themes in literary texts. As Arthur Ford claims, "a long tradition of literary nationalism had been established by the outbreak of the Revolutionary War" (Ford, 63). One must bear in mind that literature contributes to the discursive creation of identity and as every newly built nation needs some literary texts to praise the nation's existence, texts were crucial to make the formation of an American identity possible, because literature can, on the one hand, function in order to legitimize assumptions of a certain society, and on the other hand, may also offer possible orientations for the readers as far as a

¹⁰¹ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

¹⁰² Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

particular culture is concerned. A so-called “national narrative” was essential for expressing an “American exceptionalism”¹⁰³. Neil Campbell describes a “national narrative” as “a story of agreed principles, values and myths that gives the country a coherent sense of identity” (Campbell, 2).

One could say that nations demand the duty of both men and women; typical gender roles and hierarchies between men and women are created through discursive practices; and discourses in general are mainly conveyed through language. It might be helpful to quote Christopher Looby again and give the full quotation of his idea. “NATIONS ARE NOT BORN, but made. And they are made, ineluctably, in language” (Looby, 1). In other words, language and literature play an essential part in the creation of identities and the production of standards and norms. As Astrid Fellner claims, “literature should represent the message of nationalism and virtue to the public” (Fellner, 33). Literary representations take up general beliefs, assumptions and values – for example, what being a nurse implies – and either enforce or deconstruct these. How this is done will be the main point of debate in the following analysis of selected American texts dealing with the nursing profession.

Considering the fact that women have always played an important role with regard to the development of an American literature and a sense of national identity, the statement that “nations are not born, but nursed” could be enlarged by claiming that “they are nursed in literature”. In other words, the American nation, metaphorically speaking, is born and carefully nursed into being in and through literature.

At the same time the importance of literature for the medical profession can also be seen in the fact that numerous doctors – and even nurses – started to write in order to shed light on their everyday experiences. In addition to that, literature courses have been included in the medical school curriculum in the United States since the 1970s¹⁰⁴. At the beginning, such courses focused on

¹⁰³ Cf. Campbell, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 5.

representations of doctors', nurses', or patients' experiences¹⁰⁵. The use of literature that displayed disease, death and medical findings aimed at the students' motivation to care about the patient in the same way as about the illness¹⁰⁶. Over the course of history, the multiculturalist and feminist movements helped to emphasize aspects such as race, ethnicity, gender, as well as social and cultural backgrounds¹⁰⁷. In so far, the students' reflections on literature force them to face and come to terms with their own preconceptions and assumptions¹⁰⁸. Literature courses in medical schools should help future doctors and nurses to understand better the patient's perception regarding disease and treatment¹⁰⁹.

Besides, more and more diverse genres entered the field, like autobiographies, medical writings, poems, plays, or "pathologies" (Hawkins and McEntyre, 6), which are narratives written by patients¹¹⁰. The latter kind of texts are considered especially important, because they allow both doctor and nurse a better awareness of the concerns and experiences of the patient and act accordingly¹¹¹.

Literature as well as concepts such as being ill or healthy, having medical authority or healing power, are not only influenced by cultural assumptions and beliefs, but are also reflections of these and help create them¹¹². Nursing – in the same way as literature on nursing – is usually concerned with people and their lives, and are thus embedded in culturally shaped convictions and ideologies¹¹³. However, not only the medical practice itself is influenced by cultural assumptions, but even the individual experience of illness¹¹⁴. It has to be mentioned, however, that the degree in how far a disease is socially

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 5.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 6.

¹¹¹ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 6.

¹¹² Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 22.

¹¹³ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 3.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 3.

influenced or even constructed varies¹¹⁵. An often-cited example of an illness that might be shaped by cultural values is anorexia¹¹⁶. Anorexia is a disease that might be caused by literature such as magazines which mainly depict skinny women. Readers habitually attempt to imitate dominant portrayals, even at the risk of their health, like young women who stop eating in order to become as skinny as the majority of women that are pictured in magazines. This behavior might cause anorexia. In turn, diseases like anorexia are much described in medical texts in order to determine details concerning the illness and suggest possible healing methods. It becomes clear that there is a close connection between literature, health and illness. Hawkins and McEntyre claim that

[L]iterature and medicine have a long history of cross-pollination. From biblical and classical accounts of plagues and healings [...] to the psychopathologies and malignancies of contemporary fiction, drama, and film, medical themes in literature abound. (Hawkins and McEntyre, 1)

As prominent examples Hawkins and McEntyre mention the work *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann and furthermore the author and physician William Carlos Williams¹¹⁷. Authors like these are said to be aware of the "actualities and metaphorical possibilities of illness and medicine" (Hawkins and McEntyre, 1). This means that one has to be aware of the fact that medical practice in the general sense – like literature or history – always has to do with interpretation, and is not simply based on facts¹¹⁸. According to Hawkins and McEntyre, "[r]eading literature heightens personal awareness" (Hawkins and McEntyre, 5). By analyzing literature, the reader – be it nurse, doctor or any other human being – may start to think more critically about moral concerns and show empathy in the medical profession¹¹⁹. This goes back to ancient Greek culture even, where the origin of Western medicine and philosophy lies, and where literature was regarded as an essential aspect of teaching morality¹²⁰. Similar to

¹¹⁵ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 3.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 3.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 1.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 2.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 5.

¹²⁰ Cf. Hawkins and McEntyre, 5.

the way nurses and doctors have to pay attention to their patients and make sense of their stories and symptoms, readers also have to interpret literature and decipher its message.

The following analysis of a number of selected novels will include one essential question: How are the nurses viewed by patients or doctors? A special focus will also be on aspects such as how women in nursing and caring positions are portrayed by individual authors, and which functions they inhabit in these texts. Moreover, there will be a recurring elaboration on the question of how the link between the idea of "nursing (and) the nation" is established in a number of literary examples.

3 The depiction of the nursing profession in nineteenth century American literature

In order to acquire a better conception and be able to obtain a comparative view, it appears necessary to investigate a number of selected literary texts from the nineteenth century first, because as Mary Roth Walsh claims, "the past enables us to see the present more clearly, and our view of the future is made all the more exact" (Walsh, xii). In other words, assumptions and values may change over the course of time and it might be helpful for the understanding of twentieth century texts to understand several changes that occurred over the century.

In the nineteenth century, doctoring and nursing began to separate into two different professions. The profession as a nurse was regarded as inappropriate for a well-educated woman at that time¹²¹. This changed in the middle of the nineteenth century when the nursing profession achieved a higher status. The fact that nurses were to a great extent at work in field hospitals, as war nurses, where they had to care for the wounded soldiers, might have contributed to an increased admiration of female nurses, because in most people's eyes, (war) nurses served to secure the nation's existence in that they were regarded as

¹²¹ Cf. O'Connor and Robertson, <http://www.history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk>.

healers for the soldiers.

Due to the fact that the common notion of women during the nineteenth century considered them as mother figures and healing angels who obediently served the nation in their roles as nurses and nurturers, such discourses were also prevalent in contemporary literature. The depiction of female persons as sensitive, caring and self-sacrificing servants of the nation was by and large supported by both men and women. This can, for instance, be observed in Louisa May Alcott's short story "The Brothers". The fact that the medical profession started to gain more attention in the nineteenth century caused many physicians – male and female – to create

a textual representation of medicine, developing the emerging norms of the medical interview, testing the limits of internal criticism of the profession [and] inventing new forms of medical research. (Wells, 5)

Especially portrayals of war nurses can be found very frequently in the nineteenth century, a time where a "good" woman was considered a person who cared for the people around her in a motherly way, being the "angel in the house", and sacrificing her own needs for the wishes of others. It is only understandable that the image of a woman in the position of a nurse perfectly fits into this scheme. The portrayal of nurses in the nineteenth century often promoted a feminine behavior that was regarded as typical and suitable for contemporary female individuals in order to create loyal and moral female servants for the nation state.

3.1 Nursing in Louisa May Alcott's "The Brothers" (1863)

Louisa May Alcott's short story "The Brothers" illustrates how ideologies concerning the creation of a national identity – as well as the role of men and women in this process – can be incorporated into one single text. It deals with the experience of a white female Civil War nurse who is taking care of two half-brothers (one half-black, the other one white). The relationship between Nurse Dane and the mulatto Robert stands in the foreground, although the emotional

association between the brothers is of importance as well. The reader approaches the events through the nurse's eyes.

3.1.1 War nursing

The major role that Nurse Dane has in the short story is being a Civil War nurse. Louisa May Alcott herself had been working as a nurse in the nineteenth century¹²². Her main tasks were dressing soldiers' wounds, cleaning their bandages and feeding the patients¹²³. Martha Saxton states that through her work as a nurse, Louisa May Alcott "was expressing her own fierce humanity in a courageous alternative to marriage and motherhood" (Saxton, 268). However, one has to bear in mind that for a Victorian woman like Louisa May Alcott it was surely not an easy thing to be a nurse during the Civil War, because treating the injured troops was certainly a very sudden confrontation with the anatomy of men¹²⁴. Numerous women at that time – some of whom had never received any form of medical training – offered their help as nurses, as there were frequently too few male physicians present. Due to the fact that these female individuals were not really prepared for the situation with which they were confronted, many were shocked. It was not only the frequent instances of death they had to witness, or the horrible and often disgusting injuries of the soldiers with which they had to deal, but also the fact that they had to look at or wash naked strangers, for instance¹²⁵. As far as Louisa May Alcott is concerned, she tried to solve that problem in that she started to treat the injured soldiers as children and regard them as her "boys"¹²⁶. This aspect is also reflected in the short story when Nurse Dane calls her patient "black boy" (Alcott, 289).

In the course of the story, the nurse is at first portrayed in a hospital. Towards the end, however, she is depicted as being with the soldiers on the battlefield. It was a quite typical situation for nurses during the nineteenth century that they were mainly at work on the battlefield and not inside of a medical institution.

¹²² Cf. Saxton, 252.

¹²³ Cf. Saxton, 253.

¹²⁴ Cf. Saxton, 253.

¹²⁵ Cf. Saxton, 253.

¹²⁶ Cf. Saxton, 255.

Although there were in reality great many medical institutions, the majority of the wounded soldiers rejected being medically treated in a hospital¹²⁷. The main reason was that they feared the illnesses that were present in medical care institutions¹²⁸. In her biography on Louisa May Alcott, Martha Saxton describes the situation in Civil War hospitals as follows:

The close air, rotten straw beds, and haphazard care carried off lives more effectively than Confederate guns. [...] In addition to wounds, the troops were commonly afflicted with chronic diarrhea, typhoid, bronchitis, rheumatism, and pneumonia. There were twice as many sick as there were wounded. (Saxton, 252)

Louisa May Alcott herself was also tragically affected by her short service as a nurse during the Civil War¹²⁹. She got sick and exhausted and actually never fully recovered again¹³⁰.

Nurse Dane is not only depicted as a Civil War nurse, but also as a mother and a mistress in the short story. She becomes a substitute mother for the dying soldiers on the battlefield. Louisa May Alcott portrays the nurse as a sensitive and healing angel, who sacrifices her needs for her patients and acts according to the norms society imposes on her. In this respect she acts like a submissive and loyal servant of the nation.

The fact that Nurse Dane cares for her patient like a mother renders her as a rather feminine nurse. However, it is striking that she is characterized by the phrase "I'll stand to my guns" (Alcott, 289), which implies that she would fight for her ideas. Moreover, this line implies that she will do as the doctor expects her to do. The association of women with guns is quite rare in literature and therefore very striking. This portrayal of a nurse does not confirm to the typical gender image, because the picture that immediately enters people's minds when thinking about the concept of being a nurse is usually not connected to guns. The expression "my guns" causes an even more powerful impression. It

¹²⁷ Cf. Saxton, 252.

¹²⁸ Cf. Saxton, 252.

¹²⁹ Cf. Saxton, 267.

¹³⁰ Cf. Saxton, 267.

shows that Nurse Dane is firm in her conviction and strong.

Robert, on the contrary, is her servant and is portrayed as inferior. Nevertheless, he can also be said to stand by his guns, because he fights in the Civil War side by side with white men. Therefore, he acts according to dominant white ideals. Although he becomes a man on the battlefield, Robert is weak again in the end, because Nurse Dane has to care for him. The fact that Robert takes on the nurse's name Dane before his death is an effective image of possession. Eventually he dies through the hands of his white brother, who is himself killed by another soldier. Such an ending is quite typical of so-called tragic mulattoes in fiction, who are of mixed racial origin. The idea is that they can only end tragically, and they usually die in the end.

Robert does not have a family. The only people that seem to regard Robert as a family member are nurse Dane, who cares for him like a mother, and the soldiers with whom he fights on the battlefield and who treat him like a brother. Here the American ideology of soldiers standing next to each other – fighting together for one nation – becomes evident. According to Patterson, African American men could only achieve the status of political subjects due to their service as soldiers in the Civil War¹³¹.

The short story symbolizes that such representations of the nation through soldiers of various ethnic groups who fight on the battlefield is only possible if men and women are depicted as behaving according to their gender roles, namely women in their functions as nurses, caring for the injured soldiers, and men in their position as soldiers, fighting in war. What is represented is a "symbolic citizenship marked by both gender and race" (Douglass, quoted in Patterson, 1). A woman's task in this ideology is therefore nursing, mothering, advising and healing the soldiers, on the one hand, and following the doctor's instructions, on the other hand. As Nurse Dane behaves according to the gender role that is ascribed to her in the medical realm, she is "satisfied" (Alcott, 308) in the end. One could interpret her satisfaction as a happy ending.

¹³¹ Cf. Patterson, 1.

3.1.2 The hierarchical status of nurses in the medical realm

Louisa May Alcott plays with dichotomies, such as feminine versus masculine, weak versus strong, black versus white, hospital versus army, nurse versus doctor, or nurse versus patient throughout her short story. These binary oppositions are characterized through hierarchies, meaning that one term is privileged over the other. It can be suggested that the hospital, in the same way as the army, shows tendencies to hierarchize people¹³². When considering the status of doctors and nurses, one can clearly observe that the doctor is the one who has power and the dominant position in the short story. Nurses are inferior and have to do as they are told.

However, Nurse Dane still seems to be on a higher level than her patient, who is a man. She evaluates Robert in terms of feelings like most white persons at that time would have done. This means that even though she tries to put him on the same level as white people, there is still some kind of feeling of superiority in her. This can be observed at the beginning of the short story when Nurse Dane feels surprised that black men can feel such passion and emotion. Another example is the scene when Robert as a black man can only appear as soon as the white doctor disappears from the scene¹³³. It seems to be part of white society in the nineteenth century to feel superior over people of other skin colors. Nurse Dane constructs an image in her mind how an African American man has to be like, or one should better say, what society told her how black people “are”. It cannot be denied that every individual grows up with certain beliefs and values of the society in which the person is embedded. Even Nurse Dane has internalized particular social constructions or ideas. Although she is an abolitionist, there seems to be some racism in her as society has taught her. The lines “these black boys are far more faithful and handy than some of the white scamps given me to serve, instead of being served” (Alcott, 289) imply that African Americans were used as servants. Although the nurse seems to be aware of this generally acknowledged lower status of African American people, on the one hand, and patients, on the other hand, she does not try to overthrow

¹³² Cf. Patterson, 3.

¹³³ Cf. Alcott, 290.

her privileged position. On the contrary, she seems to be proud of the fact that her patients call her "mother", look up at her and are basically dependent on her.

Although Nurse Dane attempts to break her attitude and treat Robert equally, this even enforces her superior status over her patient. An example is that she is the one who gives him the name Robert, despite the fact that he would like to be called Bob. However, Bob does not seem enough for her. As Mark Patterson claims,

Nurse Dane's divided response to Robert's race indicates what gender roles – either friend or "mistress" – she may perform in reaction to Robert's multiple selves, but it also reveals her own gender confusion. (Patterson, 3)

The fact that the woman in this short story is the one who tells the man what his name is and how he should behave, leads to the assumption that the short story also provides a reversal of typical gender roles to some extent. This is only possible due to the fact that African Americans were at the time the short story was written treated like children. Not only the fact that he is her patient makes him inferior to Nurse Dane but also the general valid belief that African American men were no "real" men. They were simply regarded as boys. However, the question arises: What does it mean to be a "real" man? Assumptions may vary at diverse places and times. As black people were generally regarded as boys, it is no surprise that Nurse Dane takes on the higher position in this dichotomy. She not only cares for his physical health like a nurse usually does for her patient, she also advises him and convinces him not to kill his white half-brother. In this respect, the position of a nurse equals mother in this context, because she also provides moral help for her patient.

One might conclude that Alcott proposes that the only reason why a woman can take such a high and superior position in this case is, because she is white, and the categories race and ethnicity seem to be of greater importance for or against discrimination in this instance than the category of gender. However,

one might also conclude that the profession of a nurse is indirectly described as having a more powerful status than being a soldier. In this respect, Louisa May Alcott succeeds in praising or even glorifying the nursing profession. Consequently, the short story is to some extent a tribute to the healing power of a nurse.

One could also claim that Alcott links the position of women as nurses to their biology. In Louisa May Alcott's short story as in Mary Seacole's autobiography it becomes obvious that both authors support the general valid assumption that women are by nature equipped with the necessary skills to care for others. For both authors it seems to be a woman's duty to behave like a mother, a mistress and a "healing angel" at the same time. This is not only due to a woman's reproductive capabilities, but is also caused by the psychological condition of a woman, which – in Alcott's view – is biologically different from the psychic situation of a man. Even though the authors are aware of the social construction of racism and the hierarchical structure that is linked to it, they apparently ignore the fact that also gender roles and psychological conditions that are supposed to be typical feminine or masculine characteristics are also caused by a socializing process and that assumed typical and natural behaviors of men and women are actually learned.

As a conclusion one could claim that Louisa May Alcott's short story "The Brothers" is a perfect literary example that enforces the hegemonic image of women nursing men. The author supports the cliché of the sensitive and loving healer of the nation.

3.2 Nursing in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)

3.2.1 Deconstructing contemporary notions of femininity

In contrast to literary texts that portray women as being biologically determined to take care of other people, there are also texts that contradict typical

depictions of women being nurses by nature. At the end of the nineteenth century, phenomena such as industrialization and urbanization triggered a number of social changes. These changes included women's increased responsibilities and tasks, not only as regards the female duties in the domestic sphere, but also at the workplace. Many women had to suffer severely from the moral and social expectations of their surroundings. As a consequence to the great strain, a number of women started to fight for more rights and autonomy and against the restrictions and rules that society imposed on them. Several women were self-confident enough to attempt a deviation from the common expectations. One could speak of a "growth of 'social feminism' during the 1890s" (Campbell, 207).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was well aware of the impact that literary texts could have on the construction of general values and beliefs¹³⁴. She realized that art – and literature in particular – enabled people to know the past, govern the present, and influence the future" (Gough and Rudd, 2). Her short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" provides a rather new, innovative and daring view for the time the text was written. However, most of these innovative and revolutionary narratives were regarded "as 'scandalous' or eccentric, and peripheral to the mainstream or 'male-stream' culture" (Campbell, 210). The behavior of a woman who refuses to behave like a self-sacrificing mother, healing and caring nurse and nurterer, and "angel in the house" was mainly experienced as unnatural by the majority. There were even people who believed that an "atypical" female behavior would cause a damage in women's brains. It was a common assumption that female individuals who did not behave according to the gender roles that were ascribed to them would end up in some form of negative condition.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself had to make the experience in her life that a doctor prescribed her a "rest cure"-treatment due to her depression after the birth of her daughter¹³⁵. The doctor's proposal for Gilman was to return to the domestic sphere and avoid any intellectual activity; and then she would soon be

¹³⁴ Cf. Cranny-Francis, 161.

¹³⁵ Cf. Baym, 831.

well again¹³⁶. However, Charlotte Perkins Gilman could not identify with the common expectations and resisted patriarchal ideals¹³⁷.

In her short story, Charlotte Perkins Gilman describes such a rather sceptical view that the public has on those women who try to become independent individuals. Even though the narrative depicts the struggle of a young woman who tries to become an autonomous subject and free herself from the restrictions that society and her husband impose on her, it is a rather tragic story and does not offer any optimistic prospect for the woman's future in the story. As Val Gough and Jill Rudd point out, "the darkly tragic short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* [...] does not assert optimistically the possibility for utopian change" (Gough and Rudd, 1). This means that the short story does not lead to the conclusion that a change of common gender roles – including women's empowerment and self-determination – can easily be achieved. Gilman rather attempted to portray contemporary society in a different light and show that common views on femininity and masculinity are not something natural but constructed¹³⁸.

3.2.2 Breaking the rules

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is told from a woman's perspective. The author portrays a young woman who had just had a child. The most striking aspect is that in this case, the mother is not able to take care of her child. It is rather the adult woman who is treated like a baby in the nursery and represented as inferior and silly. In this respect, the author reverses the common portrayal of all women being nurses and obedient servants of men and the nation. Through the description of an "anti-nurse", Charlotte Perkins Gilman signals a movement away from the conventional role of women.

The young woman rejects her typical role and activities as a mother and wife. Even though she tries to conform to what society wants her to do and believe in

¹³⁶ Cf. Baym, 831.

¹³⁷ Cf. Baym, 831.

¹³⁸ Cf. Cranny-Francis, 161.

what her husband says, she breaks the rules when writing secretly. At the same time, she has a bad feeling, because she does not behave according to the conventions. Her husband John is a doctor and dictates what she has to do and how she is supposed to behave. As a doctor his orders are usually followed without questioning. The fact that the husband defines his wife as weak and silent symbolizes that there are certain characteristics that are inscribed into the female body by men. In fact, the first-person narrator only repeats what her husband says. She has no name and is not able to gain a voice on her own. Making herself heard is very difficult for her. However, language as a means of self-expression is an essential tool in the process of gaining subjectivity. Due to the fact that she does not really have her own voice, she is also banned from self-reflection. Therefore, she starts to write, which is a relief for her. This becomes obvious in the following passage:

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me. (Gilman, 835)

Writing is a form of therapy for her. The young woman writes in the form of a diary. This is also reflected in the formal structure of the whole short story, which is also written like a diary. The writing process can be interpreted as the woman's method to free herself from all restrictions. John, on the contrary, hates the fact that she is writing, because writing is a mental activity and considered too strengthening for her. However, the main reason why she is not allowed to write might be that her husband is afraid of her imagination. He cannot really control her writing and has a horror of superstition. There is an emphasis of rationality on his side, because he is "practical in the extreme" (Gilman, 833). Rationality is what he can control, but not his wife's spirituality and imagination. Thus, she is forbidden to write. Due to the prohibition to use pencil, pen or brush, she begins to hide her writing. John is of the opinion that he knows what is best for his wife. In his opinion, she just needs another surrounding. Therefore, he takes her to a nursery in a country house. The first-person narrator describes the house as a "colonial mansion, a hereditary estate [...] a haunted house" (Gilman, 833). This description in the first few lines of the short story already point towards the female protagonist's condition in the short

story. The woman feels dominated and controlled by her husband and haunted by society's expectations. However, John does not realize the cause of his wife's suffering. As a "physician of high standing" (Gilman, 834) he suggest a "rest cure" treatment for her. His belief is that she only needs some time to relax in solitude in order to overcome her "hysterical tendency" (Gilman, 834). However, in the end, his decision turns out wrong.

3.2.3 A room of one's own

The woman attempts to free herself from the rules of both her husband and society by locking herself into her own room and trying to heal herself from her fractured identity and from the person that she has to be, but does not want to be. She fights to have a room of her own¹³⁹ and be an autonomous person. However, the woman is not only locking herself in, but also locking everyone else out. At the same time she feels alienated, isolated, lonely and empty. The question arises, if she really tries to liberate herself or rather locks herself into her own world? Or does she lock up her liberation?

After some time in the room, she starts to develop a relationship to the wallpaper. She even personifies the wallpaper. The wallpaper has some form of subpattern and develops into a woman. The protagonist tries to liberate the woman behind the wallpaper from her prison. The first-person narrator wants to establish a sense of solidarity and sisterhood with people who are like her and soon starts to see herself in the woman in the wallpaper. In a metaphorical sense, this can be interpreted as her attempt to nurse and heal herself. Regarding the following quotation, one could claim that she tries to free herself through her identification with the woman in the wallpaper:

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. (Gilman, 840)

To some extent, the yellow wallpaper can be seen as a representation of

¹³⁹ Cf. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

society with its rules and laws that restrain the woman. As Janet Beer claims, the institution of marriage is the main cause for the protagonist's sickness¹⁴⁰. This can be seen in the following quotation when the first person female narrator claims, "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (Gilman, 833).

In the end, the protagonist sees creeping women outside of her room. The question arises: Do these creeping women all come out of the wallpaper, or do these women only metaphorically stand for the protagonist's madness? The young woman definitely suffers from depressions which turn into madness towards the end of the story. The reason for her madness is her non-conformity to society's standards and her deviation from the norm. Again, the effect that the common gender order can have on a person's mental health becomes obvious. According to Jane F. Thrailkill, the short story has "become a case study of the psychical consequences of the masculine refusal to listen to a woman's words" (Thrailkill, 526). In this respect, "The Yellow Wallpaper" can be interpreted as a kind of warning for the (male) reader.

The portrayal of the female protagonist in the short story shows that a person cannot only be pressed into one particular position, being either one or the other, but that there are more aspects to a person than just one certain role that is ascribed to him or her by others. Such limitation and restraint of a person would sooner or later lead to mental diseases. Some readers and critics at that time claimed that the short story would promote and even inspire madness¹⁴¹. However, through writing "The Yellow Wallpaper", Charlotte Perkins Gilman did not intend "to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy" (Gilman, 845).

Generally speaking, Gilman was one of those authors at the end of the nineteenth century who tried to deconstruct the typical stereotype of women being nurses by nature. She turns the picture of the ideal nursing and caring woman as represented by the figure of Florence Nightingale upside down and

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Beer, 54.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Thrailkill, 527.

consequently emphasizes the fact that also female persons sometimes need to be cared for.

4 The depiction of the nursing profession in twentieth-century American literature

4.1 Nursing in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)

4.1.1 Need for order

War times have always required a certain gender order. Astrid Fellner points to the fact that during times of war, the national duty forces men to leave their homes in order to serve in the army, while at the same time pressing women to take control of the family's properties and finances¹⁴². The two World Wars in the first half of the twentieth century led to the fact that women had to serve the nation again in their roles as housewives, mothers and nurses, caring not only for the wounded soldiers, but also taking over men's tasks at home while the male relatives were fighting on the battlefield. The diverse distribution of various tasks among men and woman went hand in hand with a double pressure on female persons. On the one hand, they had to focus on domestic tasks, but on the other hand, they were also required to serve as hard workers on the labor market¹⁴³. After the war, men increasingly became afraid of losing their dominant position in the gender hierarchy¹⁴⁴. In the same way as the typical male function of bread-winning, authority and responsibility was taken over by women during war times, numerous men feared that women would also claim men's superior status¹⁴⁵. This is why women had to return to their traditional position as obedient housewives again in times of peace¹⁴⁶. People were yearning for a traditional order of things. Neil Campbell claims that

¹⁴² Cf. Fellner, 4.

¹⁴³ Cf. Campbell, 212.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Campbell, 212.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Campbell, 212.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Campbell, 212.

[a]fter the insecurity of the 1930s and the social disruptions of the Second World War, post-war America looked for a return to security, both in social and political ideologies. Gender offered pre-set compartments into which male and female could be arranged so as to create a sense of 'normalcy' and order that were non-threatening and in keeping with precise, uncomplicated versions of an ideal America developed in these years of consensus. (Campbell, 212)

As a consequence of this general social attitude, the image of the beautiful, submissive and caring woman became especially prominent up until the late 1950s and is also depicted in Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*. It was also written during peacetime, although the novel deals with the author's experiences as an ambulance driver in Italy during the First World War. Due to the fact that the genre of the novel in general has often been a fictional portrayal of real political and social conditions, it is not surprising that Hemingway's novel reflects contemporary notions of men's and women's adequate roles and behaviors.

4.1.2 The nurse as a moral model

Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* depicts the story of Frederic Henry, a tough American who works as a Red Cross ambulance driver in Italy during the First World War and Catherine Barkley, a submissive nurse working in an Italian hospital. They fall in love and Catherine soon becomes pregnant. However, she tries to hide her pregnancy from the people around her, because Frederic and Catherine are not a married couple, and at the beginning of the twentieth century it was still not socially accepted to get a baby without being married. The two lovers decide to quit their jobs and flee from Italy to Switzerland in order to escape the war and build a family. In Switzerland, Catherine gives birth to her child, but both mother and child die soon afterwards.

Catherine Barkley is the most obvious example of a beautiful, obedient, sensitive and caring nurse in the novel. Throughout the story, she puts herself into a subordinate position. This can be observed in the following passage when Catherine is talking to Frederic:

“I want what you want. There isn’t any me any more. Just what you want.”

“You sweet.”

“I’m good. Aren’t I good? You don’t want any other girls, do you?”

“No.”

“You see? I’m good. I do what you want.” (Hemingway, 113)

The nurse pretends that she likes the same things as Frederic and that she has the same wishes in life as he has. She completely gives up her own identity and seems to live only to serve his desires. Consequently, she supports him in everything he does:

“Don’t let me spoil your fun, darling. I’ll go back whenever you want.”

“No,” I said. “We’ll stay and have our drink. Then we’ll go down and stand at the water jump for the steeplechase.”

“You’re awfully good to me,” she said. (Hemingway, 141)

Another example of her self-chosen obedience can be found when Catherine is talking with Frederic about their plan to flee from Italy:

“You don’t appreciate what a fine wife you have. But I don’t care. I’ll get you some place where they can’t arrest you and then we’ll have a lovely time.” (Hemingway, 269)

In its praise of a certain type of woman – the beautiful, submissive, dependent and weak nurse – the novel aims at the female reader's identification with Catherine Barkley. The intention might be to educate the female audience and teach women how they are supposed to behave in order to be regarded as "good" women fulfilling their duty for the nation. Therefore, Ernest Hemingway enlarges his portrayal of the female nurse by placing her also into the role of a mother. At first, Catherine motherly cares for Frederic and even calls him a “boy”. At one point in the novel she tells him, “Be a good boy and be careful” (Hemingway, 46). This definitely sounds as if a mother were talking to her son.

It seems as if Catherine had always been this specific type of obedient character. Even when she talks about her ex-boyfriend, the passage expresses a certain amount of compliance and passivity on her part:

“He could have had anything he wanted if I would have known. I would have married him or anything. I know all about it now. But then he wanted to go to war and I didn’t know.

[...]

“I didn’t know about anything then. I thought it would be worse for him. I thought perhaps he couldn’t stand it” (Hemingway, 19).

The reason for her self-sacrificing attitude towards men might be due to her education and socialization. Social conventions are to a high degree responsible for the formation and regulation of particular gender dialectics. At the time the novel was written, the general assumption was that every woman should at one time in her life marry, bear a number of children, be a "good" housewife and a “healing angel”. Marriage was regarded as an essential institution, especially as regards the life of a woman. The contemporary conviction was that if a woman became pregnant, she had to marry, otherwise she would have been ostracised from society. In *A Farewell to Arms*, this common assumption is, for example, represented in the following passage where Helen Ferguson tells Catherine,

“I want you both to be happy.”

[...]

“I don’t want you happy the way you are. Why don’t you get married?”

[...]

“We’ll be married, Fergy,” Catherine said, “if it will please you.”

“Not to please me. You should want to be married.” (Hemingway, 265)

What is implied in these lines is that every woman should have the wish to become married, in particular if she is pregnant. Female persons at that time were not regarded as being able to exist on their own without a man by their side. Also Catherine mentions her wish to become Frederic’s wife several times in the novel. They even start pretending to be husband and wife, although they are not married yet. Both of them dream of a perfect union and imagine being only one person. For some people, this might seem like a very romantic love story, because the author illustrates an almost nostalgic desire for oneness between the nurse and the ambulance driver. Nevertheless, there are a number of hints in the novel that the nurse feels guilty for having an affair with him.

Actually, she feels like a "whore" (Hemingway, 163). This might be one reason why Catherine is so enthusiastic telling everybody that they are a married couple. Perhaps this is her way of giving him a feeling of security and assurance that he is the only man in her life and that the child in her belly is really his child. Still, at the end of the story, one could say that Catherine gets punished for becoming pregnant without being married. Due to the fact that her behavior concerning marriage and pregnancy stands in contrast to the social norms and common conventions, she and her child have to die, no matter how well she had performed the act of the weak, passive, loyal and subservient "wife" and helping nurse throughout her life.

Contemporary women also had to struggle with their restrictions from education. In other words, women were defined through their sexuality, rather than through their intellectuality. This attitude is also supported in Hemingway's novel. Catherine's vanity is described as a rather positive female attribute. The message that is transmitted is that women should take care of their bodies, dress nicely and have a neat appearance altogether. Catherine, for instance, only wants to marry as soon as she has lost weight and is "pretty" again for her future husband. She even tries to hide her pregnant belly by turning away from Frederic while she is dressing. The nurse frequently stresses that her only wish is to be beautiful for the ambulance driver. It is also striking that Frederic pays more attention to Catherine's appearance rather than to her qualities as a nurse, for example. To some extent, Hemingway's novel is a propaganda for traditional and moral female traits.

4.1.3 The separate positions of doctors and nurses

One could say that the First World War was characterized by a so-called technization. Besides the fact that many soldiers were treated like war machines, there was also an improvement of technical equipment and weapons. The new inventions that were used to inflict physical harm or damage caused more severe injuries than were known from the wars before. The result was that a huge amount of soldiers returned from the war as cripples or

invalids. Those wounded soldiers needed especially intensive medical treatment and care in order to be able to take up their former duties and responsibilities at home and at the workplace again. Artificial limbs played an essential role in this process of reintegration. Consequently, the development of artificial limbs flourished in the years following the First World War. In the procedure of rehabilitation and readjustment, the help of nurses was therefore considered of great importance.

Another reason for the rather high social acceptance of professionally working nurses was that a woman's activities as a nurse corresponded to a high degree to the caring tasks female persons had to do at home. As a matter of fact, nurses were mainly at work inside of special buildings such as hospitals rather than outside in the public, on the battlefield. This aspect is also addressed in the novel:

Outside the post a great many of us lay on the ground in the dark. They carried wounded in and brought them out. [...] The doctors were working with their sleeves up to their shoulders and were red as butchers. (Hemingway, 60)

What is striking with regard to the quoted lines above is that there are no nurses mentioned who work on the battlefield. Moreover, in cases of death, there are also only male persons mentioned, like doctors, male nurses or ambulance drivers:

If any one were going to die they put a screen around the bed so you could not see them die, but only the shoes and puttees of doctors and men nurses showed under the bottom of the screen and sometimes at the end there would be whispering. (Hemingway, 79)

Being at work exclusively inside of medical institutions is opposed to what Alcott describes in her short story. As regards the working conditions of nurses in hospitals, Hemingway's depiction differs from the nineteenth century conventions when nurses often had to treat their patients on the battlefield.

Similarly to Alcott's narrative description, Hemingway also portrays the male

doctors to be the most powerful and dominant figures in the medical realm. One nurse in the novel claims that she “can’t do anything without the doctor’s orders” (Hemingway, 89). At another point, Frederic asks for wine that he would like to drink with his meal and the nurse answers, “[o]nly if the doctor prescribes it” (Hemingway, 93).

As far as the inferior position of a female nurse is concerned, Catherine Barkley mentions the precarious situation nurses have to face in their contact with the patients, because the injured soldiers often do not really have confidence in the nurses' skills. She says, “They don’t trust us when there’s nothing going on. When there is really work they trust us” (Hemingway, 25). This means that only in situations of extreme sorrow and pain, or when no male doctor is present, do patients rely on the help of the female nurses. In the novel, Catherine emphasizes the fact that her colleague Helen is a nurse. When Frederic asks her, if she herself is not a nurse, she answers, “I’m something called a V.A.D. We work very hard but no one trusts us” (Hemingway, 25). Catherine explains it in the following way: “A nurse is like a doctor. It takes a long time to be. A V.A.D. is a short cut” (Hemingway, 25). Catherine compares the profession of a nurse to that of a doctor in this quotation, but only as regards the teaching and training time it takes. In other words, the education a woman has to undergo in order to become a trained nurse lasts about as long as it takes a man to become a doctor. What becomes obvious once again is the generally agreed lack of intellectuality that is ascribed to women.

4.1.4 The ambulance driver as opposed to the nurse

What is particularly striking in *A Farewell to Arms* is that both protagonists are active in the medical realm, caring for and helping other people. However, the profession of a Red Cross ambulance driver is portrayed in the novel as an exclusively male area, like the position of a doctor, whereas both men and women can take up the occupation of a nurse. There might be two reasons for the entirely male domain of the ambulance driver: Firstly, women at the time were usually not trained driving cars. Secondly, being active as an ambulance

driver would have meant going to the front and leaving behind the domestic sphere.

The ambulance driver Frederic Henry can be said to be a prototypical man. He hunts, is sexually promiscuous, tough and likes drinking alcohol. As regards his relationship to Catherine, he just plays with her, especially at the beginning. He lies to Catherine and pretends to be in love with her as can be observed from the following passage:

I thought she was probably a little crazy. It was all right if she was. I did not care what I was getting into. This was better than going every evening to the house for officers where the girls climbed all over you and put your cap on backward as a sign of affection between their trips upstairs with brother officers. I knew I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her. This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards. (Hemingway, 31-32)

This "cool" and ignorant attitude is depicted as a typical masculine characteristic and described in a rather positive way in the novel, because it is only due to his tough behavior that both of them are able to flee from Milan to Switzerland. In addition to this, his masculine features are portrayed as a necessity to endure his function as an ambulance driver on the battlefield. Only if he can be strong enough to resist being affected by all the sorrow, pain, blood, cruelty, brutality and death at the front, is he able to do a good job. Frederic's colleague Passini describes the situation of an ambulance driver in the following way:

“There is nothing as bad as war. We in the auto-ambulance cannot even realize at all how bad it is. When people realize how bad it is they cannot do anything to stop it because they go crazy. There are some people who never realize. There are people who are afraid of their officers. It is them that war is made.”

“I know it is bad but we must finish it.”

“It doesn't finish. There is no finish to a war.”

“Yes there is.”

Passini shook his head.

“War is not won by victory. [...] One side must stop fighting. Why don't we stop fighting? [...] Everybody hates this war.”

“There is a class that controls a country that is stupid and does not realize anything and never can. That is why we have this war.”

“Also they make money out of it.” (Hemingway, 53-54)

While the female nurses are concerned with their private lives and looks, the male ambulance drivers are interested in the public sphere, talking about the situation of war and the fate of the nation, it seems. The soldiers and ambulance drivers are, for instance, discussing the question, if the United States will declare war on Austria. The following quote by Frederic Henry is very interesting. He says, "I did not know what we had against Austria but it seemed logical that they should declare war on her if they did on Germany" (Hemingway, 80). In this single sentence the ambulance driver identifies himself as an American by saying "we", but at the same time he distances himself from those people who declare war, namely the politicians, by saying "they". Austria is portrayed as the enemy in the novel and referred to as "she". This means that the country is imagined as a female being. Thus, one could speak of a feminization of the enemy in *A Farewell to Arms*. In other words, the opponent is female. As I have stated before, throughout human history, the depiction of nations as female persons has been a very frequent phenomenon. The novel itself also offers another example of a female personification of nations:

Rome is the mother of nations. I will never forget Romulus suckling the Tiber. [...] Rome is a beautiful city, said the major. The mother and father of nations, I said. Roma is feminine, said Rinaldi. It cannot be the father. (Hemingway, 81)

This quotation immediately reminds the reader of the legend around the assumed founding fathers of Rome, Romulus and Remus, who were abandoned and only managed to survive by being suckled and nurtured by a wolf. This is yet another instance of emphasizing the importance of the nursing and nurturing tasks of female beings for the existence of each nation, as opposed to the leading and fighting duties of the male persons. Therefore, one could conclude that Hemingway's novel is another literary example that enforces the stereotypical role of nurses as it was represented by Florence Nightingale.

However, in the second part of the twentieth century, there repeatedly appeared literary texts that criticized the common image of the lovely, beautiful, self-sacrificing, healing and nursing female servant for the nation. Examples are Ken

Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Stephen King's *Misery*.

4.2 Nursing in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962)

4.2.1 Ken Kesey's portrayal of nurses and the 1960s

The idealisation of women as sensitive, caring, self-sacrificing and obedient mothers and nurturers of the nation reached its climax in the 1950s. Afterwards, there was a social change in the United States. The women's rights movement was strengthened by the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was written at a time of "social turmoil when the drug culture, the Civil Rights movement, and the second wave of feminism occurred simultaneously" (Napierki-Prancl, 229). One can assume that the author was well aware of contemporary revolutionary conditions, because in the novel Kesey criticizes the power network of the 1960s. Napierki-Prancl claims that "[w]hile embracing the drug culture, this book acts as a form of backlash against the Civil Rights and feminist movement" (Napierki-Prancl, 229).

The liberal and revolutionary social attitude of the 1960s was to a certain extent enforced by specific literary texts, but at the same time, the reality also had its impact on contemporary literature. One famous piece of literature from the 1960s is Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. She addresses the fact that with the return of the soldiers after the Second World War, women had to go back to the private sphere after they had been the main workforce during men's absence. Women had to take care of all the work that was considered men's responsibility while men had to serve in war. However, with the homecoming of the soldiers, the traditional gender order was restored again. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* became a classic of the new feminist movement. She wrote about the life of contemporary American women from the white middle class, who dedicated their lives to the household, the children and the husband, but who did not undertake anything to realize and reach their own goals in life.

Friedan tried to raise people's consciousness that women were lacking some kind of professional life. They were just supporting the career ladder of their husband. Especially during the 1950s, the belief that there had to be a certain gender order – which was described as consisting of a so-called norm-family (father – mother – two children) – was prevailing¹⁴⁷. The typical family picture that most people had in mind included a professionally working husband and his wife who was responsible for diverse reproductive activities, including doing the household, educating the children and caring for the husband¹⁴⁸. A woman's main role was to marry, bear children and be a sensitive and diligent housewife. Betty Friedan also pointed to the fact that many women were not even aware of their situation, commonly because they were not very well educated. Besides, a large amount of wives would be economically dependent on their husbands and hence, would not see any possibility for escape. Friedan accused the media – especially television, newspapers and advertisements – for creating clichés and stereotypes about how ideal male and female persons should look like and behave. She was one of the first writers to deconstruct these portrayals as façade and to illustrate that such imagery does by no means correspond to reality. Friedan argued that the perception of and identification with one's own body was not only a matter of the individual, but rather due to dominant assumptions and images of bodies¹⁴⁹. Bodies have always been preferred places for the inscription of race, sexuality and gender as visible signs of difference¹⁵⁰.

The 1960s also became famous in literature for the development of confessional poetry. An example is Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus", which was written in the same year as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The genre of confessional poetry was a new and revolutionary style of literature that mainly dealt with shocking and taboo subjects, such as suicide, mental breakdowns and madness. Some confessional poets had to suffer from treatment in mental institutions as well. Sylvia Plath, for instance, was sent to a mental hospital after

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ellmeier, 197.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Ellmeier, 197-198.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Kossek, 109.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Kossek, 110.

she had attempted suicide a number of times. In the medical institution she had to undergo electroshock therapies. Afterwards, she was said to be healed and she went to and graduated from college. Plath's example shows the ambivalence and arbitrariness concerning mental illnesses. A critical view on the discourse of madness cannot only be found in confessional poetry, but also in Ken Kesey *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

What is especially striking as regards the confessional poetry of the 1960s is that it discussed the role of femininity in a new way. Confessional poets like Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton struggled with the typical gender roles that were ascribed to women. A similar phenomenon can again be found in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. However, in the novel, it is rather the male characters who are struggling with the female persons who do not behave according to the standards and do not fulfil their typical roles as caring, nursing, loving and obedient mother figures. Contrary to the portrayal of female figures who are suffering from male domination in confessional poems, Ken Kesey depicts the image of destructive female nurses in his novel, who are in control of men. Nevertheless, I want to claim that the topics typically found in confessional poetry are very similar to the themes that are addressed in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

In the revolutionary 1960s, portrayals of women in literature on nursing changed from depictions of nurses as healing angels – images that were common in the first half of the twentieth century – to descriptions of masculine, powerful and frightening female individuals. One example in this context is Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

4.2.2 A patient's perspective on nurses

The novel is told from the point of view of one particular patient in a mental institution, namely Chief Bromden. The ward is mainly run by the nurses, with Nurse Ratched (Big Nurse) as the head nurse. She is described as a very dominant woman who dictates the male patients as well as the other nurses

what they have to do. Nurse Ratched is the most powerful person in the asylum until the arrival of the patient Randle Patrick McMurphy. McMurphy questions the authority of Big Nurse and encourages the other patients to rebel against their restrictive situation. Contrary to Ernest Hemingway's depiction of women in nursing positions as sensitive, nice, caring and loving, the nurses in Ken Kesey's novel are portrayed as threatening beings who emasculate men and dominate them¹⁵¹. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is concerned with the power-relations between nurse and patient, on the one hand, and woman and man, on the other. Most of the gender roles that are portrayed in the novel are in contrast to those that are prevalent in patriarchal cultures¹⁵².

The first-person narrative of the Chief allows the reader to get an insight into the patient's view of the events on the ward. As regards the first-person perspective, one could claim that there is a similarity to the way in which confessional poetry of the 1960s was written, because such poems were usually designed like monologues, expressing the view of a certain individual. The same is true of Ken Kesey's novel, where the reader gains insight into Chief Bromden's personal feelings and thoughts.

Analyzing the Chief's view of the situation in the hospital, one discovers that he frequently uses machine imagery in order to describe the nurses and the Combine. The machine metaphors are representative of a rather mechanistic world view. They indicate that feelings and emotions are not of great importance in an asylum. Chief Bromden even describes the nurses in the hospital as "machines with flaws inside that can't be repaired" (Kesey, 19). What the Chief refers to in this quotation might be that it is actually the nurses in the asylum, who are insane and not the patients. The machine metaphors also refer to the fact that one of the nurses' main tasks is operating medical machinery¹⁵³. The equation of the nurses in the mental institution with technical devices corresponds to their portrayal as rather masculine beings in the novel. Chief Bromden describes them with characteristics that are commonly associated

¹⁵¹ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁵² Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁵³ Cf. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos083.htm>.

with male persons. An example is the following description of Nurse Ratched:

She works the hinges in her elbows and finders. I hear a small squeak. She starts moving, and I get back against the wall, and when she rumbles past she's already big as a truck, trailing that wicker bag behind in her exhaust like a semi behind a Jimmy Diesel. Her lips are parted, and her smile's going out before her like a radiator grill. I can smell the hot oil and magneto spark when she goes past, and every step hits the floor she blows up a size bigger, blowing and puffing, roll down anything in her path! (Kesey, 87)

Due to the fact that the nurses not only seem to behave like men, but also have the physical strength that is usually ascribed to male individuals, it is not surprising that the female nurses can run the asylum on their own without the help of either male doctors or male nurses¹⁵⁴.

4.2.3 The aspect of power in the nursing profession

For the main part of the novel, the female nurses are the ones who are in power, whereas the men on the ward – be they patients or doctors – are inferior¹⁵⁵. What is interesting is that the patients are exclusively male persons who are treated by female nurses. Men are mainly depicted as victims, who are dominated by women.

Most of the female characters in the novel fall into the category of being "bad" women and are portrayed in a very negative light. They are often aggressive and manipulative and are only looking for power and control. These threatening women are depicted as being a danger for masculinity, because the female characters in the novel are actually the cause of the patients' madness. The author includes characters like Big Nurse, who question fixed notions of what it means to be masculine or feminine.¹⁵⁶ Nurse Ratched is particularly depicted as a rather masculine woman without any typical characteristics of femininity¹⁵⁷. She has an obsessive concern with order, control and power. She does not only

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Bernard Becker Medical Library, <http://beckerexhibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/stats/men.htm>.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

control the inmates, but even treats them like little boys. It seems as if the Big Nurse refused to take on the prescribed role for a woman. Her behavior is contrary to the norms of how a nurse was supposed to be at that time. It even seems to be inappropriate that she does not wear any "lipstick or woman stuff" (Kesey, 10). What is interesting is that it is a female nurse who has authority on the ward, rather than a doctor.

The novel also depicts female persons who enforce the traditional roles of femininity, which means that they behave in accordance with their conventional gender roles¹⁵⁸. What is striking is that those women in the novel who act according to prescribed gender roles are described as "little"¹⁵⁹. The Japanese nurse, for instance, is portrayed like a mother figure¹⁶⁰. Interestingly enough, the novel emphasizes the aspect of size numerous times¹⁶¹. According to Napierski-Prancl, "[f]emininity has long been associated with being small, frail, and thin, while large size, weight, and strength have corresponded to masculinity" (Napierski-Prancl, 228). Even nowadays, "big" women – such as the "Big Nurse" – are frequently considered as unfeminine and unattractive, whereas women who are "little" are usually regarded as pretty and attractive¹⁶². The Japanese nurse seems to be the only "good" nurse on the ward. Although she understands why the patients hate Miss Ratched, she is not able to stand up against the Big Nurse. The Japanese nurse does not seem to be powerful enough to question Nurse Ratched's dominance. The Japanese nurse describes the nurses in the asylum as

Army nurses, trying to run an Army hospital. They are a little sick themselves. I sometimes think all single nurses should be fired after they reach thirty-five. (Kesey, 234)

This quotation might lead the reader to the assumption that the Japanese nurse regards the fact that the Big Nurse is not married as the main reason why Nurse Ratched is so obsessed with power, control, dominance and masculine

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

¹⁶² Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 229.

behavior. The idea behind the quotation above seems to be that if the Big Nurse were married, she would be more sensitive, emotional, caring, and mother-like. The inherent assumption also is that if a woman reaches an age of thirty-five years, she does not have any possibility of getting married anymore. The Japanese nurse seems to consider this time in a woman's life the turning point, when women turn into mad and desperate beings if they are not already married to men.

Apart from the Japanese nurse, there are also the two prostitutes, Candy and Sandy, who can be said to be "good" women as well. They seem to bring joy and warmth to the asylum. In their roles as prostitutes, they are also described as behaving according to the norms that are ascribed to them. Candy and Sandy are not ashamed of their womanhood. They emphasize the patients' manhood and make them "big", which means that they restore the men's self-confidence. In the relation with the prostitutes, the men on the ward gain a feeling of superiority over women. The male characters have the impression of being in control. Candy and Sandy are in this case the ones who are dominated and who have to behave as they are told. In their roles as prostitutes they are only there to satisfy the wishes of the male patients. What becomes obvious is women's limited choice of roles¹⁶³. The female characters are either portrayed as motherly caring figures, as whores or as mad and threatening beings¹⁶⁴.

The male individuals are also just portrayed in a restricted choice of roles¹⁶⁵. They can only belong to one of three categories. The first category is the strong, tough and self-confident hero. Secondly, there is the weak and dependent victim. The final category is the homosexual¹⁶⁶.

Randle McMurphy definitely falls into the first category as he is the prototypical tough hero in the novel. He dares to question the authority of Nurse Ratched¹⁶⁷. Owing to McMurphy, the Big Nurse has more and more difficulty to subdue

¹⁶³ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 227.

men's masculinity. Although his strength is weakened by shock therapies – and ultimately by lobotomy –, he does not stop trying to restore men's masculinity in the asylum. Cheswick is one of the first to support McMurphy. He sees in McMurphy the hero he himself has always wanted to be. McMurphy is a gambler, loves women and has a tendency to fight with others. He is not a victim of patriarchy but a full-fledged male. McMurphy even speaks of himself as a man who "fights too much and fucks too much" (Kesey, 18). The novel even appears to promote rape, because McMurphy's reason for being in the asylum is because he raped a young girl¹⁶⁸. However, the incident is only mentioned marginally and hence, creates the impression as if it were a rather unimportant fact. McMurphy is nevertheless depicted in a positive way so that the reader feels solidarity and empathy with him rather than with Nurse Ratched. McMurphy is also tattooed and likes to wear motorcycle caps. This portrayal of him supports the typical image of how a "real" man has to be like in patriarchal society, namely strong, violent, dominant over women and sexually promiscuous¹⁶⁹. What is striking is that only this "heroic" and dominant role is described as being acceptable for men¹⁷⁰.

The weakest man on the ward is probably Billy Bibbit¹⁷¹. He is the typical representative of the second category. He lacks self-confidence and has an extreme speech handicap, namely his stuttering. As language is a means of control, Billy's stuttering represents his inability to cope with the world and the people around him. Although he is already in his thirties, he is still dependent on his mother. His overprotective mother treats him like a child. This can be seen at one point in the novel when Billy tries to speak with his mother about looking for a wife and going to college. He wants to explain to her that he is already a man in his thirties, but she just laughs at him and asks him if she looks like the mother of a middle-aged man. Clearly, Billy's mother gave her son away to Nurse Ratched, who acts like a substitute mother in this case. The behavior of Billy's mother could be compared to a cuckoo which does not build a nest on its

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

own but rather transfers the responsibility of caring for the infant to another mother. In other words, the Big Nurse in the novel can be interpreted as the replacement of the patients' mothers. Even though she takes on the part of the substitute mother, Ken Kesey portrays Nurse Ratched as a mother with selfish goals. The same aspect applies to Billy's biological mother, who does not appear to take care of anybody else but herself. Thus, it is not surprising that Billy is afraid of women. On McMurphy's urging, Billy finally loses his virginity with Candy the prostitute. This sexual act restores his self-confidence. One could say that Billy makes progress towards manhood by losing his virginity. Through this rather rebellious act, Billy metaphorically manages to escape the "cuckoo's nest". However, when Nurse Ratched appears after Billy's encounter with the prostitute and mentions Billy's mother, he immediately falls back into stuttering and loses his self-confidence again. Due to this dilemma of not being able to free himself from the influence of the powerful and threatening women in his life, Billy Bibbit commits suicide.

The message that arrives at the reader is that female persons who do not behave according to their traditional gender role make men crazy. Consequently, one could say that Ken Kesey's novel does not simply represent a reversal of conventional assumptions of how men and women have to be. The continuance of traditional gender roles is actually enforced by portraying a picture of how desolate the world would be if the established gender hierarchy were reversed. Napierski-Prancl states that Ken Kesey's novel can be said to enforce sexist ideas about traditional notions of masculinity and femininity¹⁷².

Surprisingly, even Dr. Spivey, the psychiatrist, is portrayed as a rather weak man in the novel. He is an outsider, shy, weak, and easily intimidated. He is not able to stand up against Big Nurse's matriarchy. This means that he does not have the courage to challenge Nurse Ratched's power in the asylum¹⁷³. What Mr. Harding claims at one point in the novel describes the situation quite well:

¹⁷² Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

¹⁷³ Cf. Napierski-Prancl, 228.

In this hospital [...] the doctor doesn't hold the power of hiring and firing. That power goes to the supervisor, and the supervisor is a woman. [...] We are victims of a matriarchy here, my friend, and the doctor is just as helpless against it as we are. (Kesey, 59)

As far as Mr. Harding – with his tendency towards homosexuality – is concerned, he clearly represents the third category of men, even though he tries to suppress his homosexual feelings. The picture that he has of himself – and which is also supported by the people around him – is that he fails to conform to the norms of society. Most of the time, he seems to be nervous, which might be due to his voluptuous wife Vera. She puts her husband's masculinity in doubt and dominates the relationship. Vera Harding flaunts her sexuality in power over her husband. The impression that the world around him has left on Mr. Harding is very well described in his following statement.

All of us in here are rabbits of varying ages and degrees, hippity-hopping through our Walt Disney world. Oh, don't misunderstand me, we're not in here because we are rabbits – we'd be rabbits wherever we were – we're in here because we can't adjust to our rabbithood. We need a good strong wolf like the nurse to teach us our place. (Kesey, 55)

The quotation indicates that Harding tries to accept his inferior status and adjust to the circumstances. This also becomes obvious when he claims that

[t]his world ... belongs to the strong [...]! The ritual of our existence is based on the strong getting stronger by devouring the weak. We must face up to this [...]. We must learn to accept it as a law of the natural world. The rabbits accept their role in the ritual and recognize the wolf as the strong. In defense, the rabbit becomes sly and frightened and elusive and he digs holes and hides when the wolf is about. (Kesey, 60)

Harding continually compares himself and the other patients in the asylum to rabbits. The term "rabbit" immediately reminds one of the expression "bunny", which is an idiom repeatedly used for women nowadays. However, here the term "rabbit" refers to the male patients and indicates their weak and vulnerable position in the asylum. According to Mr. Harding, the men are in comparison to the Big Nurse just "comical little creatures [who] can't even achieve masculinity

in the rabbit world" (Kesey, 63). Mr. Harding's suicide at the end of the novel gives the reader the impression that a man cannot exist in a world that is dominated by women. He cannot endure the situation, although he attempts to get used to it. Eventually, Harding drowns himself in the swimming pool. For him, this act represents the only possibility of freeing himself from the influence of the dominant women around him. Only by killing himself, he is able to triumph over the nurses and his wife and leave the ward. In this respect, Harding's situation could be compared to that of Billy Bibbit.

Chief Bromden also had to suffer from dominant women throughout his life. He is half Indian and half white and is in the asylum because he is deaf and dumb – at least he pretends to be so. The Chief's condition began after a traumatic experience with an important female figure in his life, namely his mother. The Chief's father was inferior in the family. This can be seen from the fact that the family denied the name of the Indian father and took on the name of the white mother instead. This is rather uncommon and goes against patriarchal custom. A man who takes on the name of his wife is still an unusual phenomenon today.

Another important event in Chief Bromden's life was the following incident: When he was a child, government officials tried to buy the tribe's land from the Chief's father, but they failed to do so. However, Mrs. Bromden finally forced her husband to give in and sell the land. The father did as he was told by his wife and afterwards turned to a life of alcoholism. The powerful woman in this case took over a male domain, namely the transfer of land ownership. The male person became the emotional, irrational being, whereas the woman is described as the cold-blooded business-person. An Indian Chief is usually represented as a proud, strong and masculine symbol in the West, but Mrs. Bromden almost reduced her husband to the position of a boy. The incident with the land must have led to the Chief's belief that the world is dominated by a matriarchal structure. In his family, the father can be said to have had minority status, whereas the mother had social supremacy. The Chief's white mother had the power to decide what happened with the land of her husband. In this respect, the Chief's family represents a microcosm of the macrocosm. Similar to the real

situation, an ethnic minority is overpowered by the dominant white culture in the story. The Chief's mother destroyed both, her husband and also her son.

Through the life story of Chief Bromden, Ken Kesey again emphasizes the reversal of conventional gender roles. The men in the novel try to achieve manhood in a world that is dominated by women. The question is: Why does the author reverse gender and power roles here? One could claim that Kesey was afraid of the feminist movement and the social unrest of his time. This argument arises from the fact that at the end of the novel, the author restores the regular gender hierarchy. Due to men's successful escape from the dominance of the Big Nurse, the patients can be said to become more powerful than the nurses and regain control over women. The nurses are overwhelmed. Ken Kesey stresses the importance for the male patients of gaining "real manhood" in a speech by Mr. Harding claiming that "[t]hey are still sick men in lots of ways. But at least there's that: They are sick men now. No more rabbits" (Kesey, 241).

Returning to the circumstances of Chief Bromden in the novel, he describes his mother as having been bigger in size than he and his father together. The Chief – although being physically tall – experiences himself as comparatively small. It becomes obvious again that power and strength are related to physical size in the novel. Nevertheless, the Chief manages to grow bigger and bigger in the course of the story. Due to the help of McMurphy, Bromden's strength rises and eventually his self-consciousness is restored. As a consequence, the Chief starts to speak again. McMurphy can be said to act like a substitute father for Bromden. However, in the same way as the Chief's strength steadily increases, McMurphy's power is continuously on the decrease. In the end, the Chief even smothers McMurphy. Pretending that he is deaf and dumb actually contributed to his victory over the nurses and his flight from the asylum. He uses the insanity which is ascribed to him by society to free himself of the constraints of the nurses and of society. At one point in the novel, it is Mr. Harding, who makes the reader aware of the power of madness.

Never before did I realize that mental illness could have the aspect of power, *power*. Think of it: perhaps the more insane man is, the more powerful he could become. Hitler an example." (Keseey, 202)

In the quotation, Harding compares the situation in the hospital to the Nazi regime. In this case, the nurses represent the oppressors, whereas the patients are in the position of the oppressed who are punished and tortured by women like the victims of the Holocaust. However, in the end, the destructive nurses are overwhelmed by their "innocent" patients.

4.2.4 The asylum as a mirror of the nation

Generally speaking, the novel is not only dominated by the binary position women as oppressors versus men as oppressed, but also by the dichotomy of individual versus society. This latter binary opposition becomes particularly relevant when considering the fact that Ken Keseey deliberately places the story of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in an asylum. An asylum is an institution where people with mental illnesses are put. Society often cannot deal with individuals who do not behave according to the standards. Such people are therefore repeatedly displaced and separated from the rest of society. However, the question is: How are mental diseases defined and who has the power to say who is insane?

The author and historian Katrin Schmersahl claims that the diagnosis of insanity is usually not based on the actual reception of physiological changes, but rather on the (moral) judgment of a person's "abnormal" behavior¹⁷⁴. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the amount of persons who are diagnosed as mad or insane and consequently taken to an asylum has dramatically increased¹⁷⁵. "Mad" people were often locked away from society in special medical institutions¹⁷⁶. Correspondingly, the process of professionalization of particular doctors who were responsible for the psychic healing of people

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Schmersahl, 48.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Schmersahl, 51.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Schmersahl, 51.

began¹⁷⁷. From that time onwards, one could say that these doctors were considered as experts in their field who carried the power and responsibility of defining who and what is abnormal¹⁷⁸.

As regards the situation of women at that time, they were to a great extent characterized by an assumed sensibility¹⁷⁹. However, this female sensibility was also often interpreted as a potential danger for women, because the general valid conviction was that the female nerves – which were believed to carry certain feminine personality traits such as sensibility – would cause (typical female) illnesses, such as hysteria¹⁸⁰. According to Michel Foucault, "[t]he entire female body [...] encloses a perpetual possibility of hysteria" (Foucault, quoted in Fellner, 29). This means that women were by nature seen as more endangered to become mad or insane than men, and that hysteria was regarded as a common female disease.

Ken Kesey seems to question conventional assumptions and beliefs of what madness is in his novel. This becomes obvious in the following statement by Chief Bromden:

The ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches [...]. When a completed product goes back into society, all fixed up good as new, *better* than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart. (Kesey, 40)

In other words, Ken Kesey puts the blame on society. "[S]ociety is what decides who's sane and who isn't, so you got to measure up" (Kesey, 48). In the quotation above uses Big Nurse as a symbol for society as a whole. Kesey criticizes that society, on the one hand, demands total conformity to certain rules and norms, but, on the other, is itself responsible for the creation of "abnormal" behavior.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Schmersahl, 51.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Schmersahl, 51.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Fellner, 29.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Fellner, 29.

The Combine in the novel can be interpreted as symbolically representing society. The patients on the ward – who are fighting against the Combine – could be compared to soldiers who are defending the nation. Similar to the equation of the Combine with society, one may think of the ward as standing for the whole nation state, Nurse Ratched being the head of it. The institution of nursing in the novel seems to represent some form of “cuckoo’s nest” for the people of a certain nation. The women are the ones who have the national responsibility to care for and educate the future members of the American society. Consequently, the women in nursing and caring positions are also the ones who are to blame if persons do not turn out as loyal citizens. In this respect, the nursing of the patients could be interpreted as a political act.

Chief Bromden's success in freeing himself from the prison-like circumstances in the hospital symbolizes an individual's victory over a totalitarian society. In this respect, the activities on the ward are a mirror of reality, where the asylum stands for the whole nation state, the nurses represent those who are in power and the patients correspond to powerless citizens.

At one point in the novel, Big Nurse claims that "*everyone...must follow the rules*" (Kesey, 28). My argument is that the same is true for the functioning of every nation state – it needs certain regulations and rules that people have to follow in order to guarantee a regular and well-ordered collaboration of the people within a nation. Generally speaking, men and women have to behave in certain ways in order to complement each other and guarantee the functioning of the nation state. It is commonly acknowledged that female figures have to submit themselves and take care of domestic and reproductive activities, like nursing and caring, whereas male persons are usually responsible for public matters and exert power and control over women. The novel endorses the idea that every deviance from the required gender roles represents a potential danger for society as a whole¹⁸¹.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Schmersahl, 72.

4.2.5 The symbolism of Nurse Ratched's breast

Even though the female nurses are the ones who are in power throughout most of the story and the male patients are portrayed as weak and inferior, these depictions change towards the end of the novel. One of the key situations in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* seems to be the passage when McMurphy tears down a piece of Nurse Ratched's clothes in a fight and her bare breast is revealed. The situation stresses her femininity. From this point onwards, the Big Nurse does not appear threatening, destructive, powerful and dominant anymore, but rather weak, helpless and insecure. As a consequence, the men on the ward are able to regain their power and succeed in defending the nurses. Nurse Ratched is overwhelmed by her patients in the end. One might interpret this defeat as the women's punishment for not behaving according to the norms that the traditional male dominated society demands from them.

The message that arrives at the reader is that the Big Nurse is only represented as powerful as long as she negates her sexuality and does not show any signs of femininity. One could conclude that Nurse Ratched's bare breast symbolically stands for her femininity and being feminine seems to make women powerless. As Yalom claims, women's breasts are "the crown jewels of femininity" (Yalom, 3). In Western culture, female breasts are regarded as sexual symbols. They usually hold "good" implications. The breast is, for example, positively connoted when feeding children, or even when – allegorically speaking – nourishing whole nations. Yalom claims that "a woman's obligation to breast-feed merged with the collective responsibility of the Nation to "nurse" its citizens" (Yalom, 5-6). In the same way as a child is said to become strong, healthy and resistant to illnesses when breast-fed by the mother, the nursing of Nurse Ratched in combination with the symbol of her bare breast might symbolize the strength, as well as the economic and political power of the United Nations of America and its protection against foreign influence¹⁸². The patients are fighting as a group against the aggression of the nurses. This immediately reminds one of the rhetoric of "us versus them".

¹⁸² Cf. Yalom, 107.

In general, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* deconstructs the common picture of the obedient and submissive female nurse and rather portrays women as threatening and destructive individuals who are a potential danger for the whole nation if they do not behave according to their assumed inferior gender role. As a consequence, the novel indirectly promotes the importance of loyal and subservient women for the existence and functioning of the mechanics within a certain nation. A similar idea is implemented in Stephen King's novel *Misery*.

4.3 Nursing in Stephen King's *Misery* (1987)

It seems as if in the same way as the women's rights movement developed and grew stronger from the 1960s onwards, the picturing of nurses as dominant, powerful, masculine and even frightening also continued. Especially the 1970s and 1980s saw a more radical feminism. Those women who were active in the feminist movement were not seldomly considered as masculine, threatening and even mad individuals by a great number of people. Stephen King's novel *Misery* expresses a certain fear as regards powerful and dominant women who question traditional notions of womanhood. According to Kathleen Margaret Lant and Theresa Thompson, the author describes "the terrifying 'other' face of the domestic sphere, where the angel in the house both dominates and is dominated" (Lant and Thompson, 5). One can even discover a certain degree of antagonism towards women in King's novels¹⁸³. In his portrayal of the (anti-) nurse Annie Wilkes, the author goes to the extreme by depicting this woman as a threatening, destructive and horrible murderer.

After a car accident, Paul Sheldon, a famous writer, is saved by his "number-one fan", Annie Wilkes, who used to be a nurse. She takes him with her to her house under the pretext of taking care of him. Annie is a big fan of Paul's *Misery* series, but she does not like the ending of his last *Misery* book. Annie locks Paul into a room and forces him to write a further *Misery* novel that meets her expectations. She even supplies him with paper and an old typewriter that has

¹⁸³ Cf. Lant, 166.

already lost some letters. Attempts of resistance and escape from his part are brutally punished by Annie. She constantly threatens Paul and even cuts off his foot after he had once managed to get out of his room. Paul finds Annie's scrapbook and has to discover that during her life as a nurse, Annie has murdered a great number of people. She even kills two policemen who come to her house in their search for Paul. From that time onwards, Paul realizes that he has to fight in order to stay alive, because he is sure that Annie will murder him as well after he has finished the *Misery* book. He starts using the typewriter for physical workout in order to become strong enough to fight Annie. Eventually, the nurse is overwhelmed and killed by her patient, whereas Paul is rescued.

4.3.1 The (anti-)nurse

At first, Annie seems very caring and lovely as regards her treatment of Paul. However, she soon turns out to be his destruction. She locks him into her house and does everything that is necessary to keep him in his bed and hinder him from recovering from his injuries. Therefore, her position as a nurse is rather ambiguous¹⁸⁴. Due to his weak physical condition, the nurse has the power to tell the patient what he has to do. Paul has no other opportunity than follow her demands, not at least because she is the only one who can provide the painkilling pills for him. After some time, Paul even seems to become addicted to these drugs. Kathleen Margaret Lant claims that "[Annie Wilkes] uses this invasion of his body to claim him as her own" (Lant, 170).

In this respect, Stephen King's novel makes its audience aware of the actual power that nurses have over their patients. The nurse in the novel is well aware of her dominant position and does not hesitate to take advantage of her superior status. It is her house in which her rules apply. She controls Paul and supports the decline of his body. Shortly after the accident, Annie even "rapes" breath into her patient, as can be observed from the following passage.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Lant, 170.

'Breathe, goddam you!' the unseen voice shrieked, and he thought / will, anything, please just don't do that anymore, don't infect me anymore, and he tried, but before he could get started her lips were clamped over his again, lips as dry and dead as strips of salted leather, and she raped him full of her air again. (King, 5)

Generally speaking, rape can be seen as the ultimate act of power. Even though the act of raping is usually connected to male power, it is the woman in this case who is raping a man. Therefore, one could speak of a reverse rape.

Throughout the book, Annie Wilkes is described as asexual to some extent. She dismisses traditional characteristics of femininity. Kathleen Lant characterizes Annie in the following way: "Annie is not acceptable feminine: She is, in fact, repulsively unattractive. She is fat, she is slovenly, she smells, and she is insane" (Lant, 173). One could claim that there is a similarity between the Big Nurse in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Annie Wilkes in *Misery*. Both novels depict female nurses with typical masculine characteristics. Even though the nurses take on the roles of women, they are portrayed like men. The women in both novels are not really nursing their patients, but rather doing harm to them.

On the contrary, Paul Sheldon is very much concerned with sexuality. This is opposed to common conventions, because usually it is the female person who is portrayed in sexual terms. In addition to this, there also repeatedly appear symbolic castration scenes, for example, when Annie cuts off Paul's thumb or foot. Annie does this in order to prevent her victim from escaping her self-made prison. She also often directly threatens to castrate Paul. These castration passages seem to symbolize Paul Sheldon's loss of power. According to Kathleen Margaret Lant, "[Annie] threatens to render Paul Sheldon – physically, emotionally, and artistically – impotent" (Lant, 163).

Annie refuses domination and cannot easily be overwhelmed. For a female nurse like Annie Wilkes, submission is no option. She has already murdered a great number of people in her life, but has apparently never been arrested for her murders. It seems as if she had a skill in convincing people of her

innocence¹⁸⁵. It even looks like it had not been a very difficult task for her to play a role and persuade people, because there are common beliefs in Western patriarchal culture (including the assumed caring, loving, healing and self-sacrificing nature of women) which hinder people to see the truth. When the nurse kills the policeman with a lawnmower in her garden, cutting off his head, this symbolizes that she is actually erasing the common order. One could speak of a feminization of brutality in this case.

Stephen King describes the nurse in his novel as manic depressive and turns her into a monstrous creature, which is definitely opposed to common conventions of how nurses are portrayed. She is a murderer, a destructive and dangerous woman who is out of control. The nurse not only repeatedly injures her patient, but there are also instances in the book when she hurts herself. For example, there are hints that she scratches herself, as there seem to be marks on her skin. This self-scratching is linked to her manic depressive mood.

However, the way how Stephen King deals with sanity and insanity to some extent contrasts the way Ken Kesey tackles the issue. Ken Kesey portrays the supposedly mad people on the ward (the patients) in a quite positive way, without any real threatening characteristics, whereas Stephen King attaches to his mentally ill character in the novel (the nurse) various horrid traits.

4.3.2 The self-empowering process of a patient

Although Annie Wilkes constantly threatens Paul and there is a steady decrease of his physical masculinity, he is finally able to empower himself and regain part of his masculinity. The restoration of his power is due to the defective typewriter which Annie provides for her patient. The machine becomes Paul's main tool for writing. At first, he

did not want to look at the typewriter and for awhile resisted, but at last his eyes rolled helplessly toward it. It sat on the bureau, grinning. Looking at it was a little like looking at an instrument of torture –

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Lant, 176.

boot, rack, strappado – which is standing inactive, but only for the moment. (King, 72)

Paul Sheldon soon tries to get used to the typewriter and realizes that he can only come to terms with his situation and manage to survive, when he uses the machine. He needs to face his precarious situation and his inner self by looking at the typewriter. After some time, the features of the typewriter gradually decline. More and more letters get lost and the instrument seems to "grin" at Paul. The typewriter is even described like a person with its own voice and grin, and hence can be compared to the destructive nature of the nurse. However, Paul soon realizes that he can use the decay of the typewriter in order to empower himself. He starts making physical exercises with the typewriter in order to gain strength.

When more and more letters of the typewriter get lost, Paul starts filling in the missing letters in his written text shorthand. By using the pen (which can be interpreted as a symbol of the phallus), Paul Sheldon regains his power. The pen enables the patient to violate the nurse and put pressure on her, and is associated with Paul's masculinity in this context.

In fact, it is the patient's suffering that has rebuilt his power. He knows that as soon as he has finished his novel *Misery*, the nurse will kill him. Thus he tries to identify with Annie Wilkes and understand how she feels, how she might react and how she thinks. This is his way of controlling the opponent and the reason why he is actually able to survive.

4.3.3 Writing as a means to survive

Paul Sheldon mainly defines himself as a writer. For him, the creativity in his writing process is linked to sexuality.

But hadn't there also been some sort of fuck, even if of the driest variety? Because once he started again ... well, she wouldn't interrupt him while he was working, but she would take each day's output as soon as he was done, ostensibly to fill in the missing

letters, but actually – he knew this by now, just as sexually acute men know which dates will put out at the end of the evening and which ones will not – to get her fix. To get her *gotta*. (King, 267)

Even the connection between reader and writer is often described in sexual terms in the novel. Stephen King himself once stated the following:

[R]eading a good long story is in many ways like having a long and satisfying affair [...] A short story is a different thing altogether – a short story is like a quick kiss in the dark from a stranger. That is not, of course, the same thing as an affair or a marriage, but kisses can be sweet, and their very brevity forms their own attraction. (King, quoted in Lant, 167)

In Western patriarchal culture, creativity is usually thought of as "a masculine prerogative" (Lant, 163). However, the nurse in the novel is also some sort of creator, because she has produced a scrapbook where all her murders are chronicled¹⁸⁶. Furthermore she puts herself into the role of the creator when telling Paul what he should write. For Paul, writing is, on the one hand, a relief and a way of escaping reality (a similar phenomenon as in "The Yellow Wallpaper"), but, on the other hand, it is also a torture, because Annie tells him what she would like to read and how he should continue writing. In the words of Kathleen Margaret Lant,

Annie Wilkes [...] manages to make romance writer Paul Sheldon her captive and torture and terrorize him into writing the novel she wants him to write. (Lant, 162).

Annie Wilkes needs Paul's *Misery* books like drugs. In her addicted state, she even forces Paul to destroy the only copy of his most recent and most appreciated novel *Fast Cars*. When reading the *Misery* series, the boundaries between fiction and reality seem to blur in Annie's mind.

4.3.4 Reversing and re-reversing common roles

What becomes obvious is that there is a reversal and a re-reversal of gender

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Lant, 176.

roles throughout the novel. Domination and submissiveness continuously take turns. In this respect, the novel seems to be rather unpredictable. This can particularly be observed as regards the patient's writing process. The common constellation is that the reader is female and passive and the writer is male and active. However, Stephen King plays with such common assumptions. Annie refuses being passive as a reader. Paul Sheldon can only regain his masculinity when he can overwhelm the nurse and restore her passivity. This situation again reminds of the character constellation in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Paul wants to overpower Annie in order to restore the common gender order that is required for the functioning of the system in the same way as the patients on the ward of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* try to overwhelm the nurses and overthrow their power. Paul screams,

I'm gonna rape you, all right Annie. I'm gonna rape you because all I can do is the worst I can do. So suck my book. Suck my book. Suck on it until you fucking CHOKE. (King, 347)

The patient uses his pen and the book in order to metaphorically rape and violate the nurse with his new power in the same way as she has raped him at the beginning of the story¹⁸⁷. As regards Paul Sheldon, he finally succeeds in restoring the traditional gender order by killing the nurse, who has behaved like a god-like figure. In the end, he is the powerful one again and she has to be killed, because she cannot be pushed into the usual inferior, passive and weak female position.

King's novel suggests that women who refuse to behave according to their traditionally assumed gender roles and who take on masculine behavior will at some time end up with some kind of psychological problem and become dangerous, murderous and frantic people. One might even go so far as to claim that Stephen King punishes Annie Wilkes at the end of the novel for "overstepping the bounds of appropriate female behavior" (Lant, 166). The depiction of the threatening and powerful nurse throughout the story and the final restoration of masculine superiority are in accordance with Ken Kesey's

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Lant, 177.

portrayal of gender roles in his novel. Both texts indirectly help to emphasize the necessity of the traditional gender hierarchy in that they show what horrible effects it will have on the (male dominated) nation state if women – and nurses in particular – take over leading roles.

However, the twentieth century novels that were discussed so far exclusively deal with white, middle-class nurses in Western culture and how they are portrayed by white male authors. Diana Abu-Jaber, however, tries to concentrate on the situation of immigrant nurses in the United States instead. Her novel *Arabian Jazz*, enables the reader to view the role and position of the nursing profession from a multiculturalist perspective.

4.4 Nursing in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993)

Diana Abu-Jaber draws the reader's attention to the fact that in patriarchal Western culture, "real" nurses have commonly been imagined as being female and white. The question is: Which characteristics are most relevant in constructing a nursing identity: gender, education, class, language or rather certain specific personality traits like sensitivity? The answer is more often than not a problematical one, because being a nurse requires a combination of numerous diverse aspects. The feminist movement of the twentieth century has questioned exactly these inflexible categories and has emphasized the fact that the boundaries between the single classifications are not clear-cut, but rather blurring. Therefore, constructing a nursing identity means incorporating many different features at one time. Being a "good" nurse not only depends on one of the categories mentioned above, but is also influenced by a person's social background and context, that is, the socializing process a person had to undergo throughout his or her life.

4.4.1 Nursing and identity

Arabian Jazz centers around the family of Matussem Ramoud. Matussem and the family of his sister Fatima are Arab immigrants who moved from Jordan to New York years ago. Matussem has two daughters, Jemorah (Jem) and

Melvina (Melvie) who are both working in a hospital in the United States with Melvie being the head nurse. Matussem's wife Nora – who had an Irish-American background – died when the children were still very young. Jem and Melvie are in a precarious situation, as their identities contain both Arab and American elements. There is a clash of identities. The sisters were brought up in America, but their family background – since the death of their mother – is mainly Arab. Jemorah and Melvina repeatedly have troubles arranging their cultural, nursing and gender identities. Especially Jemorah has difficulties solving her identity problem. She states the following:

I don't have much idea of what it is to be Arab, but that's what the family is always saying we are. I want to know what part of me is Arab. (Abu-Jaber, 307-308)

One part of her identity wants to become fully American, whereas another part of her feels forced to behave according to the rules of her Arab family members.

The Arab identity is most clearly represented by aunt Fatima. She is attached to the values of the homeland and keeps telling the girls that they are Arabs rather than Americans. However, Melvie and Jemorah still identify with their dead mother and her ethnicity. Especially Melvie wants to live according to American values and culture, which means that she likes to work in a hospital, earn a living and choose her husband for herself, rather than marry an Arab cousin, stay at home and be dependent on the husband, as the Arab culture prescribes. It becomes obvious that the experience of Arab American women is heavily influenced by their gender¹⁸⁸. However, the American public perceives the girls first and foremost as being Arabs, rather than as being nurses (although only Melvie can be called a nurse in the strict sense). The following passage describes the situation of the girls in the United States:

“It's odd. People are always saying how much we look like our father,” Melvie said. “Not like our mother.”
 “People see color first,” Jem said. (Abu-Jaber, 193-194)

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Chérif, 207.

As far as Jemorah is concerned, she is twenty-nine years old and rather unhappy in her life. She lacks orientation and does not know how she can improve her situation. She has troubles negotiating selfhood. Jem refuses to lead a life according to the Arab tradition. Her main problem is her lack of orientation. Jemorah does not really know who she is and how she is supposed to behave. In the hospital, her job is answering the phone, transferring telephone calls to other people and filing the patients' documents. She is not a nurse like her sister and does not have any authority. This means that she is not solving any problems and not moving, but rather circling around in one place. She realizes that her way is not leading her anywhere, because she does not really do anything important. This difficult situation also reflects what her life is all about. She does not know where to move and how to act and consequently does not arrive anywhere. Jemorah wants to study psychology. This is a very important step for her, because psychology is concerned with identity and coming to terms with certain reactions in life. Working as a psychiatrist is opposed to what Melvie does in her profession as a nurse, because Melvina tries to heal physical illnesses rather than psychological ones. If Jem really chooses to study psychology, the two sisters would become complementary and represent the ultimate healing of people, namely physical AND psychological treatment.

However, Jem cannot free herself from the influence of her family. Aunt Fatima repeatedly offers her nieces potential future husbands. However, Jemorah for a long time refuses all of the men's proposals for marriage:

In college, Jem made halfhearted attempts at dating. Young men were drawn to her olive colors, inkwell eyes; they stood close to look at her hair, anoint themselves in her presence. But always she would feel stiffening under their gaze, trapped like an animal in headlights, her pulse slowing, her aunts' voices running through her like a river. After college, she decided she no longer had the energy for men. (Abu-Jaber, 37)

Nevertheless, Jem starts a secret love affair with the American Ricky Ellis. She finds relief in her relationship with Ricky. There are certain parallels between both of them and they find solace in one another. He is, for instance, also

familiar with loss, pain and aimlessness. Moreover, both have been marginalized by society.

One might claim that the women in Diana Abu-Jaber's novel are not able to "escape gender oppression" (Chérif, 209). The only thing that Jemorah and Melvina can do in their situation is constantly fight against their restrictive conditions in order to overcome their suffering¹⁸⁹. The reader gets the impression as if there were an ongoing "negotiation of selfhood" (Chérif, 209) in the sisters' life. Especially Jemorah seems to be undecided about what to do with her life. Despite her affair with Ricky Ellis, she decides to marry her cousin Nassir and move to Jordan. At the end of the novel, however, Jemorah stays in the United States and intends to go to university in order to figure out the mystery of racist hate.

4.4.2 Being "all nurse"

Melvina is twenty-two years old and although she is the younger one of the sisters, she is not so much in doubt about her identity as Jemorah. On the contrary, Melvie is strong in her convictions. She is convinced of being a nurse. In the hospital, she is regarded as a "dedicated life-saving nurse" (Chérif, 217). Melvina sees herself as being "all nurse" (Abu-Jaber, 13). Since the death of her mother, she feels an internal pressure and duty to nurse. The reason for this is because the Ramoud sisters had to witness their mother's death, which was definitely a traumatic experience for the girls at this age. Triggered by the fact that Melvie felt so helpless when she had to watch her mother die and could not do anything against it, she decided to become a nurse after this incident. In this respect, Melvina can be called a "marked nurse", because she had a very traumatic personal experience in her life that led her to the nursing profession. Despite of her trauma, Melvie does not live in the past, but rather tries to experiences the present. To some extent, Melvie also feels guilty for the death of her mother. As a consequence, she has developed an urge to fight death actively and even became obsessed with control and order from that time

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Chérif, 209.

onwards. Melvina herself points out that

from that night on she knew she was called to pursue the greatest of professions, the most physically, emotionally, and intellectually demanding of any field, the most misunderstood and martyred, the closest to divinity: nurse. (Abu-Jaber, 178-179)

Melvina is very determined and focused, because according to her, nurses have to be determined, controlled, rational, strong, tough, powerful and calm. In general, one can perceive a rather skeptical attitude of the patients towards the female nurses in the hospital, as becomes obvious in the following quotation:

“First tell me,” the woman said, dragging Hank back down the hall toward Melvie. “Are you a human being or a robot? ‘Cause we don’t talk to robots. My friend here’s sick and I’m looking for somebody to heal him, not finish him off like the robots downstairs were trying to do.” (Abu-Jaber, 160)

The nurses are in this case compared to machines – emotionless and cold beings – by the patients (similar to how the narrator and patient Chief Bromdon in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* describes the nurses on the ward). One might claim that the patients’ perception on nurses is a rather skeptical one.

As regards Melvina, she tells other people what they should do and how they are supposed to behave. This is not only true as far as the treatment of her patients is concerned, but also as regards the relationship with her family members. Melvina often behaves like a mother figure for her sister, her boyfriend Larry Fasco, but also her father. She feels responsible for their well-being, which can be observed from the following passage:

The day before she’d given her father diet cards with long lists of foods he was not, under any circumstances, to touch. She’d also given him a paramedic’s first-aid kit, full of things like surgical thread and booster shots for malaria, hepatitis, and typhus – especially typhus. (Abu-Jaber, 265)

The fact that Melvie likes to care for her relatives like a mother is due to the early death of her mother. Her sister claims that "Melvina had been making

herself into that woman for as long as Jem could remember" (Abu-Jaber, 12). In other words, Melvie deliberately created a certain type of character for herself. However, it is only a façade or a mask she wears in order to remain in control. Melvina works very hard to keep up the image she has created for herself. The question is: What is really hidden under the surface?

There are only a few moments when she gives up control, and these moments are those that she is with Larry. Only in her relationship with him can she find an outlet. When they are together, she has the feeling that she can be both the "hidden" Melvie and Melvina, the nurse. However, even when she is with Larry, she cannot completely ignore the nursing part of her personality. When Melvie supplies Larry with methadone, for instance, she acts like a "healer and killer" (Chérif, 217) at the same time. However, the fact that she is the one who gives him the drugs again ensures her that she is actually in control of the situation.

The other family members seem to ignore Melvina's secret love affair with Larry Fasco. Especially aunt Fatima is not very amused about the boyfriend her niece has chosen. It is interesting how the secret relationship with Larry characterizes Melvina's attitude in life. She does not want to correspond to the wishes of her aunt, but rather attempts to lead her own life. Melvie does not want to be dependent on a man, as the Arab culture requires. She rejects Fatima's rules regarding marriage and motherhood. In so far, the novel questions general assumptions of women being at home, doing housework and caring for the family. What is also heavily criticized is that women are often only defined by their outer appearance, whereas men are characterized by their occupations. This becomes particularly obvious when aunt Fatima introduces the girls to potential husbands:

"These here nice Mr. Farah Farah come to meet you [*sic*]. Fifty-eight years of age and no wife ever. Pure and clean like a baby."

[...]

"And wonderful, beautiful job, with pension!" Fatima said [...].

Mr. Farah Farah drew himself up at the mention of his job and squinted at Jem. "You know how to cook, clean shirts, refinish floors? [*sic*]" (Abu-Jaber, 61)

For the Arab family, Melvie's profession as a nurse is not really acknowledged. What is more important for the aunt is that the girls look pretty so that they will soon get a husband. She is almost obsessed with the idea of finding appropriate husbands for Jem and Melvie¹⁹⁰. The following passage from the novel reveals Fatima's attitude towards women quite well, when she tells Jemorah and Melvina that women have to be married and stay at home in the Arab tradition instead of going to work, because without a man by their side, the girls would not be able to survive. What is implied is the common, essentialist assumption that men should be granted all "social and financial privileges [...] in such areas as inheritance, marriage, and parenthood" (Chérif, 214). As a consequence, men usually have the power to dominate and control women, whereas female individuals are regarded as subordinate to male persons¹⁹¹. This traditional belief is also expressed in the following quotation by aunt Fatima:

"Okay, so let's say it, you're built like starving rats and not so pretty now, but you girls wait, when you're forty, forty-five, everyone will say how *handsome* you are, I guarantee it. But what good will handsome do if you don't already snagged some man to see it? There are things you don't know yet that I know perfect, and first and last is that you must have husband to survive on the planet of earth.[sic]" (Abu-Jaber, 116-117)

Aunt Fatima is also very much concerned with the typical feminine dress code. According to her, Melvie had "never looked like a girl" (Abu-Jaber, 12), because Melvina does not pay too much attention to her outer appearance, but rather focuses on her task as a nurse. Also Jemorah refuses to correspond to her aunt's idea of the pretty and obedient wife. This can be seen in the following lines:

[Fatima] turned to Jem. "Show me your fingernails. No, no! This are terrible [sic]! This will never do. What man will come near such fingernails? All right, let's get these over with" (Abu Jaber, 53)

Aunt Fatima keeps telling Jemorah and Melvina how they are supposed to

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Chérif, 212.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Chérif, 214.

behave as “good” women. She almost behaves like the girls’ substitute mother, which might be caused by the fact that Fatima herself does not have children on her own. The passage below reveals that she uses every opportunity to teach the girls her view of life and that Fatima feels responsible for the girls’ “education”.

You have to *make* children see, Fatima thought, even if it meant scooping out their eyes and pointing them with your own hands. Jemorah [...] simply would not use hair spray or padded bras, no matter how Fatima wept and railed. (Abu-Jaber, 117)

Fatima is against the fact that the girls want to live according to American values and tries to convince them that they should better hold on to their Arab roots and rules. In Arab culture, women are powerful only in the private sphere. It is only at home that a woman can have at least some control, while she is commonly restricted from any form of authority, power or control in the public sphere¹⁹². As Fatima claims,

“America is no place for young girls like you.” [...] The mirage would someday melt and they would be back in the family home where they belonged. [...] A man was different; he could let himself fly into the world like an arrow and, the aunts told them, no matter where he flew, he would still be an arrow. (Abu-Jaber, 99)

If the sisters gave up their jobs in the hospital and sacrificed their lives for the sake of certain ideals, they would probably end up like Dolores Otts, who lives in the neighborhood of the Ramouds. She is a white woman of the same age as Jemorah, but already has a great number of children. There are many parallels between her and Jem. Both of them see no purpose and aim in their lives. Dolores feels overwhelmed by the mass of duties and responsibilities she has at home. She is sent to hospital and treated by Melvie, who seems to feel much more oriented in her life. However, when Dolores leaves the hospital against Melvina's advice, Melvie is not in control of the situation anymore. Soon afterwards, Dolores commits suicide. The following quote describes her situation very accurately:

¹⁹² Cf. Chérif, 216.

[Dolores] was a mummy. She was Lazarus, brought back to life just to prove someone else's point, just long enough to see her death coming. (Abu-Jaber, 270)

Dolores' suicide can be interpreted as her way of liberation from a life full of restrictions and constraints. Up to a certain point, Dolores was also "all nurse" throughout her life, because she only lived to nurture and care for her children, and fulfill the wishes of her husband. Jemorah's supervisor in the hospital, Portia Porschman, claims that

it's women the most underpaid of all staff, and they work the longest hours. Their right to employment isn't in question, but their working conditions are! (Abu-Jaber, 314)

Even aunt Fatima states that

"[i]t's terrible to be a woman in this world. This is first thing to know when the doctor looks at baby's thing and says 'it's a girl.' (Abu-Jaber, 116)

The difficult and strenuous situation of female individuals who have to comply with many roles at one time is also apparent to the male persons in society, as the following quotation from the novel shows:

As a boy growing up in a house full of sisters and their friends, aunts, and female cousins, Matussem had never known there were any other sorts of women in the world. He knew, watching and overhearing his sisters at night, that it was a bitter thing to be a woman. (Abu-Jaber, 187)

However, men apparently either do not feel responsible for the situation of women, or they deliberately refuse doing anything against it, as they enjoy being nurtured and nursed by women. Even though there are female individuals in the novel who do indeed find satisfaction and pleasure in being mothers and housewives, this does not apply to all women, although motherhood and housework is often portrayed as some form of fun or leisure activity in society with the aim to give women the feeling that this is no hard work and therefore

does not have to be paid. As Melvie states,

I don't care about fun. Jem doesn't care about fun! Hilma Otts across the street with six more kids, do you think she cares about fun? No! (Abu-Jaber, 258)

The same is true for Dolores Otts, who also cannot experience much fun in her life. She is bound to her circumstances and dependent on her husband, because she lacks education. In this respect, the novel represents a broad picture of American society and a realistic depiction of life. It becomes obvious that there are massive differences between different groups of people in the United States. In the novel, aunt Fatima cannot imagine that there could be a world, in which men take care for and nurse women. This becomes obvious in the following passage:

Fatima stared hard at the beautiful heads and bodies in her glossy magazine. Was there really a place in the world like this? Young, lovely women, laughing, sitting on rocks, tawny as cats, while young, lovely men fanned them with palm leaves. Ha! (Abu-Jaber, 117f.)

In Fatima's view, a woman has to stay at home, otherwise she would not be able to take efficient care of the household and her family. This is also the message Fatima conveys to Jemorah and Melvina:

[Jem] thought about the passage of her life, about the fact that she would be thirty in a month, after years of summers, visiting aunts and uncles, listening to their warnings: A good girl does not leave her home. Does not go out in public, speak to a man, show her ankles, talk back to her parents, go to school, live alone. (Abu-Jaber, 289f.)

As far as Melvina is concerned, she in fact shares two of Fatima's claim: firstly that the family is an important obligation, and secondly that a woman cannot trust men. Despite of this, Melvie falls in love with Larry and cannot do anything against it. She feels attracted to him because he seems to be her soul-partner. Both of them have to experience the feeling of being outsiders from society. Yet Melvie does not want to appear weak by admitting her relationship to her family. She tries to pretend being strong in her convictions and live her dream, namely

being a nurse. Rather than marry, bear some children and spend the rest of her life at home, caring for her husband and the children, she chooses to be “all nurse”.

4.4.3 Immigrants and the hospital

The hospital in *Arabian Jazz* can be interpreted as the representation of the American public. Jemora and Melvie Ramoud are caught between two different cultures: In the private sphere, at home, the patriarchal Arab order is dominant, while in the public sphere, in the hospital, the American part of their identities is more prominent. The most powerful person in the hospital seems to be Portia Porschman. Most of the people are afraid of her. Portia has a rather racist and anti-Semitic attitude. The image she has of Arabs is that they are primitive. Furthermore, she claims that most Arabs have diseases. By way of the character Portia Porschman, Diana Abu-Jaber points to the racist view that is held by numerous people in the United States.

To some extent, Portia can be compared to Nurse Ratched in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or Annie Wilkes in Stephen King's *Misery*. She is the one who is in the position to dictate to the girls what they have to do and how they should behave.

“Theses girls are mine. [...] I trained each of them like a mother, and without me they're nothing. When I say eat, they eat; when I say breathe, they breathe. They're my flock. I love each and every one of them. When they're good, I reward them; when they're bad, I'll be the one to punish them. I made them, every one.” (Abu-Jaber, 314)

Portia tries to make Jem and Melvie look like American girls. She says, “We'll try putting some pink lipstick on you, maybe lightening your hair, make you *American*” (Abu-Jaber, 295). However, by lightening the hair or putting on lipstick, Jemora and Melvina perform a certain type of American identity. It is sort of a costume, and the girls refuse to do this.

Diana Abu-Jaber's novel emphasizes the common belief in Western culture that

white people have the power and right to decide over the fate of non-white persons. White superiority is often simply taken for granted. In contrast, the novel shows that being Arab is related to very low social prestige. The public image of Arabness in the United States is a very negative one. The novel is full of negative stereotypes regarding Arab culture. At one point, Mr. Boink, for example, refers to Matussem as "the dirty sand nigger" (Abu-Jaber, 99). People who look exotic are habitually categorized as mysterious and inferior in Western society and as a result often have to experience hostility and racism. People often forget that there is no such thing as "The American". The American society is a mixture of different groups of people. In the novel, Melvina addresses the multiculturalist character of the United States:

Where do you think Americans came from, when they're not captured on reservations? They come from other places. That's what an American is! (Abu-Jaber, 328)

However, Jemora adds one more thing to this claim, namely that it is not enough to be born in the United States in order to become a respected member of its society.

"I think it just doesn't work like that. It's not enough to be born here, or to live here, or speak the language. You've got to *seem* right." (Abu-Jaber, 328)

Jem here addresses the importance of assimilation and adjustment to the norms of the host culture, which also includes a certain gender order.

It is a very frequent phenomenon that when people think that the exotic becomes dangerous, it has to be made inferior, although it becomes obvious throughout the novel that the majority of white people do not know very much about Arab culture. However, many people think that different skin color or language is reason enough for discrimination, as can be seen from the following lines:

Peachy was Jem's only friend on the bus. The other children taunted Jem because of her strange name, her darker skin. (Abu-Jaber, 92)

It seems as if the two sisters tried to escape from their hostile surroundings by starting affairs with local men, whereas their father finds release and relief in his jazz music¹⁹³.

However, there is also some form of antagonism against American culture on Fatima's part:

[Fatima] lived among American, in places they had built, among their people, but despite this she wanted to keep herself, her family, and a few friends apart from the rest. She wanted what the Americans had, but at the same time she would never relax her hold on herself. It was not appropriate to mingle. Americans had the money, but Arabs, ah! They had the food, the culture, the etiquette, the ways of being and seeing and understanding how life was meant to be lived. (Abu-Jaber, 360)

It becomes obvious that Fatima regards her own culture as the superior one. Holding on to Arab roots and traditional rules might be her way of overcoming the discriminating conditions in the United States¹⁹⁴. Yet the situation in the hospital shows that there are indeed some similarities between Arab and American traditions. One example is the general conviction that women are the ones who are solely responsible for nurturing, nursing and caring tasks. This can be seen in the fact that in this novel, there are very few male nurses represented who are at work in the hospital. It still seems to be uncommon for male persons to enter the domain of long-established female tasks. There is one interesting passage in the novel which reveals that traditional notions and beliefs about the roles and positions of men and women are still at work:

There were a few male nurses on the floor, especially good for lifting and turning patients, but often the first to start feeling wounded dignity. Their identities were often a source of confusion; it was not uncommon for a patient to assume that a male nurse was a doctor, a female doctor "just" a nurse. (Abu-Jaber, 283f.)

The patients in the hospital draw a certain picture in their minds. Certain beliefs

¹⁹³ Cf. Chérif, 212.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Chérif, 212.

concerning gender roles and responsibilities lead to the fact that the patients in the novel sometimes feel confused, if their assumed gender roles are reversed.

However, it is a rather sad conclusion that one of the most obvious things that connect most – even though not all – societies is women's restricted role in the public domain, as well as their assumed responsibilities in the domestic sphere, including nursing and caring tasks.

As a conclusion, one can say that the picture of the “perfect” nurse that Diana Abu-Jaber describes is principally in analogy with the traditional Western image of the “healing angel” that was also portrayed in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. *Arabian Jazz* also enforces the common Western belief that it is a woman's national duty – no matter where the female individual originally stems from – to serve the United States through nursing the nation and its citizens.

5 Striking similarities and differences between literary depictions of women in nursing positions

Literary depiction of women, in particular women in nursing positions, might not always correspond to the typical social assumptions of appropriate feminine behavior. Some authors deliberately choose to contradict the conventional image of the beautiful and caring mother figure. This can be observed from the rather ambivalent pictures of nurses that were analyzed in this diploma thesis, ranging from the self-sacrificing, “healing angel” to the destructive and cruel madwoman.

What can be observed from the twentieth-century texts as opposed to those from the nineteenth century is that nurses are no longer depicted as war nurses, who work on the battlefield, healing the injured soldiers, but they are rather at work in special buildings such as hospitals or asylums, but they are no longer at work outside. The limitation of female nurses to certain medical institutions even more enforces their restriction to the domestic sphere.

Nevertheless, there is one striking similarity which can be found in the portrayal of nurses in all texts. Neither of the nurses portrayed in the works is married or has children. Apparently, a woman who goes to work does not have time and/or interest in having a family on her own. The message that comes across is that professionally working nurses are not able to care for a family, as they have to concentrate and focus on the treatment and healing of their patients, which often includes taking on the position of a substitute mother for the patients.

6 Conclusion

One could claim that since the end of the eighteenth century, there has been a polarization of the sexes¹⁹⁵. This binary opposition, on the one hand, influenced the creation of medical theories, and on the other hand, was itself to some extent naturalized by medicine. It becomes obvious that people "are placed in gendered discourses" (Patterson, 3). These discourses have always been crucial concerning the stability of the nation state, because a nation needs such a gender order or hierarchy in order to function.

As has become obvious in the course of this diploma thesis, the construct of a nation is, on the one hand, formed through discourses, and on the other hand, through the establishment of a particular gender order. According to Patterson, "people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy" (Patterson, 11). However, it is not always easy to distinguish fact and fiction, because facts are in most cases communicated via diverse forms of representation such as pictures, films, songs, short stories, novels or poems, for instance. The most important thing to keep in mind is that such depictions are determined by individual, collective and national ideologies. Even history is not one single objective truth, because it is always told from a particular viewpoint and must as a matter of fact make deletions at some point. No matter if analyzing high culture or popular culture, there are always ideologies behind that are taken up by various forms of representations – literature, as well as painting, or the film

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Schmersahl, 2.

industry – and that try to influence people by enforcing or deconstructing typical images.

The aim of this diploma thesis is to analyze the image of the nurse in the United States and to show the close connection between nation and nursing, as the nation building process depends to a great extent on the idea of the nurse. Traditional convictions as regards typical features of nurses usually include that a nurse has to be sensitive, subservient, loyal, self-sacrificing and caring. As these characteristics are commonly interpreted as typical female features, the profession as a nurse is often thought of as the “ideal” profession for women. The common belief is that being a nurse enables women to render an essential contribution for the existence and growth of the nation, whereas men mainly serve the nation in their roles as soldiers.

Contemporary literary texts often take up the idea of the nurse and either enforce or deconstruct typical images, depending on the message, the author tries to convey. Despite the fact that literature can on the one hand help to deconstruct general assumptions of how women and men have to be, one has to keep in mind that it is also literature that is responsible for the creation of such gender roles.

My intention was to describe how literary depictions of women in nursing positions changed from the nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century. A literary example of the nineteenth century that enforces the typical idea of women being responsible for the healing of the soldiers during times of war and men serving in the army is Louisa May Alcott’s short story “The Brothers”.

On the contrary, literature is also a way of decoding and deconstructing specific clichés in order to make the reader aware of the purpose and impact that depictions of common ideas might have not only on the individual, but also on society and the nation. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper”, for instance, is such a text that deconstructs the common idea of women being nurses by nature.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, general attitudes and assumptions concerning gender dialectics were to a high degree the same as in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. The majority of people still held on to traditional notions of man- and womanhood. Women were the ones who were commonly thought of as being responsible for all sorts of nursing and caring tasks, which was to some extent also reflected in literature. An example is Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*. Literary portrayals like this serve as an enforcement of certain values and beliefs and aim at the reader's identification with particular cultural and social notions.

In the second half of the twentieth century, novels like Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or Stephen King's *Misery* turned the traditional picture of the nursing profession upside down. Their portrayal of destructive and murderous nurses reflected a fear of loss of the established gender hierarchy. Both authors indirectly stress the fact that a reversion of the conventional gender order might turn out as damage for the whole nation state.

At the end of the twentieth century, Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Arabian Jazz* again supports the idea that it is a woman's natural capability and national duty to take on the role of a nurse.

An example of the twenty-first century that clearly illustrates that even at the beginning of this century women and men are still meant to inhabit clearly defined roles and spaces within the nation is the fairly recent and very broadly known movie *Pearl Harbor*. The film also makes use of the image of the heroic soldier, sacrificing his life for the nation. The movie incorporates all typical ideas that were discussed in the course of this diploma thesis about men being soldiers and defending the nation, women being at home or in the hospital caring for the wounded soldiers, and sacrificing their lives for the soldiers. Although the film was made in the year 2001, it still enforces all these discourses of how men and women have to behave in order to guarantee the functioning of the nation state.

Such examples show that portrayals of dominant nursing stereotypes were not

just supported during the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. It is rather that conventional characteristics as regards the portrayal of women in nursing positions are still present today, probably more than ever.

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Das Konzept der Nation hängt zu einem wesentlichen Teil von der Konstruktion und Regulation der Geschlechterordnung ab. Kulturell geprägte Annahmen von speziellen weiblichen und männlichen Charaktereigenschaften und Verhaltensweisen sind dafür verantwortlich, dass in der nationalen Rollenverteilung der Geschlechter Männer meist diejenigen sind, die sich als Soldaten im Krieg für die Nation aufopfern, während Frauen der Nation dienen indem sie sich in ihrer Rolle als Krankenschwester um die verwundeten Soldaten zu kümmern haben und für die Reproduktion zukünftiger loyaler Bürger verantwortlich sind. Althergebrachte Überzeugungen bezüglich typischer Eigenschaften von Krankenschwestern inkludieren üblicherweise, dass eine Krankenschwester sensibel, belastbar, einfühlsam, aufopferungsbereit, fürsorglich und liebevoll sei. Da diese und ähnliche Charakteristika als typisch weibliche Merkmale angesehen werden, wird der Beruf der Krankenschwester oft als typischer Frauenberuf betrachtet.

Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es, das Bild der Krankenschwester in der U.S. amerikanischen Literatur zu analysieren und die Verbindung zwischen der Darstellung der Krankenschwester und dem Konstrukt der Nation aufzuzeigen, denn literarische Beschreibungen sind meist geprägt von individuellen, kollektiven und nationalen Ideologien. Zeitgenössische Texte können das übliche Bild der Krankenschwester entweder forcieren oder dekonstruieren. Diese Arbeit konzentriert sich auf eine überblicksmäßige Analyse, wie sich literarische Darstellungen von Krankenschwestern oder Frauen in Pflegepositionen vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert verändert haben. Ein Beispiel aus der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts, welches das typische Bild der Frau als Pflegerin und Heilerin der Soldaten während Kriegszeiten forciert, ist Louisa May Alcott's Kurzgeschichte "The Brothers" (1863). Am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts kam es zu sozialen Veränderungen im Zusammenhang mit der Industrialisierung und Verstädterung. Frauen begannen vermehrt für ihre Rechte zu kämpfen. Diese Veränderungen sind auch in zeitgenössischer Literatur erkennbar. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Kurzgeschichte "The Yellow

Wallpaper" (1892) ist beispielsweise einer jener Texte, der die althergebrachte Vorstellung von einer naturhaften Begabung der Frau für Pflēgetätigkeiten in Frage stellt. Zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts waren die Vorstellungen bezüglich der Geschlechterverhältnisse im Wesentlichen die gleichen wie im 18. oder 19. Jahrhundert. Frauen wurden noch immer als die Hauptverantwortlichen für Pflegearbeiten gesehen. Besonders während der beiden Weltkriege mussten Frauen wieder primär der Nation in ihrer Rolle als Hausfrau, Mutter und vor allem Krankenschwester für die verwundeten Soldaten dienen. Ernest Hemingway's Roman *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) reflektiert das übliche Krankenschwestern-Cliché wie es am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts forciert wurde. In den 1960er Jahren kam es erneut zu einem sozialen Umbruch. Man denke zum Beispiel an die Frauenbewegung in den Vereinigten Staaten. Dies hatte zur Folge, dass sich auch das Bild der Krankenschwester in der Literatur veränderte. In der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts waren es Texte wie Ken Kesey's Roman *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) oder Stephen King's Roman *Misery* (1987), die das typische Bild der Krankenschwester auf den Kopf stellten. Die Darstellung der Krankenschwester als beängstigendes, destruktives und mörderisches Wesen in den beiden Werken spiegelt die Angst vor dem Verlust traditioneller Geschlechterhierarchien wider. Beide Autoren vertreten indirekt das Bild, dass eine Veränderung konventioneller Geschlechterverhältnisse sich als Gefahr für die gesamte Nation entpuppen könnte. Am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts rückt vermehrt eine multikulturelle Perspektive in den Mittelpunkt der Betrachtung, weil man erkannte, dass die Erfahrung von weißen, westlichen Krankenschwestern aus der Mittelschicht nicht universelle Gültigkeit hat. Diana Abu-Jaber's Roman *Arabian Jazz* (1993) liefert Einblicke, wie das Bild und die Rolle der Krankenschwester in anderen Kulturen innerhalb der Vereinigten Staaten wahrgenommen wird. Jedoch forciert Diana Abu-Jaber letztendlich wieder die Idee, dass es eine natürliche Fähigkeit und eine nationale Verpflichtung von Frauen sei, die Rolle der Krankenschwester einzunehmen. Dominante Stereotype hinsichtlich des Bildes der Krankenschwester sind im Grunde auch heute noch präsent, vielleicht sogar mehr denn je.

Lebenslauf

Name: Kathrin Csencsics

Adresse: 7473 Hannersdorf
Burg 16

Geburtsdatum: 31.12.2008

Staatsbürgerschaft: Österreich

Ausbildung:

- 4 Jahre Volksschule in Hannersdorf
- 4 Jahre Musikhauptschule in Großpetersdorf
- 5 Jahre Handelsakademie in Oberwart (mit Matura)
- Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik (Diplom) in Wien:

Wahlfachmodul: Gender Studies

Schwerpunktmodule: Literaturwissenschaftliches Modul
Cultural Studies Modul

2004: Lateinergänzungsprüfung

2005: Abschluss des 1. Abschnitts

2008: Abschluss des 2. Abschnitts und Diplomprüfung