Vilnius University

Faculty of Philology

Department of English Philology

Žemyna Šliauterytė

Gender Stereotypes and the Depiction of Women in Edith Wharton's Short Stories

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Academic Advisor: Jr.Asst.Grant Rosson

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Abstract

The aim of this BA paper is to analyze three short stories by a widely recognized American author Edith Wharton, and to investigate where, according to their descriptions, the female characters of these works stand in relation to gender stereotypes. The characters of the short stories *the Mission of Jane, Souls Belated*, and *the Pelican* are analyzed in terms of whether or not they display signs of being gender-schematic, and which of their personality traits help to determine it. It is also examined and discussed if the stories contain heteronormative patters. Such concepts as *Stereotypes*, *Gender Stereotypes*, and *Heteronormativity* are introduced and defined. *the Gender-Schema Theory* by Sandra Ruth Lipsitz Bem is also introduced in order to provide the basis for the analysis. The analysis of the descriptions of the women figures in the aforementioned short stories reveal that they display signs of being both gender conforming, and non-conforming, and that the stories contain heteronormative motives.

Contents

1. Introduction

"Imagine, for a moment, a young woman born to wealth and privilege in the leisured society of nineteenth-century Old New York. Fitted into brocade and velvet, her red-gold hair caught in a ringlet of curls, she is expected to become a society matron. But another calling- born of her love for words and a gift for storytelling- intervenes against these well laid plans."(Benstock 2004:vii).

This description provides only a small glimpse into the life of a widely known and recognized American author Edith Wharton. Edith Wharton, or Edith Newbold Jones, was born "in her parents' spacious brownstone at 14 West Twenty-third Street, just off Fifth Avenue and the fashionable Madison Square"(Benstock 2004:3) on the 24th of January, 1862 (ibid.). Her passion for writing and storytelling compelled her to start her literary career at a very young age, and as early as her first debut in society, at the age of seventeen, she has already "written a novel and several short stories, and published (under her pastor's name) a translation of a German poem" (Benstock 2004:vii). The question of how Edith Wharton became so successful and widely recognized, and "How did the frightened debutante become the social chronicler of her age, an internationally acclaimed author of forty-seven books, a woman of firm opinions and independent mind?" (ibid.) arises. Although her background, her identity as a woman, and her place in society were not very encouraging when it came to developing "her "gift""(Benstock 2004:viii), she persisted and "began a long literary apprenticeship, working alone and without mentors." (ibid.). Wharton had a very consistent and intense work ethic and dedicated time to her literary works daily. As Benstock reiterates, "Disciplined to the daily task, she wrote every day until the last weeks of her life." (Benstock 2004:viii). As a result of this determination, and her talent she became an accomplished literary genius and "Today, Edith Wharton is considered by literary scholars in the United States and Europe to be one of the most important writers and cultural critics of the twentieth century."(Singley 2003:47).

Wharton´s literary work has issued diverse reactions and contradictory responses from the very beginning of her career. Killoran emphasizes the dichotomy of how her works were viewed by the critics, and says that, "During Edith Wharton's lifetime, critics grudgingly admired her

craftsmanship, but backhandedly referred to it as too clever and too artificial."(Killoran 2001:1). Some of the earliest of Wharton's reviewers "trivialized her work as that of a mere woman, sneered at the elite class that was her material, and dismissed her as out of touch with America. This is indeed paradoxical, since – from the very beginning of her career- Mrs. Wharton was simultaneously recognized as a writer of exceptional literary distinction."(Tuttleton et al. 1992:ix).

One of the core themes in terms of the criticism that she received in the early years, is that "She never could shake the shadow of Henry James in the eyes of the critics and the public." (Killoran 2001:1). "In the first phase, between 1899 and 1905- from *The Greater Inclination* up to *The House of Mirth*- Mrs. Wharton was sometimes praised but usually criticized as a writer in the school of Henry James"(Tuttleton et al. 1992:x). Although the man was, in fact, a dear friend of hers, he was "in no way her teacher" (Killoran 2001:1), and "Essentially, Edith Wharton became a victim of repetition and association and, of course, history"(ibid.).

However, when *The House of Mirth* was published, "there could no longer be a question as to originality or discipleship to James"(Tuttleton et al. 1992:xi), and the second phase of Wharton criticism began(ibid.). In this phase, part of the criticism was directed at the fact that Wharton wrote from a perspective of someone wealthy, someone who depicts the peculiarities of the higher circles of society. "The House of Mirth, Wharton's first novel to treat upper-crust New York society"(Singley 2003:195), was received very positively and by some is considered to be the novel that made her career (Benstock 2004:139). However, as it was the era of World War I, the conditions for workers were terrible, and class division was heavily discussed, some of the academic critics that were more heavily influenced by early socialism "felt that the accident of Wharton's wealth and connections made her undemocratic and outside the spirit of "realism""(Killoran 2001:1), which was "the preferred writing style of the time"(ibid.). "Critics with socialist leanings and interest in the welfare of the "lower classes" were offended by wealth"(ibid.), and due to this, Edith Wharton "was accused of being too rich and aristocratic"(ibid), and thus, incapable of developing a social conscience(ibid.).

Wharton's *the House of Mirth* is also a good example of her works that received a lot of attention from feminist critics, as it "conveys the feminist social message that women bred to be frilly decorations run risk of various sorts of death."(Restuccia 1987:224). "Most feminist critics seem

to imply that Wharton, though never one to ally herself with the feminist movements of her day, was a kind of inherent feminist" (as cited by Olin 1988 in Killoran 2001: 17). She attracted a lot of criticism, and/or praise for the ways she depicted women figures in her works, as well as for being a female author herself. "Wharton's early stories began to appear in 1898, the end of the Victorian era" (Killoran 2001:3), and, although some of the reviewers "praised her craftsmanship"(ibid.), "those who came later smilingly dismissed her work as something to be put in a drawer with a lavender sachet"(ibid.), and "read with sighs and sentiment"(ibid.). The prejudice against Wharton that these critics held was the idea that she "belonged to the "inferior" sex, a society female writer entering a tradition scornfully biased against what Nathaniel Hawthorne called "scribbling women.""(ibid.)

Although Edith Wharton had experienced being on the receiving end of criticism involving her identity as a female writer, and even though the presence of some feminist ideology is undeniable in a big portion of her works, she did not escape the influence of the societal beliefs of the time. She "was also tainted to varying degrees by the prejudices of her age"(Rattray 2012:6) and "proved at times remarkably dismissive of women and women's rights."(ibid.). Be it subconscious beliefs or not, "These views often came in the guise of casual remarks and witticisms in her correspondence"(ibid.). When describing the pictures of the British women's movement, she expressed that "I, who think that women were made for pleasure & procreation, note with satisfaction that the leaders of the movement, judging from their photos, all look unfitted for the first, & many for both functions"(Lee 2007, as cited in Rattray 2012:6). This remark is a direct one and leaves very little to interpretation. However, in her novels and her short stories the female characters constructed by Wharton, are often depicted in ways that make us question the complex nature of Wharton's beliefs on the role women play in life and in society.

When discussing Wharton and her relationship with different genres and forms it is necessary to mention her inclination towards short fiction. Beer emphasizes Edith Wharton´s inclination to writing short stories, stating that "Throughout her career Edith Wharton was a prolific writer of short stories and novellas; her first published fiction was a short story collection entitled *The Greater Inclination* (1899) and the last book of new fiction she published before her death was also a collection of tales, *The World Over* (1936)." (Beer 2001:36). It is said that she has an

"immediate proficiency"(Beer 1997:7) writing in this form, and Beer notes that "There is no sense in which Wharton's short stories are to be considered as anything other than texts in which she was able to do different things than in her novels"(ibid). Beer adds, that short stories for Wharton worked as "a medium in which to theorise her craft"(ibid.). Wharton herself talks about her confidence in this genre and expresses that she has always thought that she "didn't know how to write a novel"(ibid.), and adds that "it is in such sharp contrast to the sense of authority with which I take hold of a short story."(ibid.)

One major theme that can often be identified in Wharton´s short stories is that of marriage and the attitudes towards it. As Beer writes, Edith Wharton's short fiction often focuses on the "relations between men and women and, centrally, the impact upon the institution of marriage of social change and – in particular – the expansion of opportunities for women."(Beer 2001: 41). Despite the aforementioned inconsistencies about her views on women and their roles, Wharton brings a lot of attention in her short stories on her version of the future where women lack toleration "of the limitations imposed upon them"(ibid.), where women are starting to rebel against the constrains of social norms. One of the ways she does this is by writing about relationships between two members of opposite genders, the impact of decisions taken by either of them, the problems they face. As Beer states, Wharton writes about "relations at a point of crisis between the sexes using the language and insights of the evolutionary scientists"(Beer 2001:41-42). A great example of this process is her short story *Souls Belated,* in which she explores a relationship between a man and a woman, depicts the social realities of the time and the attitudes towards marriage and unmarried women, and depicts their struggles against social norms imposed upon them. When describing this particular short story, Beers states, that Edith Wharton "shows a different side to the failure of marriage, where the woman is caught between her need to be free and the conflicting desire to have her social and moral existence sanctioned by the prevailing code of standards and conduct."(Beer 2001:42). This further highlights how important this theme was in Wharton´s short fiction. As Beer states, *Souls Belated*, just like "Many of her stories deal with the after-effects of the path not taken, the bold step not attempted"(ibid.). *Souls Belated* is a great example showing how important the theme of marriage was in Wharton´s short fiction, as it, like many of her short stories, highlights the friction that existed in many women's lives between their desires and the limitations and norms imposed by society on their sex.

The purpose of this BA paper is to analyze three selected short stories by Edith Wharton, published in the collection of her works *Edith Wharton*: *Collected Stories Vol 1. 1891-1910 (LOA #121) (Library of America Edith Wharton Edition).* These short stories include *Souls Belated*, which was mentioned previously, *the Mission of Jane*, and *the Pelican.* Although a lot of research has been done and analyses performed through a feminist lens on Wharton's novels, her short stories received less attention, and there is significantly fewer materials on these specific short stories. They are even less analyzed in terms of gender norms and stereotypes. Thus, the primary focus of this BA paper will be on how female characters are depicted in these selected stories by Edith Wharton, and where, based on the character descriptions, their gender expression stand in relation to gender schema, gender stereotypes and the concept of heteronormativity.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this BA paper is comprised of three sections. The first part of the framework will provide a definition of the term *stereotype* and will examine how the concept of *gender stereotypes* in particular is defined by different sources. This section will introduce ideas on gender categorization, the nature and validity of gender stereotypes, the impact of gender-related stereotype formation, and will introduce the specific characteristics assigned to binary men and women. In the following part of the framework, the *Gender Schema Theory* by Sandra Bem will be introduced, further highlighting the correlation between gender stereotypes and social behaviors. The third section will provide a definition of *heteronormativity*, It will discuss how this concept relates to the notion of gender stereotypes, and what role it plays in the analysis that will be performed on the selected short stories by Edith Wharton.

2.1. Gender Stereotypes

The Merriam-Webster dictionary online defines the noun *stereotype* as ¨something conforming to a fixed or general pattern¨ ("Stereotype". 2022), "especially **:** a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment"(ibid.). As noted in Six and Eckes' article, "stereotypes are "a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people" (p. 16) with gender stereotypes being defined accordingly as "the structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes of men and women" (Ashmore & Del Boca 1979, Ashmore & Tumia 1980; Ashmore et al. 1986, as cited in Six & Eckes 1991:58). In her article "Gender Stereotypes" published in *the Annual Review of Psychology*, Ellemers provides a comment that corresponds with these definitions. She writes that, "Stereotypes reflect general expectations about members of particular social groups." (Ellemers 2018:276). In all of these sources, the defining elements of the notion of *stereotype* are its interconnectedness with expectations and beliefs formed by/about different social groups. However, when it comes to the process of categorization and stereotype formation in terms of gender, it is important to note that the beliefs associated with it are much stronger and deeper rooted than when discussing different types of stereotypes. Ellemers agrees with this idea, stating that when it comes to gender, "stereotype fluidity and context dependence are much less likely to emerge" (Ellemers 2018:277). One of the reasons for this might be that "Gender is considered a

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primary feature in person perception" (ibid.), and that "Children and adults immediately and implicitly cluster unknown individuals by their gender" (ibid.). Thus, due to how perceptible gender expression is, the formation and persistence of gender stereotypes, in comparison with other types of stereotypes, might be considered to be much more prominent and influential.

When it comes to the analysis of gender stereotypes and their influence, the questions of their nature and validity need to be discussed. As Hyde puts it, "Whether men and women are fundamentally different or similar has been debated for more than a century" (2014: 373). Ellemers states that "Gender stereotypes reflect the primary importance we attach to task performance when judging men and to social relationships when considering women" (Ellemers 2018:277). She adds, that "Assertiveness and performance are seen as indicators of greater agency in men, and warmth and care for others are viewed as signs of greater communality in women" (ibid.). Could there be a valid biological reason for why these particular traits are being assigned to one gender or the other? As Ellemers notes, "the larger physical strength of men and the ability of women to bear children predispose them for different types of activities and relate to testosterone and oxytocin levels, which can also impact behavior." (ibid.). Due to these biological factors, "gender differences are often seen as deeply rooted in evolution and hard-wired in the brain, reflecting the different roles and survival values of agentic versus caring behaviors for men and women" (Ellemers 2018: 277-278). Contemporary scientific research, however, presents arguments supporting the theory that the hormonal and physical differences between men and women are not as influential on social behaviors as previously thought (Ellemers 2018:278). According to Ellemers's article, "there is no one-to-one relationship between specific hormones and specific behaviors." (Van Honk et al 2011, as cited in Ellemers 2018:278), and, that "a review of hundreds of studies on cognitive performance (e.g., math ability), personality and social behaviors (e.g., leadership), and psychological well-being (e.g., academic self-esteem) reveals more similarities than differences between men and women (Hyde 2014, as cited in Ellemers 2018:278). Even if the actual differences between the two binary genders are of little significance, the way these differences are perceived have influence. As Löckenhoff et al. state, "When considering practical consequences, perceived gender differences may be just as relevant because—even in the absence of actual sex differences—they may influence the range of experiences that men and women have access to (e.g., whether they are offered leadership positions) and the way they are treated in their social environment (e.g., whether emotional expressiveness is rewarded or sanctioned)." (Löckenhoff et al. 2014:677). Thus, the idea

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that gender stereotypes and their formation are heavily based on preexisting physical and biological differences between the two binary genders has little validity, and is being constantly debunked with more and more scientific research being performed in this area. However, gender stereotype formation is influenced by how these differences between sexes, no matter how insignificant, are perceived. These perceived gender differences might contribute to the development of various ideologies and expectations related to the attributes and traits assigned to specific genders, and in turn, it might influence the experiences members of these groups have, creating a broader gap between the two genders.

The specific traits and characteristics assigned to different genders and reinforced by gender stereotypes need to be discussed in order to perform the following analysis of Wharton´s work. Löckenhoff et al. highlight such characteristics as agency and communality, stating that "Men are seen as higher in agentic and instrumental traits, whereas women are seen as higher in nurturing and communal traits" (Löckenhoff et al. 2014:678), In her article, Ellemers also highlights a few of the traits assigned to different genders. As mentioned above, task performance and related behavior often is the lens through which we consciously or subconsciously evaluate and judge men, while it does not apply to women (Ellemers 2018:281). In terms of how women are perceived, appearance plays an important role. Ellemers writes that "men as well as women are inclined to evaluate women primarily in terms of their appearance, rather than their accomplishments, whereas they do not evaluate men in this way (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, as cited in Ellemers 2018:280). Moreover, just like Löckenhoff et al., the elements of agency and communality are highlighted in Ellemers article. According to it, while task performance, competence, and the expectation to prioritize work are the traits associated with males, the focus on family, communality, caring for others, emotional warmth, and being professionally inept or less competent are qualities stereotypically assigned to women (Ellemers 2018:281). The division and contrast between these gender stereotypes become even more apparent when the element of parenthood arises. As Ellemers states, "parenthood also causes us to perceive men and women differently, with gender stereotypes implicitly guiding our judgment. When women become parents, we tend to assume that caring for their children will be their first priority and should make them less committed and ambitious at work." (ibid.). She also adds that, "when men become fathers, this does not impact negatively on their perceived suitability as workers (ibid.). The implicit stereotype that women prioritize, or should prioritize, family at all times, and the fact that "professional women are seen

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as less competent after they become mothers, whereas this is not the case for men who become fathers." (Cuddy et al 2004, as cited in Ellemers 2018:281) further highlights the division between how these two genders are perceived by members of society, and what character qualities are associated with them.

2.2. Sex Typing and the Gender Schema Theory by Sandra Lipsitz Bem

Sandra Ruth Lipsitz Bem, a well-known American Psychologist, has introduced a range of works related to gender studies, stereotypes involving gender roles, and androgyny. She is best known for inventing *the Bem Sex-Role Inventory* and *the Gender Schema Theory* (GST). In order to analyze the nature of gender stereotypes even further, further entertaining the idea, that they do not arise as a result of biology or physiology, *the Gender Schema Theory*, its implications, and the concept of *sex typing* will be presented in this section.

"Although societies differ in the specific tasks they assign to the two sexes, all societies allocate adult roles on the basis of sex and anticipate this allocation in the socialization of their children." (Berry et al. 1957, as cited in Bem 1981:354), Bem writes. They also adds, that "Not only are boys and girls expected to acquire sex-specific skills, they are also expected to have or to acquire sex-specific self-concepts and personality attributes, to be masculine or feminine as defined by that particular culture" (ibid.). When describing this kind of social programming, Bem explains that this process of sex typing, is precisely that – transmuting male and female attributes, characteristics, and behaviors into feminine and masculine (Bem 1981:354).

The Gender Schema Theory is intertwined with the notion of sex typing. In essence, it is "a social-cognitive theory about how people in society become gendered from an early age and the impact of this gendering on their cognitive and categorical processing throughout the lifetime (Starr & Zurbriggen 2017:567). According to Bem, "Gender schema theory proposes that the phenomenon of sex typing derives, in part, from gender-based schematic processing, from a generalized readiness to process information on the basis of the sex-linked associations that constitute the gender schema. In particular, the theory proposes that sex typing results from the fact that the self-concept itself gets assimilated to the gender schema." (Bem 1981: 354). Meaning, the argument of the theory proposes the idea that individuals, and specifically children, undergo a process of becoming gender schematic as a result of being influenced by the discourse surrounding them (Starr & Zurbriggen 2017: 567). "Gender schematicity, in turn, helps lead children to become

conventionally sex-typed. That is, in imposing a gender-based classification on reality, children evaluate different ways of behaving in terms of the cultural definitions of gender appropriateness and reject anyway of behaving that does not match their sex."(ibid.). By proposing the idea that gender schema is developed due to social conditioning, rather than being a collection of innate traits of an individual, the *Gender Schema Theory* further clarifies the way the concept of gender stereotyping is used throughout this paper.

2.3. Heteronormativity

Sexual expression and gender expression are two phenomena that play a dominant role in the lives of the majority of individuals. They are integral to such constructs as marriage, family, and society at large. Heteronormativity could be considered a concept linking these two types of expression, and describing one of the core issues with the ideologies and stereotypes related to gender and sexuality. The third part of the theoretical framework that the analysis of Edith Wharton's short stories performed in this paper is based upon, is related to the concept of heteronormativity, and how it is interconnected with the notion of gender stereotypes.

In their article *the Normativity of the Concept of Heteronormativity,* Herz and Johansson writes – "Since the early 1990s, heteronormativity has become one of the key concepts within gender and queer studies." (2015:1009). They add that, "The term, although introduced by Michael Warner in an article published in 1991 (see Warner, 1991), could be argued to have its roots in the second wave of feminism" (Herz & Johansson 2015:1009). The Merriam-Webster dictionary online defines the term *heteronormative* as "of, relating to, or based on the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality" ("Heteronormative". 2022). Toorn, Pliskin, and Morgenroth agree with this definition, reiterating that heteronormative ideology support the belief "that heterosexuality is a given, rather than one of many possible sexualities" (Warner 1991, as cited in Toorn et al. 2020160). They also add, that this "ideology refers to the belief that there are two separate and opposing genders (women and men) with associated natural roles (masculine and feminine), which are in line with their assigned sex (female and male)" (ibid.). Similarly to how gender expression is closely related to expectations, stereotypes, and judgements held by society, "heteronormativity is the lens through which the world is viewed and, importantly, through which it is evaluated and judged" (Herek 2009, as cited in Toorn et al. 2020: 160). To conclude, gender expression, and gender stereotypes are closely related to the concept of heteronormativity, as it is describing judgements, expectations, and ideologies held by society, related to gender and sexual expression.

3. Analysis
3.1. The Mission of Jane

The first Edith Wharton´s short story that will undergo analysis is *The Mission of Jane*. In this particular short story, the two prominent female characters appearing throughout the text are Mrs Lethbury, Jane´s mother, and her adoptive daughter Jane. The analysis will be performed taking note of a few core aspects. The descriptions of the appearance of the selected female character will be looked at, and it will be determined whether or not there is more focus placed on her appearance in comparison to the male characters' appearances. The character will also be analyzed in terms of whether or not she displays high competence and intelligence levels, or is described as being family oriented and caring, as well as having any other significant traits that could be considered gender schematic.

First of all, the fact that much more attention is placed on the appearance of Mrs. Lethbury in comparison to her husband is significant. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, in accordance to gender stereotypes, women are much more likely to be evaluated and judged based on their physical appearance than men. Mrs Lethbury is first introduced to us by her husband. He describes her appearance, emphasizing how she blushes, saying that she has a "delicate, almost frightened blush" (Wharton. "*The Mission of Jane*"), and that "she still blushed as prettily as at eighteen"(ibid.). He continues focusing on how she looks like, making an assumption that she has "been to a dressmaker's opening"(ibid.), as she is "absolutely brimming with illicit enjoyment" (ibid.). While her appearance is such a primary focus at the beginning of the story, we do not get any descriptions on the appearance of Mr Lethbury. This focus placed on the appearance of the wife is one of the first elements suggesting that she conforms to some of the gender stereotypes.

Another sign of how Mrs. Lethbury conforms to gender stereotypes in the story has to do with her displaying such personality traits as being caring, family oriented, having high levels of emotional warmth, and being extremely motherly. From the very beginning of the story, the main purpose and desire of the woman is to adopt a baby, whom she "always wanted so dreadfully" (Wharton. "*The Mission of Jane*"). She is the one expressing this wish to her husband, pursuing him to go to the hospital and look at Jane, and, eventually, adopt her. The husband tells us that "he had always thought she would be happier with a child"(ibid.), basing this idea on the assumption that "it was in the nature of things to think of every woman", and because "his wife was so eminently one of a

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species that she fitted into all the generalisations of the sex" (ibid.). Mrs Lethbury's maternal nature is highlighted once again, when the narrator says that after bringing the child home "she was like a dried sponge put in water" (ibid.), and that "it was curious to see how her stored instincts responded to the pseudo-maternal call" (ibid.). It was also noted that, "one felt in her the epitome, the consummation, of centuries of animal maternity, so that this little woman, who screamed at a mouse and was nervous about burglars, came to typify the cave-mother rending her prey for her young" (ibid.). This depiction of the wife is vastly different from how the male protagonist of the short story is depicted, as it is noted in multiple occasions that he is the provider of the household, and is "providing for his adopted daughter" (ibid.). His description differs greatly from his wife's, as he is described as someone who is struggling with his new position as a father, connecting with the child with great difficulty, and feeling like he was being "squeezed into the smallest compartment of the domestic economy" (ibid.). The difference of how Edith Wharton depicts these two characters in her short story reveal that the wife, who is described as being caring, motherly, and who places such importance on her child, conforms to the gender stereotypes associated with women, and thus, is gender schematic in relation to these particular traits.

Moreover, the wife also shows signs of low intellectual competence. Not only is the wife described as caring, and is said to have strong motherly instincts, her intelligence is questioned by the husband and the narrator on more than one occasion. The husband tells us that "she was stupid, limited, inflexible"(Wharton. *The Mission of Jane*"). The narrator explains that while the husband "was to educate Jane"(ibid.), "In matters of the intellect, Mrs. Lethbury was the first to declare her deficiencies"(ibid.). The narrator even states that, "She said she did not pretend to be clever, and there was no denying the truth of the assertion"(ibid.). The wife declares that she has "always been stupid"(ibid.), further emphasizing the belief that she is not intelligent, and suggests that the husband is the one who must tell her "what ought to be done"(ibid.). As mentioned in the framework, one of the core differences between men and women according to gender stereotypes is that men display high levels of agency and competence, while women do not. By describing Mrs. Lethbury as having poor intellectual capacities, Wharton construct another character trait of this woman that alludes to the fact that the character conforms to gender stereotypes and gender schema.

The description of Jane, however, shows signs of non-conformity to gender stereotypes, as she displays signs of high competence and intelligence, and does not possess such characteristics as

being caring or communal. Just like in the case of her mother, there is more focus placed on her appearance in comparison to male characters of the story as well.

Jane is at first described to be "extraordinary intelligent" (Wharton. "*The Mission of Jane*"), and having a "precocious definiteness of mind"(ibid.). She is said to have a great memory and "no difficulty in fixing her attention"(ibid.). The girl is described to even have developed "an inordinate pride in the capacity of her mental storehouse"(ibid.) and she would share her knowledge with people surrounding her with great pleasure. Her good memory allowed her to collect "dates as another child might have collected stamps or marbles"(ibid.), and to her mother "she seemed a prodigy of wisdom"(ibid.). The way Jane's appearance is described relates to her intellect as well. She was described as being good looking, however, it was said that she has developed "a kind of categorical prettiness which might have been a projection of her mind"(ibid.). It could be argued that Jane is considered to be less attractive to men due to her intellectual abilities. The narrator suggests that during her coming out to the society men might have "guessed the axioms on her lips and detected the encyclopedia in her eye"(Wharton. "*The Mission of Jane*"), and because of it Jane was not successful in finding a match during her first season. The narrator even says that her mother "consoled herself with the idea that Jane had failed because she was too clever"(ibid.). As in her mother's case, Jane's appearance is subject to description much more than her father was. However, in contrast to her mother, the way Jane is portrayed suggests that she is smart, and interested in knowledge acquisition.

Furthermore, instead of being described as a caring, family oriented individual, Jane is depicted as having a more complex personality. In addition to being interested in acquiring knowledge, Jane is depicted as being prideful of her abilities, and wanting to display her agility. Mr. Lethbury expresses his belief that showing how quick she was seemed to be the motivation behind her attempts to act as "a good little girl"(Wharton. "*The Mission of Jane*"). Moreover, it is said that, "an early consciousness of virtue had moreover constituted her the natural guardian and adviser of her elders"(ibid.), and at a very early age she "had set about reforming the household"(ibid.). She did that by giving advice to her mother, rearranging the way servants worked, and "lastly she applied herself to Lethbury"(ibid.). Jane, thus, is more focused on achieving certain goals, her personality shows signs of agility rather than communality.

The descriptions of Jane's character suggests that she possesses such characteristics as agility and high intellect. She is non-communal and does not have high levels of emotional warmth. All of these traits are not stereotypically assigned to her gender, which suggests that she does not adhere to gender stereotypes and show signs of non-conformity. However, the fact that her appearance is still highly focused upon, just like in the case of Mrs. Lethbury, contradicts this notion. Thus, the description of Jane suggests that she is not a gender-schematic character in terms of the personality traits that she possesses, but there are some signs of conformity to gender stereotypes as her appearance is highly focused upon.

The ways in which these two characters are depicted in the short story could be seen as extremely different. While Mrs. Lethbury is a picture perfect example of her gender (if we base the assessment on stereotypical traits and behaviors), Jane is a lot more non-schematic, displaying traits that are not considered to be traditionally representative of the female gender. Jane's mother could be considered to fit in within the frames of the stereotypical behaviors assigned to women as she is depicted as extremely caring, motherly, and family oriented. As noted in the previous section on gender stereotypes, being caring and prioritizing ones family are traits that represent the expectations imposed upon women by society. According to the description, Mrs. Lethbury adheres to one other stereotype related to the female gender, and that has to do with her low level of intelligence. As described above, her intelligence was questioned and belittled multiple times throughout the story, going as far as calling her/herself stupid. Jane, on the other hand, displays more signs of gender non-conformity, as her descriptions suggests that she possesses high levels of intelligence, which, according to the gender schema, is more typical of a man, than a woman. To conclude, these two female characters of Edith Wharton's short story *the Mission of Jane* are described differently, one a representation of a woman who conforms to gender stereotypes, and the other, Jane, a character showing few signs of gender conformity, and more prone to be non-schematic.

3.2. Souls Belated

In order to determine if the main female character of this short story, Lydia, displays symptoms of adhering to gender stereotypes, let's take a look at the highlights of how the author portrays her. The main aspect of Lydia's personality displayed in the short story *Souls Belated* is her desire for liberation. She is not described as someone family oriented, as from the very beginning of the story it is made clear that she does not wish to marry, but rather to continue traveling and enjoying this type of lifestyle and the sense of freedom that comes with it. Even though Lydia was aware that divorce was inevitable, when travelling she felt as if "nothing mattered, in those days of supreme deliverance, but the fact that she was free"(Wharton. "*Souls Belated*"). The woman describes her resentment towards the thought that divorce had released her from her husband and "had given her to Gannet"(ibid.), the man she was travelling with. When talking about her married life Lydia expressed her unhappiness, saying that her life in her husband's mansion "had been reduced to a series of purely automatic acts"(ibid.), and that "before she met Gannet her life had seemed merely dull"(ibid.). Lydia was aware, however, that by cultivating this relationship with him she could be "unwillingly involving Gannet in the trammels or her dependence"(ibid.), and she would likely be looking upon him "as the instrument of her liberation"(ibid.), using him for the purpose of freeing herself from the constraints of matrimony. When the woman was made aware of the fact that her husband had filed for divorce, and the need to have a conversation with Gannet about their future arose, she wanted to know why they could not "live everywhere" (Wharton. "*Souls Belated*"), and why they had to settle down. After Gannet asks her to marry him, she exclaims that she does not want to, she wants to be free, unconstrained by the pressure to marriage, and the pressure of society in general. Lydia explains that she perceives a correlation between marriage and the loss of individuality, or the loss of one's self. For example, she tells Gannet that "if marriage is sacred in itself and the individual must always be sacrificed to the family—then there can be no real marriage between us, since our—our being together is a protest against the sacrifice of the individual to the family"(ibid.).

The main characteristics of the protagonist of this short story paint a picture of a woman, who longs for freedom. She longs for freedom to explore, travel, see new things and places, as well as for liberation from social expectations and pressures forced upon her. As marriage was such a crucial part of social identity and social rank in these times, many of these expectations were intertwined

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with one's marital status. Lydia claims that she does not desire to get married; the things that bring her joy are in agreement with the belief that marriage would only limit her, and prevent her from exploring them. This dynamic makes the reader aware that this female lead is not someone who prioritizes family, desires children and the domestic routine that comes with having them, but is rather a bit more hedonistic in nature, and prefers a more independent approach and a life that does not revolve around taking care of others. This suggests that she does not display high levels of communality, which would be considered to be gender-schematic, and would adhere to the gender stereotypes usually associated with females. Rather, Lydia does not comply with the gender-schema and is a portrayal of a character struggling with to conform to gender stereotypes and the social expectations forced upon her.

3.3. The Pelican

The lead female character of the short story *the Pelican* who will be subject to analysis, is Mrs. Amyot. The most notable trait of this woman that is related to the notion of gender stereotypes and that will discussed in this section, is her inclination to care for her child, and to make it the driving force behind all efforts she puts into her work.

It has been reiterated multiple times in the story that Mrs. Amyot started giving lectures, and then continued to do so throughout her lifetime, motivated by the fact that she was doing it for her son and his well-being. The narrator lets us know that the husband of this woman passed away, and left her large amounts of debt, and a baby boy to take care of. The society was also aware of this fact, and the women in her social circles first started attending her lectures because they felt sympathetic towards her condition, and because "what can a poor thing do, whose husband has died of drink when her baby is hardly six months old, and who finds her coral necklace and her grandfather's edition of the British Dramatists inadequate to the demands of the creditors?".(Wharton. "*The Pelican*"). From drawing room lectures, to giving lectures in universities – you could hear the same story being told about this woman. The story goes– "she only does it for the baby"(ibid.), which later on evolves into – "she's a widow and does it for her son—to pay for his education"(ibid.). Even at the culmination of the story, when confronted by her son who is a grown man already and does not need financial support, Mrs. Amyot reveals that she has been letting sympathetic people continue spreading the same rumors about her. The woman did so because she wanted to spend the funds she received from lecturing on his children, her grandchildren, and on spoiling the son's family by, for example, sending "his wife a seal-skin jacket at Christmas"((Wharton. "*The Pelican*"). The fact that Mrs. Amyot is described as incredibly family oriented and caring alludes to the fact that she conforms to gender stereotypes and is gender-schematic. As mentioned previously such characteristics as communality or being caring are stereotypically associated with women.

The second aspect that is worth noting of the way lady Amyot is described in the story and how her description agrees with gender stereotypes, is how much attention is given to her appearance. There are ample descriptions of her physical attributes, her face, her features. Even the story itself begins by the narrator letting us know, that when he first met her, "she was very pretty"((Wharton.

"*The Pelican*"), and had a "sweet straight nose and short upper lip of the cameo-brooch divinity, humanized by a dimple"(ibid.). Her also beauty plays a role in how she is judged and assessed in her career. It is noted that "Mrs. Amyot, thanks to her upper lip, her dimple and her Greek, was already ensconced in a snug hollow of the Parnassian slope"(ibid.). Her appearance is described by the narrator and other characters in the story in great detail. Thus it can be concluded that in terms of this specific feature of her description she is subject to gender stereotypes.

Both of these aspects that were mentioned, help us paint a clearer picture of what the most prominent traits of the character herself and the manner of how Mrs. Amyot is described in the short story, are. Her inclination towards taking care of her child, and letting it be the driving force behind her occupation, reveal the caring and maternal nature of this woman. This characteristic goes hand in hand with the aforementioned gender stereotypes, and leads to the hypothesis that the character of Mrs. Amyot is showing signs of being gender-schematic, and of adhering to gender stereotypes. Furthermore, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, women are primarily judged in terms of their looks, while the evaluations of men relate more to their accomplishments (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, as cited in Ellemers 2018: 280). The short story itself contains many descriptions of Mrs. Amyot's physical appearance, while there are significantly fewer such descriptions of male characters. The fact that so much focus is put on her physical appearance, and that the assessment of her lectures include mentions of her beauty further emphasize that her description in the short story is in agreement with gender stereotypes, and that the woman is being evaluated through their lens.

To conclude, Mrs. Amyot, the main female character in Edith Wharton's short story *the Pelican*, show signs of being constructed in agreement with gender stereotypes, as she is described as caring, maternal, and family oriented. There are more signs of conformity to the gender-schema due to the fact that her appearance is focused upon more than the physical appearances of male characters, and plays a role in how she is assessed in terms of her profession.

3.4. Heteronormativity

The three selected short stories and the female characters in them are all distinct, and display different amounts of gender schematic behavior. As discussed in the theoretical section of this paper, heteronormativity is closely related to the concept of gender stereotypes, thus in order to investigate further the role gender schema plays in these works of Wharton; these stories will also be analyzed in terms of it.

One of the signs indicating that heteronormative ideology is present in all of the aforementioned short stories is the presence and description of a large amount of heterosexual relationships. In *the Mission of Jane*, Jane´s parents are both of opposite genders, and the girl herself is expected to find a match and marry a man, when she comes out to society. She proceeds to meet a male suitor, who proposes. They get married, forming a heterosexual relationship. The female protagonist of the second short story, Lydia, also forms romantic attachments with males – first with her husband, and later on with Gannet. Multiple of the surrounding characters are also part of heterosexual unions, including Mrs. Cope, her husband, and her new suitor Mr. Linton. In *the Pelican* we can notice the same pattern, As Mrs. Amyot is said to be a widow, whose husband have passed, and her son is married to a woman.

However, the most important indicators of the presence of heteronormativity in the selected short stories by Edith Wharton are the fact that there are no mentions of sexual or romantic relationships in any other dynamic than heterosexual in any of these texts, and the fact that the expectation to marry a person of the opposing gender is one of the core themes in these stories.

4. Conclusions

"In the past the internal conflicts involved in being a woman in a male-dominated society have been largely ignored by readers of both sexes, and this has affected our reading of women's work. The time has come for a serious reassessment of women's writing in the light of what we understand today" (Joslin 1991:vi)

This quote is a great summary of how I feel about the importance of contributing to the preexisting analysis and research of the literary works by such female authors as Edith Wharton. In this day in age, when the mentalities and ideologies of society have shifted drastically, and women find themselves possessing rights and occupations that to past generations would of appeared delusional and dream-like, it is incredibly important to take a step back and discuss the works produced in the previous centuries. This will allow us to process and understand how ideologies, and in turn humans, have progressed and developed since then, as well as help us acquire more valuable knowledge in the literary genre. Edith Wharton, a literary giant whose works have now been subject to criticism and have been analyzed by numerous scholars, is a great representation of the mentalities and ideologies that dominated in the American society throughout her lifetime. These ideologies are reflected in the plotlines themselves, as well as in the way the characters are constructed. As mentioned previously, her short stories were chosen for analysis, as they are less researched than her novels, and there is also significantly less analysis done on the relationship between Wharton's short fiction, gender stereotypes, and the traces of the ideologies associated with them.

"Gender stereotypes are present everywhere in every feature of society, such as: work, family, daily vocabulary, advertisements, and television. They are transmitted from father to son through generations, affecting the development of a free society" (Corral 2014, as cited in Vásquez-Guarnizo et al. 2020:144). Gender stereotypes and the expectations that they evoke have a major influence on the society at large, and on separate individuals. They are deeply imbedded in our subconscious thought patterns. They are inescapable. Not being aware of them poses many great risks, especially because "They are "dangerous" mental models" (Mella 2022:156), that can also be "devious and capable of acting even unconsciously in individuals, social groups and organizations altering the rationality of assessments and choices and producing discrimination and prejudice" (ibid.). This is the exact reason why it is important to gain more awareness in this area,

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and to learn more about the beliefs and expectations associated with different genders. Analyses, such as this BA paper are one way of increasing awareness on this subject, which consequently helps become more conscious of these ideologies, helps identify them and reduce the harmful effects of promoting them. Edith Wharton's short fiction was chosen to be analyzed in terms of GS not only for how important this awareness is, but also due to the fact that we have more resources and knowledge related to this subject in comparison to the previous centuries or during Wharton's lifetime.

The analysis performed in this BA paper revealed that the descriptions of the female characters in the selected short stories by Edith Wharton display signs of both gender conformity and non-conformity. Two of the analyzed characters, Mrs. Lethbury and Mrs. Amyot, are described as being caring, communal, and in other ways act in agreement with gender stereotypes. The other two characters that were analyzed, however, display clear signs of not conforming to the gender schema and do not act in accordance to the gender stereotypes assigned to women. All of the short stories that underwent analysis display heteronormative patterns and conform to the stereotypes and social expectations related to the concept of heteronormativity. One of the reasons for this might be the fact that, just like mentioned previously, Edith Wharton's views and beliefs related to women and their place in society were complex, and at times – dichotomous.

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6. Summary in Lithuanian

Šio Bakalauro darbo tikslas yra išanalizuoti tris pasirinktus Edithos Wharton apsakymus, mėginant įžvelgti ryši tarp moterų veikėjų aprašymų, savybių, elgesio ypatumų ir lyčių stereotipų. Analizuojami trys kūriniai-„Džeinės misija"(*the Mission of Jane*),"Vėluojančios sielos"(*Souls Belated*), ir „Pelikanas"(*the Pelican*). Rašto darbe tyrinėjama ir diskutuojama, kurie šių moterų bruožai sutinka arba prieštarauja stereotipams visuomenės priskiriamams jų lyčiai, ir kokios galimos jų tokio vaizdavimo priežastys abiem atvejais. Paaiškinamos ir apibrėžiamos tokios koncepcijos kaip „Stereotipai", „Lyčių stereotipai" ir „Heteronormatyvumas". Taip pat pristatoma Sandros Ruth Lipsitz Bem sukurta teorija analizuojanti lyčiu schemas. Šių apsakymų veikėjų analizė atliekama remiantis šiomis koncepcijomis ir teorijomis. Tyrimas atskleidžia, jog šios apsakymų veikėjos, kai kuriais atvejais atitinka lyčių stereotipų keliamus lūkesčius, o kai kuriais jiems priešinasi. Analizė taip pat parodo, jog visuose minėtuose apsakymuose dominuoja heteronormatyvūs motyvai.

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