

Weaver Hands

*A social-constructivist study and literary analysis of textile artefacts,
environments and appropriators re-negotiating gender roles and gendered
expressions*

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Introduction

Queer theory is primarily employed as a mode for reading and interpreting society and sexuality, but also in deconstructing assumed gender-related truths (Bolsø 59-61). Indeed, men and women conform, entering specific gender roles, because of society's expectations and conditioning, and not because they are biologically pre-wired (Claudi 164). Simone de Beauvoir also contested the gender essentialist mind-set, asserting "you are not born a woman, but you become one" (Claudi 164). Indeed, as a rebuttal of the gender binary (biological sex and social gender), she meant that gender-specific attributes, whether feminine or masculine, did not naturally belong or derive from the biological sex, as somewhat of a substance, but were rather determined by social norms, conventions and expectations that the two biological sexes inhabited (Claudi 164). Moreover, the queer theorist Judith Butler perceived gender as a socially contingent performance, whereby meant that people unconsciously performed feminine/masculine reflecting the dominant social norms dictating e.g. attire, conduct and behaviour. Butler argued moreover, connecting gender performativity and the power aspect, that the gender performance itself was dictated by the hegemonic and dogmatic social norms built by historical and cultural power structures (Solbrække and Aarseth 74-75). Richardson

argues, in accordance with Butler's performative theories, that social gender is continuously constructed producing the *illusion* of its naturalness and stability. Indeed, it is through gender performances that the production of the concepts of womanhood and manhood occurs (12).

Social constructivism argues that socially constructed understandings of realities are not solely measured by objective criteria, but also by societal factors produced by social processes in the respective communities. Arguably, it means that actors (people, groups and communities) socially script their artefacts (technologies and objects) according to continuous, redefined social factors. This is e.g. visible in the generations' diverse formulation of social values existing in their respective appropriated objects (Henriksen et al. 16). Considering this constructivist concept, technology is thus a mode for doing or expressing gender, whether the appropriator conforms or challenges the scripted social values of the artefact. Thus, the "masculine" and "feminine" gendered artefacts can over time contribute meanings by their association (Lie 250). A socio-technical perspective argues that sociological aspects, such as gender, and technological artefacts, such as looms, construct together in a co-production new gender ideologies (Bray 38). Thus, the script of an object with its designed material/socio-technical effects, can result in ideologies. However, also their creators/users, with their interpretive flexibility, divergently modify e.g. the artefacts intended symbolical meaning and appropriate usage (Bray 38-40).

Deborah Wolfe

The novella *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), firstly published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, has been claimed to project working class literature, social but naturalistic realism, and an unreciprocated, one-sided romance (Amper 1; Rose 187). Indeed, it is also a critical commentary of the industrial revolution, as e.g. showcased in the narrator's description of the industrial pollution which has contaminated her mill town as "pregnant with death", which is

indeed a description or an image that “conflates gender, industry and place” (Pfaelzer 28). In fact, the novella features not only descriptions of gendered environments, but also the female protagonist, Deborah Wolfe, which projects unconventional gender performativity. In fact, Rose argues that Davies always featured protagonists who were “sexual anomalies in societies codified by gender distinction” (Rose 191). Indeed, the occurrence of these androgynously constructed characters effectively provides one mode of narrative strategies for covertly adding social criticism. Rose moreover claims that 19th century female authors were obligated to assemble these kind of narrative strategies, as for example applying masculine alter egos, to “rationalize” their unfeminine perspectives existing in their plots (Rose 197).

Although widely discussed, most critics have drawn the conclusion that the gender identity of the narrator in *Life in the Iron Mills*’s is female and Amper has designated Deborah Wolfe as the story-teller (Amper 1). Deborah Wolfe, the female protagonist, is a cotton picker and a multi-layered woman (Davis 9). Along with questioning the narrator’s contextual credibility, Amper furthermore accentuates her claim by directing the reader’s attention to the novella’s covert layers, cross-directed plotlines as well as Davies’ use of the literary strategy of narrative duplicity and concealment, and therefore, Deborah’s communicated version of events (Amper 1). Although the narrator directs and navigates the readers away from this possible identification, her significant familiarity with the house (“when I was a child”) and the mills (“Korl we call it here”) proves her intertextual deceiving attempts (Amper 1). Davis has constructed a manipulated distance between the narrator, Deb, and the characters by giving the narrator an educated voice, and it is particularly amplified by the use of narrative concealment, e.g. the described bias. Indeed, Deb depicts herself as a passive victim, “weak and wretched”, although her actions in relation with Hugh expresses otherwise (Amper 1-2). Indeed, Deb’s motivations and actions in the plot showcases her deeply invested concern with Hugh, whether she is feeding him food, love or economical and aesthetical opportunities. Even

securing him a proper burial place underlines the covert narrative and underscores Deb as a truly strong character (Amper 5). Also, Amper indicates that Deborah's true gendering qualities are mirrored and existing in the artefact of the 'Korl woman' (3). Indeed, their close relation is evident for example in that there are only two instances of the descriptive adjective crouching occurring in the novella (Amper 3). Firstly, when Deborah/Narrator identifies the Korl statue with herself by "a woman, white, of giant proportions, crouching on the ground, her arms flung out in some wild gesture of warning" (Davis 17) and secondly about Deb whose characterized as 'crouching' (Davis 32) on the jail wall separating herself and Hugh (Amper 3).

Rose purposes that nineteenth-century domesticity, as a primary ideology, infiltrated Davis as a narrator and were also therefore manifested in *Life in the Iron Mills*. Domesticity in relation to gender spheres syndicates idealism, evangelicalism and sentimentalism and is furthermore a so-called "codification of the head-and heart dichotomy" in relation to gender-linked qualities (Rose 189). Indeed, the ideology of domesticity prescribed idealism and sentimentalism in that they together transfused Christian and feminine values. As such, transfused by these values, women were prescribed to have self-abnegation and push forward their social roles as 'messianic'. On the other hand, evangelicalism emphasised the significant, needed spiritual reformation, which was required by women (Rose 189). Rose argues that while the society in power of the domesticity ideology required their women to conform to their 'preordained' roles, it also gave them a mandate to reform (Rose 190). The use of realism, a genre characterised as an 'aesthetic of objectivity', helped Davis, moved by the domesticity ideology to produce this social critique (Rose 190). Indeed, Rose theorises that *Iron Mills* reveals in four different ways that Davis, as a female writer, responded to domestic ideology: mediation, confrontation, amelioration and rationalization (190). In the context of gender performativity, Rose's annotations on the narrative strategy of aforementioned mediation prove useful. Arguably, Davis mediates gender limitations through her narrative strategies (Rose

190). Indeed, Rose underscores that Davis produces confrontation of the customs of the domestic ideology present through her androgynous female characters, who are either “victimized by domesticity’s false material values or empowered by its true spiritual ones” (190). Moreover, she underlines Davis’s mediating of gender codes in the narrative strategy of producing a male narrative voice, as present and assumed in *Iron Mills* (Rose 191).

Deborah is described as physically unattractive, “ghastly, blue lips and watery eyes” (Davis 3), and her wittering is due to her cotton mill work and social class. Indeed, she is the epitome of a deteriorated woman: “starved” (Davis 10), weak and physically agonized after twelve-hour long shifts at the spool and even mentally traumatized (Davis 11). However, she is not enslaved by alcohol. She drinks “nothing stronger than ale” (Davis 10) because she is empowered by her love and hope for Hugh. Only his disappearance would make her lose focus and be the cause of her choosing whiskey instead (Davis 10). She however modifies her own gendered womanhood and performs her femininity with other textual textile components. For example, her “faded cotton-gown” (Davis 10) is attributed as feminine but arguably also creates the symbolical connotation duality of her being enslaved to her cotton mill work, but also her own chosen feminine self-fashioning. Another example could be her usage of an “slouching bonnet” (Davis 10), which, arguably, symbolically signals modesty or subservience, hence another example of her own processual performativity of gender. Indeed, apparel, such as bonnets, and especially worn-down products articulate and illustrate alternating meanings. By emphasising the religious aspects of the ideology of domesticity (e.g. about covering the hair) and the Victorian socially designed roles (e.g. beauty), the bonnet perhaps projects some contrasting aspects, e.g. weariness, femininity, decorum and subservience. Indeed, a Victorian bonnet may formulate, whether adorned or simple, functionality. For example, it provided protection of the 19th century’s women’s hair and kept it clean. On the contrary, the bonnet also projected modesty, due to the reminiscences of religious influence from Christianity. The

bonnet is a symbol of the 19th century's crown, since it is a definite feminine object, but also her chains, linking her to the subordination to her respective male relatives. Rose actually formulates Deb as a symbolic emblem who is victimised by her own femininity, in regards to personality traits, and thus in juxtaposition to the redemptive Quaker, who is described as strong and relentless (Rose 192). Still, with both masculine and feminine gendered attributes, Deb has configured and reconciled her gender identity as strong.

Silas Marner

Silas Marner – the weaver of Raveloe (1861) is a realist novel thematising gender expressions with weaver motifs (Shepherd 119). However, Shepherd argues that, at the time of publication, textiles were paradoxically implicated considering the gender discourses. Indeed, due to industrialization, textile processes became mechanized and centralised in factories, and thus the crafts of weaving and spinning were integrated by the masculine sphere of manufacturing and wage labour, even if weaving and spinning had previously been attributed as female crafts (Shepherd 19). In this case, “pallid”, “short-sighted” and automaton Silas Marner may represent a symbol for textile industry's mechanization and provided deterioration of body and mind (Eliot 4). Silas have previously performed a masculine gender identity with some feminine quirks, but due to his masculine industrialisation of his profession and appropriation of loom, he had as Shepherd notes, a shrunken face/body, thus evoking the "weaker build of a woman" (47). However, Silas willingly appropriated the loom mechanically, almost being an insect. Indeed, the novel presents imageries wherein Silas weaves like a “spider”, perhaps referring to the myth of Arachne. The imageries are present even in Silas' speech, e.g. in “woven a plot” (Eliot 8-9). In fact, despite his past's trauma, he found satisfaction in the repetitive actions of throwing the shuttle and progression watching the little

squares in the cloth he wove. It may have been his only perspective of “end”, as there was no “unseen love”, hence meaning he was briefly a Christian dissenter due to the experiences which made him exiled from Lantern Yard (Eliot 10).

As Shepherd argues, he created “textiles into gold, but (...) wealth is a prison for him” (50). However, Shepherd furthermore annotates that 19th century literature featuring lower classes’ industrial life often broadcasted that the “web of technology established a ladder of progress” but, that it also “constituted an entangling snare” (9). Silas, “lone and crazy” (68), pitied and “dead man come to life again” (5), is realistically judged by the narrators of the community of Raveloe, who arguably gender him effeminate. It is however when he performs the “feminine” tasks, mothering Eppie, that the community enables sympathy, “especially amongst the women” (Eliot 68). He regains acceptance, by reconciling his feminine and masculine identity. Indeed, he embodies ‘feminine’ skills and attributes, e.g. medicinal herbs knowledge from his mother (Eliot 6) and nurture, since caring once for his deceased baby sister (Eliot 61). The novel may then preach the morals saying that the domestic sphere is not unnatural for men, just gendered feminine.

The female character of Pretty Nancy Lammeter acted by “unwavering principle” and projected perfection in all aspects of life (Eliot 85), as for example showcased in her use of textile artefacts, where she valued e.g. “perfect white linen, no creases (...) allowing no irregularities” (Eliot 51). Nancy projects her gender-specific feminine script of textiles in her opinion of others. Indeed, she thinks that “low dresses” with visible necks do not present “sense and modesty” (Eliot 51). Nancy is perhaps the most prominent female character who has completely socially-conditioned herself with the recurring, indoctrinated female gender roles. Her sister Priscilla is in contrast, clear and true to her own opinions. She considers vanity little significant and emphasises her paternal influence. Indeed, the “ugly” sister Priscilla is the one who defies domesticity’s gender roles about marriage. She considers “Mr. have-your-own-

way” the best solution, because women devoting continuously themselves to lady-like appearances and conducts, and still being rewarded with a cheating husband, is a “folly”, not worth the consent of false virtual premises. Instead, she accentuates the importance of good father and good home, and thus projects a strong feminist identity, even with considerable “masculine” physical features (Eliot 52). If Nancy and Priscilla present alternative feminine identities, their differences are most visible in their interactions in the novel. Indeed, the novel features a scene wherein Nancy’s gown got “caught under the stately lamp of the Squire’s foot” (Eliot 58) and slightly tore it. However, the narrator underscores that it is Priscilla which is ready to handle gown-related accidents, as she has a pocket with tools ready to render the stitches at the dresses’ waist, thus fixing it and helping Nancy’s reputation remain ladylike (Eliot 59). Priscilla is thus the one who has appropriated a textile of utility (pocket), which as a textile artefact may have, in the Victorian age, been stereotypically associated with men and masculinity. However, Priscilla does not suddenly perform a masculine identity. Instead, by appropriating the pocket to her own preference of use, Priscilla scripts her own multi-layered femininity into a textile artefact. The pocket can thus, over time, with re-appropriation and with similar scripted valuation be gendered androgynous or even genderless. Arguably, Priscilla performs her gender identity in accordance with her own valued social norms, and she appropriates her textiles with ease, which is the reason why the textiles enables her to project her desired gendered performance. While Nancy, on the contrary gets restricted.

Silas, finally, projects a multidimensional gendered identity based on his performance as a mother and father, in raising Eppie. Moreover, his physical frailness, as e.g. described in his weaver hands, is a result of his work with the loom which undoubtedly required masculine physical strength and progression, but also feminine dexterity. Indeed, Raveloe genders him as feminine since weaving makes him “handier” than men who do out-door work, and because he is partly as “handy as a woman” since “weaving comes next to spinning” (Eliot 72). However,

Silas gradually assimilates into a true balanced, gendered self, since Eppie pulled him away from the “monotony of the loom” and the “repetition of the web” (Eliot 70). Thus, Eppie also provided in Silas reconciling his gendered performed identity.

The Lowell Offering mill girls

The Lowell Offering showcased authored perspectives of the textile mill girls’ daily experiences, from original ideas, to old controversies about e.g. the essential nature of women as well as expressed interests in anything particularly new (Cook 229). Indeed, Cook emphasises that they were not only workers, but also mentally and aesthetically “self-fashioning” individuals (249). With this in mind, *The Lowell Offering* were projecting mixed discourses regarding the traditional gender roles and gender attributes, by primarily romanticising or covertly criticising their available environments that the mills provided and dictated. For example, the narrator of “Dignity of Labour” philosophized: “from whence originated the idea, that it was derogatory to a lady’s dignity, or a blot upon the female character to labour?” (“The Lowell Offering” 209). Husband situates that even though the factory environment presented greater liberation and independence, it also presented issues just as much as possibilities (Husband 17). Husband accentuates furthermore the moralizing happening in *Abby’s Year at Lowell*, wherein the mill girl Abby is establishing an ‘interdependent’ identity where she performs her feminine gender expression in accordance to domesticity’s values (Husband 18). Indeed, while the marketplace with its available textile products such as e.g. bonnets were useful for the consumers among the Lowell mill girls, it also surged morale dilemmas since the restrictive structures of domestic rural family lives were conditioning the girls with alternating, gender-specific values (Husband 18). In the case of Abby, who struggled with “perpetual self-distrust and self-denial” (“The Lowell Offering” 30), the Lowell mill had completely changed her. In fact, her appearance projected “delicacy”, and her conduct “more softness of manner”. Arguably, the narrator employs a satirical stance

because they seem to overgeneralize that the girls who go to work for the mill, came back home 'saved', in that the industrialization of textiles were tremendous. In fact, Abby had in one year turned into the 'perfect' domestic lady', wherein she had stopped having the "little asperities" as well as grown "taller", "thinner" and "paler", but still with a so-called "joyous radiance" ("The Lowell Offering" 32). The narrator may have overemphasised the correspondences between feminine appearance and behaviour, but afterwards, through the emotionally moved father of Abby, the narrator precisely reinstates the true virtues, wherein it is not Abby's money of a "paltry sum" nor the appearance, but the virtues of "prudence, self-command and real affection that moves" him, thus letting her return to earn more and perhaps earn her destined "silk gown" ("The Lowell Offering" 32). Cook emphasizes indeed that among all "the hazards, temptations, and opportunities of an urban industrial order, the refinement and development of the individual is just as probable as her degradation" (Cook 238). Nevertheless, the Lowell Offering projected more than only a single type womanhood (Cook 236).

Cook illustrates for example the different characters of *Evening before Pay-Day*, wherein four young workers, Rosina, Dorcas, Lucy and Elizabeth have a conversation of how they will spend their wages ("The Lowell Offering" 121-122). Indeed, for example Elizabeth wants "a fashionable damask silk shawl", while Dorcas wants a "book" and Lucy wants a "a new pretty, but cheap bonnet and a year's subscription to Lowell Offering" ("The Lowell Offering" 124-125). Rosina, on the contrary, works to earn "comforts for a sick sister and necessaries" ("The Lowell Offering" 131) for her mother that needs her financial help. Cook argues for example that *Evening before Pay-Day* projects varied attachments to rural homes values and that their appropriation or refusal of e.g. attire reflected this (Cook 236-237). Thus, it becomes evident that the Lowell Offering projected and illustrated different modes of femininity and gender expression. However, the social values of e.g. gender norms were

refused or appropriated depending on other factors, such as class, hence e.g. poverty, religious background or for example ambition.

Conclusion

By employing theories of gender performance and socio-technical terminology, it becomes evident that the textile industry sphere, environments and artefacts offer possibilities of configuration and renegotiation of gender performativity and/or gender expression. However, as discussed of textile motifs in the realist works of *Life in the Iron Mills*, *Silas Marner* and *The Lowell Offering*, the artefacts are also socially scripted by their appropriators and exert in their own agency feminine and masculine gendered effects back onto their users. Some effects, such as the non-socially accepted masculinization and feminization are very likely to occur with mechanised usage and industrialization. The textile artefacts have their own scripted messages in attire and accessories, such as religious modesty (bonnet) and utility (pockets), in accordance to (or against) the domesticity's and the Victorian gender roles' values. Indeed, especially textile metaphors and appropriated tools, depending on literary context, and their conditions may pull in and project different notions, such as the masculinity and femininity scripted in the loom of Marner.

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Shepherd, Jennifer L. *Reading The Web: Web and Textile Imagery in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner and Middlemarch*. Dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1998.

Solbrække, Kari and Helene Aarseth. "Samfunnsvitenskapenes forståelser av kjønn." *Kjønnforskning – En grunnbok*, edited by Jørgen Lorentzen and Wencke Mühleisen, Universitetsforlaget, 2014, pp.249-255.

Annotated bibliography

Amper, Susan. "Broken Silence: Teaching Deborah's Untold Story in 'Life in the Iron-Mills'."

Teaching American Literature: A Journal of Theory and Practice, vol.1, no.4, 2007, pp.1-8.

Susan Amper analyses the role of Deborah Wolfe in *Life in the iron mills*. Indeed, she asks the readers to analyse examples from the novella, asking the narrator's credibility and motives. She claims Deborah to be the narrator, after comparing her to the Korl woman. She also points out proof, such as patterns of words, e.g. "crouching" and a "distancing" narrative strategy, wherein Deb describes herself as a victim. She moreover accentuates the possibility that Deborah may have implicated herself to get revenge on Hugh, after years of ignorance, jealousy and unrequited love.

Bolsø, Agnes. *Folk flest er skeive*. Forlaget Manifest, 2010.

Agnes Bolsø has authored a book on queer theory in Norwegian. The book discusses queer theory, ranging from homosexual policies in Norway to philosophical questions regarding the necessity of categorising of genders and sexualities. She argues for example that biological and physiological masculinity and femininity function in an unpredictable cycle, in and between human beings. Under the scope of Judith Butler's gender performativity theories, she brings up for example the embarrassment of mixing whether a baby is a girl or a boy. Indeed, she argues that people are too concerned with the division of genders.

Bray, Francesca. "Gender and Technology." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol.36, 2007, pp.37-53.

Francesca Bray has authored an article in the framework of interdisciplinary feminist technology studies where she for example discusses socio-technical aspects between actors and non-human actors. She emphasises e.g. how feminist technology studies concern with theories on gender performativity and the problem with hegemonic masculinity. She argues that this hegemonic masculinity holds current accepted response to the problem of the legitimacy of the structured patriarchy. Bray also contends the importance of the co-production of gender and technology. Hence, their mutually constitutive relationship showcases the performative, processual quality of both.

Claudi, Mads. *Litteraturteori*. Fagbokforlaget, 2017.

Mads Claudi has authored a book about modern literature theories in Norwegian. He discusses a variety of genres and modern literary movements ranging from structuralism to post-colonial literary theories to political literary theories and so on. One of his chapters concerns feministic literature theories, wherein he discusses for example Simone de Beauvoir's stance on gender essentialism. He highlights that Beauvoir forfeited social constructivist perceptions. One of these theories regarded the understanding of the world, which emphasized people's interactions and adaptation to their social environments.

Cook, Sylvia. "'Oh Dear! How the Factory Girls Do Rig Up!': Lowell's Self-Fashioning Workingwomen." *The New England Quarterly*, vol.83, no.2, 2010, pp.219-249.

Sylvia Cook has authored an article where she discusses the stories and significant aspects about the Lowell Offering. She argues for example that the *Offering's stories* embodied its contributor's nostalgia for the pre-industrial society as well as hope for new social changes, urban modes of living and consumption. She furthermore annotates e.g. about the short story *Abby's year in Lowell*, that it reproduced a trope where the mill girls, who were e.g. materialistically inclined and girlish, would enter the romanticised textile mills and return back home different in looks, thoughts and conduct. She underscores *Evening before Pay-Day* realistically portrays four literary archetypes of women, planning to spend their wage for different, personal reasons, whether materialism, greed or a family in need. She concludes that the contributors of the Offering were not only operatives, but also modern, self-fashioning authors seeking to find the ideological truths.

Henriksen, Ida Marie, et al. *Vår sosiale virkelighet – en introduksjon til hverdagslivets sosiologi*. Fagbokforlaget, 2017.

Henriksen, Levang, Skaar and Tjora have authored a book concerning people's daily lives, emphasising technology and sociological perspective. The book offers examples of sociology in environments ranging from the universities to the café to the urban cities. Considering what they call "every-day sociology", they discuss for example social constructivism. Indeed, they emphasise that the perspective of social constructivism involves that people construct their understandings of realities based on social or collective processes. For example, they mention that food, which has a socially defined meaning, is not necessarily the same for every generation and cultures.

Husband, Julie. "‘The White Slave of the North’: Lowell Mill Women and the Reproduction of ‘Free’ Labor." *Legacy*, vol.16, no.1, 1999, pp.11-21.

Julie Husband has authored an article about *The Lowell Offering*. She discusses for example Harriet Farley, a former operative in the mills who edited *The Lowell Offering* and who argued that the mills offered greater independence for the women than at the family-owned farms. Husband situates furthermore in the story of *Abby’s Year in Lowell* that Abby established a new identity based on inter-dependence. Indeed, she furthermore accentuates a situation where Abby denied herself buying dresses. Thus, she exercised a freedom, which according to Husband is a kind of self-possession deriving from self-denial.

Lie, Merete. "Kjønn og teknologi." *Kjønnforskning – En grunnbok*, edited by Jørgen Lorentzen and Wencke Mühleisen, Universitetsforlaget, 2014, pp.249-255.

Merete Lie has authored a chapter in Norwegian where she discusses genders and technologies. She discusses for example how objects are gendered due to “feminine” designs and that skills with technology is attributed as masculine. She furthermore stresses that men and women are hired for different works due to gender stereotypes. Indeed, she highlights that those gender stereotypes dictated in spheres of technological labour has led to the idea that women are not technically skilled. Thus, this idea is contributing to a so-called “social cement” which freezes the relation between people.

Pfaelzer, Jean. *Parlor Radical: Rebecca Harding Davis and the Origins of American Social Realism*. University of Pittsburgh Pre, 1996.

Jean Pfaelzer has authored a book on author Rebecca Harding Davis. Pfaelzer discusses e.g. Davis' biography and authorship. Pfaelzer discusses furthermore aspects of the realist work *Life in the Iron Mills*. These aspects range from Deb's subjectivity, to Hugh as a feminized hero and the role of the narrator. Pfaelzer discusses furthermore that female sympathy, configured from sentimentalism, is the structuring device in the novel. Finally, she also introduces how even descriptions of the environment in *Life in the Iron Mills* are gendered.

Richardson, Diane. "Conceptualizing Gender." *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*, edited by Diane Richardson and V. Robinson, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008, pp.3-19.

Diane Richardson has authored arguments for understanding genders, according with the movements and the ideologies of the generations of feminism. Indeed, she discusses a constellation of dichotomies, such as femininity/masculinity and the sex/gender binary. Richardson also discusses the theories of Judith Butler, hence the performativity of genders and a so-called denaturalizing of genders. She moreover discusses Butler's story with coining the theory of gender performativity, mentioning a drag performance. Indeed, Butler had seen how men in drag 'performed' femininity better than Butler ever could, and thus argued there were similarities between drag and performance wherein gender was a kind of impersonation accounted for naturalness.

Rose, Jane Atteridge. "Reading "Life in the Iron-Mills" Contextually: A Key to Rebecca Harding Davis's Fiction". *Conversations: Contemporary Critical Theory and the - Teaching of Literature*, edited by Charles Moran and Elizabeth F. Penfield, NCTE, 1990, pp.187-199.

Rose conceptualises the gender roles of Hugh Wolfe and Deborah Wolfe by applying concepts related to gender codification and the ideology of domesticity which involves mediation, confrontation, amelioration and rationalization. She argues that, although *Life in the Iron Mills* belongs to the realism genre, Davies still prescribed female and male protagonists who performed genders uncommon in that time and society. She emphasises Davies' narrative strategies annotating the narrative technique related to the assumed identity of the Narrator. Moreover, she debates that Deb is victimised by the domesticity's false material values and that the Quaker woman is strengthened by the spiritual ones. She suggests that Davies questioning of feminism ideas are more covert, but that she confronts the influence of domestic values through the characters.

Shepherd, Jennifer L. *Reading The Web: Web and Textile Imagery in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner and Middlemarch*. Dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1998.

In this thesis employing the chapter of *Reading the Weaver in Silas Marner*, Jennifer L. Shepherd argues that the author George Eliot redefines the gendered generalizations about weavers, based on that the craft of weaving was considered paradigmatically feminine in the past. By exemplifying textiles and Silas Marner's role as a male weaver with distinct gendered feminine character traits and mannerisms, she purposes a gendered criticism on textiles. She, furthermore, suggests that when Eliot prescribes the genre of realism, it creates an effective device for a gender-aware reconstruction of traditional myths and folklore about weaving. Shepherd also annotates that Nancy becomes a victim to the Victorian societal gender roles, as her lack of heirloom skill shames her socially.

Solbrække, Kari and Helene Aarseth. "Samfunnsvitenskapenes forståelser av kjønn."

Kjønnforskning – En grunnbok, edited by Jørgen Lorentzen and Wencke Mühleisen, Universitetsforlaget, 2014, pp.249-255.

Solbrække and Aarseth has authored a chapter in Norwegian wherein they discuss gender role and gender constructions. They discuss for example that society practises structural suppression by employing gender roles. Furthermore, they emphasise the contributions of queer theorist Judith Butler. They underline for example that gender performativity is not comparable to wardrobe that can be entered and exited by will. Instead, they stress that gender performativity must be regarded as a historically and culturally constructed power-institution.

Reflective essay

In my thesis, I considered it imperative that the primary sources were realist novels or short stories, situated in a similar time frame, and including strong patterns and incidents of gendered controversies.

Family Linen (1985), authored by Lee Smith, takes place in the 19th century and contains many related characters which are shown through numerous narrative voice changes. Particular for this book is the American southern identity and its ideologies, formed after the civil war. The actual *Family Linen* is, metaphorically speaking, emphasising the secrets revealed in the family dynamics. If I however were to employ *Family Linen*, I would have analysed the gender performance annotated in the diary of the deceased lady matriarch Elizabeth and compared her with Sybill, since there are gender paradoxes, e.g. in their aspiration of the Southern womanhood ideal. If I would have employed *Silas Marner* and *Family Linen* concurrently, I would have focused on their similarities as small communities with a lot of opinions. I would have especially emphasised here which social norms were restricting and enabling the female characters' gender performativity, identifying the broad feminine characteristics in their identities.

The metaphorical short text *the Blank Page* by Isak Dinesen features e.g. a strongly gendered artefact in the blank linen sheet, from a princess wedding night located in a Portuguese nunnery. While there is no particular main character and many small time-framed narratives, the story projects specific feminine gender attributes such as dignity, and thus only a gendered impression.

The short poem *Because I could not stop for death* by Emily Dickinson is about the process of life and features feminine attire and textile, such as tulle as a feminine gendered symbols.

The Angel by Mary Johnston is a moralising tale, featuring the generous hatter Ginny, who has economic problems, but gets saved. Indeed, the title allude to a personified picture of an angel

gendered as male. If my thesis's scope focused more on the religious aspects of gender attributes, I would have employed it.

Everyday Use (1973) by Alice Walker, takes place in the early 1970s and situates an African-American family, with Mama, Dee and Maggie, who has a conflicts about a quilt, a family heirloom. It is intended for Maggie, who would wear it down, but has the skills to produce a new one. However, Dee, who claims it, just wants to put it on display, thus against its intended use. It may project a metaphor wherein African-American culture, history and traditions are not to be forgotten, but to be investigated and remembered. Thus the work is more focused on racial discourses than gender specific ones. Therefore, it would have broadened too much the scope of my thesis.

The main textile motif in *Roman Fever* by Edith Wharton is knitting, both in a literal sense and in a metaphorical one. The narrative takes place in Rome and features primarily two women, Grace Ansley and Alida Slade. The story is driven by this metaphorical "roman fever", which entails e.g. jealousy and passion. While both knitting and strong emotions are stereotypical attributed as feminine, there is not enough socially gendered controversies worth discussing under the gender performativity theory.