A Feminine Woman Never Laughs Out Loud
Gender Performativity and Misogyny in Richard Yates's
*Revolutionary Road* and *The Easter Parade*

Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of 'Master in de taal-en letterkunde - afstudeerrichting: Engels - Italiaans'

2014-2015

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1. Introduction

Accused of being "anti-feminist, grandly patronizing women in the old style"1 and displaying "oddly misogynistic turns" (Charlton-Jones, 116) in his novels and short-stories, the American novelist Richard Yates (1926-1992) has often been confused with the voices of certain of his protagonists. Rather than examining those voices within the cultural framework in which they function, both journalistic and scholarly criticism have looked at Yates's troublesome personal life and unequivocally identified various male protagonists of such novels as *Revolutionary Road* (1961), *A Special Providence* (1969) and *Disturbing The Peace* (1975) as the author's "alter egos" (Charlton-Jones, 24). Rather than as a reflection of the author's private life, I will approach Yates's male and female protagonists in the novels *Revolutionary Road* and *The Easter Parade* (1976) as representative of the culture they live in. If the texts show misogyny and oppression, it is because they expose the repressive character of normative gender dispositions in postwar America. In addition, I argue Yates's novels anticipate Judith Butler's theoretical work on gender performativity. The novels show gender identity to be a repetitive enactment of certain mannerisms and gestures, an enactment which empowers certain characters and silences others. Notions of femininity and masculinity are not internal realities, nor are they essential in the process of identity formation. They are constructed externally and subsequently acquired and performed, willfully by some characters, reluctantly by others. The second chapter of this dissertation will work towards a discourse perspective on gender, discussing the main differences between psychoanalytical theory on gender identity and more sociologically oriented theoretical work. Discussing the phallocentric views of Sigmund Freud and the subsequent interpretation of Freud's work by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, I will confront such views with feminist theory on sex and gender, primarily the works of Simone De Beauvoir and Judith Butler. The third chapter will define and historically situate misogyny and contextualize it within the novels' cultural framework, the American society of the 1950s and 1960s. A fourth chapter will discuss togetherness, a dominant cultural narrative in postwar America, which advocated the values of the nuclear family and clearly delineated normative gender roles for both men and women. The final chapter of this dissertation will analyze gender performativity and misogyny in Yates's novels *Revolutionary Road* and *The Easter Parade* and show how discourses on femininity, motherhood and abortion are dominated by men.

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Being "dangerously at odds with prevailing wisdom" (Charlton-Jones, 4) Yates's novels question the unspoken laws of social interaction, the credibility of gender roles and notions of selfhood and identity construction. Frequently regarded as "the product of a misanthrope's unrelentingly negative worldview" (Charlton-Jones, 5) his characters are deeply flawed and act cowardly in the face of life's great challenges. At the same time they are also deeply human and represent both the best and the worst of their culture. All but alluring to his contemporaries, Yates's work did not receive much critical acclaim nor did it draw substantial readership, precisely because it directly confronted postwar America with its inconvenient truths. His debut Revolutionary Road was nominated for the National Book Award in 1962 and The Easter Parade for the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1976, but neither did win. In his 1961 review of Revolutionary Road in the London Times the literary critic Orville Prescott stated: "No fair-minded reader could finish Revolutionary Road without admiration for Mr. Yates's impressive skill; but whether the mentally ill Wheelers deserve the five years of hard labor Mr. Yates has lavished upon them is another question." (Charlton-Jones, 29).

Yates's work was not only reprehended for its bleak worldviews, it was also frequently denounced as misogynous. His male character's views and flaws were attributed to him. In Dismembering The American Dream: The Life and Fiction of Richard Yates Kate Charlton-Jones brings the authorial figure into her analysis and claims that "there is such an uncomfortable, recurring veneer of distaste permeating almost all of his allusions to the female sex drive that it is hard not to link his depictions of such desire to a fear of women or even (possible) confusion about his own sexuality." (12). Rather than permeating through "his" allusions to the female sex drive I argue both distaste towards and obsession with female sexuality are a product of male discourse in a society which obsesses with gender normativity and completely disallows challenging its monolithic character. In The New American Novel of Manners Jerome Klinkowitz claims that the narrative vision in Yates's novels is "bird's eye-sociological" (17) and that Revolutionary Road is not just a novel but also a "social study" (18). To involve the author in that social study, to equate narrative voice with protagonists, to make the considerations about the role of women "his considerations" and call them "apparently contradictory" (Charlton-Jones, 152) ignores the fact that the novels' characters function within a normative framework of gender performances which prescribes and penalizes in case of deviance. If the texts show misogyny and oppression of women, which they certainly do, it is because Frank and April Wheeler in Revolutionary Road are not "mentally ill" as mentioned above, but because they serve as "their culture's most representative members" (Klinkowitz, 18). They are part of a culture in which the power to
prescribe gender norms lies invariably with men, but in which at the same time men unwilling to perform according to certain standards are demonized. Performing outside of culturally constructed gender norms provokes questions about mental stability, as is the case for characters such as April Wheeler and John Givings in *Revolutionary Road* and Andrew Crawford in *The Easter Parade*. Crawford, a former lover of *The Easter Parade*'s protagonist Emily Grimes, is a victim of the insurmountable obstacle that is normative masculinity. Unable to perform adequately sexually he "decided to see a psychoanalyst" (*The Easter Parade*, 60), not because he is thoroughly convinced of the need, but rather because he internalizes a feeling of failure, a lack of approval. Gender normativity also excludes homosexuality. Lars Ericson for example, for whom, unlike Andrew Crawford, there was "certainly nothing wrong" with his "manhood" (*The Easter Parade*, 63) engages in a relationship with Emily Grimes, but does so in order to conform to heterosexual normativity. Rather painfully then, Emily discovers there is a man in his life for whom he will eventually leave her. This dissertation will analyze how in Yates's novels those gender norms are established, what they entail and how they are enforced, and will show gender identity to be performative rather than an innate and natural given.

The culture in which Yates's characters function or fail to function is one of containment narratives. In *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* Alan Nadel claims the following to be the era's most important cultural phenomena: "strictly censored television programming, the drop in average marriage age, the suburban housing development, the public elaboration of dating etiquette and the rigidly constrictive and restrictive structure of female undergarments." (117). The American 1950s and 1960s hailed 'better safe than sorry' as its main creed and restricted domestic life in various possible ways. Containment, originally a political strategy to counter the communist threat, furtively seeped into the suburban living room. If mainstream culture meant to safeguard domesticity, togetherness and the nuclear family, countercultural movements such as the Beat Generation in the 1950s and the budding hippie movement in the 1960s sought to counter the trend. In *Revolutionary Road* it is Frank Wheeler who in his adolescent years, not unlike Beat icons Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady, dreams of hopping on freight trains and hitchhiking West to live in the great wide open. In his adult years Frank becomes the complete antithesis of everything the Beat Generation stood for. In *The Easter Parade* the hippie movement is mentioned rather negatively, which roots Yates's protagonists firmly in mainstream culture: "I mean you see these kids today running around with their long hair and their crummy jeans and their crazy ideas, and what do they know? Am I right? I mean what
do they know?” (194). In The Politics Of Reality, a series of essays in feminist theory, the American philosopher Marilyn Frye confirms the mistrust towards hippies precisely because "their clothing and style gave off mixed and contradictory sex-announcements" (24) and thus were challenging to rigid gender structuring.

Located in suburbia, "a site of material plenty for building futures and moving up" (Nicolaides and Wiese, 1) but also a thoroughly gendered place, especially Revolutionary Road's white middle-class protagonists try to escape that spatial embodiment of normative gender identity. The Easter Parade focuses less on suburbia and centers around the sisters Sarah and Emily Grimes, the first trying to find fulfillment in marriage, the second pursuing her journalistic aspirations. Both novels' titles are significant, as Sarah Grimes in her adolescent years states: "I don't care about the silly Easter Parade (The Easter Parade, 26). As this dissertation will show however, parading or performing her femininity is what she has been doing throughout her entire life. The title Revolutionary Road indicates not only the name of the Wheelers' street but also the initial revolutionary character of their defiance of normative gender identities, and is commented on by the novel's Socrates, the supposedly insane John Givings: “The nice, young Wheelers on Revolutionary Road; the nice, young revolutionaries on Wheeler Road” (195). In order to escape the suburban dreariness of the Revolutionary Hill Estates, April Wheeler suggests they move to Paris, where her husband would be able to pursue his Sartrian aspirations whilst she would provide for the family. Their cinematic heroics are brutally undercut when Frank, whose masculinity was threatened by April's plans to move to Europe from the very start, clings to what is comfortable. Grasping a promotion at work, their frightened children and April's pregnancy as an excuse to cancel their relocation, Frank's mask falls off and rather than revolutionary he is shown to be the prime enforcer of both normative masculinity and femininity. Towards the end of the novel, rather than "a boy who'd danced with you and made you laugh and walked you home afterwards, talking about himself all the way", April starts to understand: "The only real mistake, the only wrong and dishonest thing, was ever to have seen him as anything more than that" (Revolutionary Road, 320). In a desperate attempt to save her European dreams April induces a miscarriage in the private sphere of her home, causing her to die of internal bleeding after being rushed to the hospital. The question we are left with is whether she tried to terminate her pregnancy or her life. Where Revolutionary Road focuses primarily on normative gender performances within marriage, The Easter Parade parallels the lives of Sarah and Emily Grimes. Early on in the novel, Sarah marries her too good to be true Hollywood hero, Tony Wilson. Emily's jealousy of her older sister's amorous adventure
indicates that from the very brim of adolescence, notions of femininity, beauty and submissiveness are inseparable. As the girls grow into adulthood the obsession with Tony Wilson seems to have been nothing more than obsession with an abstraction. Wilson increasingly monopolizes his wife’s discourse and as is uncovered later on in the novel, physical abuse was always an easy solution. Emily on the other hand, has various relationships which all seem to fail because of her unwillingness to behave in a feminine manner. Sarah’s misery leads to excessive alcoholism and will eventually cause her death. Upon asking her nephew Tony Jr. how her sister died, Emily discovers that she died of a liver ailment "complicated by a fall she took in the house" (The Easter Parade, 183). Much like Revolutionary Road, the Easter Parade leaves a question unanswered. Did Sarah actually fall by accident, or was she pushed down the stairs by her husband?

Overall, the novels bring to light the sheer power of gender normativity and the impossibility of challenging or negotiating those norms without taking drastic measures. Established notions of masculinity and femininity vastly overshadow the individual lives of the characters, insofar that they induce the novels' main dramas, in Revolutionary Road the death or suicide of April Wheeler, in The Easter Parade the supposedly accidental death of Sarah Grimes. An analysis of Revolutionary Road will focus more on the performative aspect of gender, whilst in the analysis of The Easter Parade the focus will be, even if those same ideas about performativity are present, on the oppression and subordination of women.
2. Gender: towards a discourse perspective

Central to the discussion on the nature of gender in the twentieth century was the question whether gender is an internal truth and thus an essential part of the formation of personhood, or whether it is constructed according to sociocultural standards and subsequently acquired or imposed. In their study of feminine sexuality in the work of the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and especially his French disciple Jacques Lacan, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose claim that psychoanalysis "could not subscribe to a currently popular sociological distinction in which a person is born with their biological gender to which society - general environment, parents, education, the media - adds a socially defined sex, masculine or feminine." (3). Although I will use 'masculine' and 'feminine' as gender dispositions rather than sexed bodies, in psychoanalysis these predicates cannot be added to a person because a person is formed primarily by and through his or her sexuality. Freud’s views on gender were thoroughly phallocentric as his work privileged the phallic over the non-phallic and stressed the importance of the father in the formation of children. His views have been frequently identified as biological determinism, a myth which feminists like Betty Friedan or the more theoretical Simone De Beauvoir and Judith Butler have tried to debunk. Biological determinism sees a causal relationship between sex and gender. Gender identities are a "direct product of biological factors still operative" (Stanley, quoted in Jackson and Scott, 31) whilst more sociologically oriented theories deem that relationship to be arbitrary. Opposite to such psychoanalytical theories are for example the existential feminism of Simone De Beauvoir or the performativity theory of Judith Butler, both of which emphasize the constructedness and thus the fictional status of fixed gender dispositions. De Beauvoir is well-known for *The Second Sex* (1949) in which she claims that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." (293), affirming that gender identity is acquired rather than innate. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is closely linked to the work of De Beauvoir, to whom she claims indebtedness. For Butler to be a gender is "to be engaged in ongoing cultural interpretation of bodies and, hence, to be dynamically positioned within a field of cultural possibilities"2. This chapter will briefly look at the differences between a psychoanalytical approach and a more sociological approach of gender identity and work towards Butler’s

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theory on gender performativity, which will subsequently be used to analyze gender in the novels of Richard Yates.

Sigmund Freud's theoretical work situates gender difference, becoming masculine or feminine, in the loss of an object of desire in the early stages of a child's life. Accused of phallocentrism, for example by De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, the Austrian psychoanalyst was primarily concerned with the masculine, insofar that he "modeled" the course of woman's destiny "on that of masculine destiny, merely modifying some of the traits" (De Beauvoir, 51). Central to Freud's conception of sexual and subsequently gender difference are the castration complex and penis envy in the realm of the unconscious. Both castration anxiety for male children and penis envy for female children occur in the Oedipal or phallic phase, a third stage of psychological development situated between the ages of three and six. The phallic phase is characterized by a growing awareness of the genital organs and a yearning for the first object of desire, the mother, for both male and female children. For the male child, the desire for his mother causes a fear of castration, a punishment by the father for whom the child's desire of the mother is possibly dangerous. The female child develops penis envy, because having a penis is the only way to sexually possess the mother. In maturing, the resolution for castration anxiety for the male child lies in identification with rather than repulsion of the father. The child accepts and identifies with the authority of the father, which entails that he will also one day be a father and thus be able to possess an object of desire. For certain feminists the identification with the father's authority has meant acquiring "a superego that embodies the patriarchal rules" (Johnson, 161). The resolution for the female child's envy of the phallus lies in giving up the mother as an object of desire and identifying with her since they share a common lack. From early on, the relationship between masculinity and femininity is thoroughly asymmetrical, as having the phallus is not equated with having something equally valuable, but confronted with the lack of a phallus. Returning to Johnson's patriarchal superego, the question arises as to what a superego exactly implies. In Freud's terminology a superego is one of the three parts of a person's psyche. The *Id* contains the basic instinctual and animalistic drives and acts according to the pleasure principle, whilst the superego is authoritative, internalizes rules and punishes in case of deviance. The *ego* then, acts according to the reality principle, trying to satisfy certain instinctual drives but always under the watchful eye of the superego. If we follow Freud, the male child internalizes a masculine superego, the authority of the father, as castration is supposedly his weapon. The mother on the other hand does not react positively or negatively to the male child's desires and is apparently powerless. The physical phallus is central to being accepted into masculine
adulthood. It is a crucial part in the formation of the masculine subject, as the boy "gives up the mother and prepares to join the world of males" (Johnson, 163). Giving up the mother involves accepting the power to choose another future object of desire. The mother remains passive whilst the male child actively empowers himself. The internalized masculine superego can thus indeed be read as a continuation of patriarchy.

The possibility of failure in giving up the desire for the mother and identifying with the father is not theorized in Freud’s work. Does this lead to a failure of masculinity? If not the father's authority but the mother is internalized, does this lead to a feminine superego rather than a masculine one? Does this consolidate "feminine libidinal dispositions" (Butler, 81) and thus homosexuality in the male child? As Mitchell and Rose claim that "at the root of Freud's assigning parallel Oedipal roles to girls and boys lies a notion of a natural and normative heterosexual attraction" (10) the question remains unresolved in Freud's own work.

If the possible outcomes of castration anxiety are not conclusive, neither are those of penis envy in female children. The focus on the phallus, or rather on being envious of the phallus, is once again proof of the phallocentric views of Freud. Penis envy implies that the female child cannot engage with the mother like the father does because of the absence of a penis. Subsequently, rather than to desire the mother, as she did initially, the girl identifies with the mother because they supposedly have the absence of the phallus in common. Again Butler sees the possibility of not identifying with the mother but identifying with the object of loss, the father, followed by a "consolidation of masculinity" (81) in the female child. As Freud was made aware of the flaws of his theory, primarily on the premises of the natural assumption of heterosexuality in both male and female children, he sought to explain homosexuality with the concept of primary bisexuality. However, the father is never an object of desire for the male child. It is only the female child whose first object of desire is the mother, and who only in a second phase identifies with the mother and thus feminine heterosexual desire. Maturity means letting go of some initially presumed bisexuality, and thus Freud's theory lacks consistency. Butler's most important criticism of Freud is that he "has no idea what these preformed dispositions (masculine/feminine) are" (82). I agree when Butler states that the dispositions masculine and feminine in Freud's work "are not the primary sexual facts of the psyche, but produced effects of a law imposed by culture and by the complicitous and transvaluating acts of the ego ideal." (86). In other words, notions of femininity and masculinity in Freud do not follow from a natural psychological growth or psychosexual maturity. They are already patterned within a sociocultural framework. Masculinity and femininity are not "primary or constitutive facts of sexual life" but "effects of
a law which, internalized, produces and regulates discrete gender identity and heterosexuality" (Butler, 87).

One of Freud's disciples, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, also suggested the division between having the phallus and not having the phallus. The difference with Freud is that for Lacan this opposition between having (masculinity) and being (femininity) the phallus is the effect of a law, in Lacan's terms the Symbolic. Having the phallus means to be the central locus of meaning creation, whilst being the phallus is to be "the reflector and guarantor of an apparent masculine subject position" (Butler, 61). For Lacan the human subject only becomes a subject in language, which is governed by rules and thoroughly symbolic. Rather than a physical attribute like in Freud, Lacan interprets the phallus as a "signifier" (Mitchell and Rose, 79) in the tradition of the Swiss structuralist Ferdinand De Saussure. A signifier is a form to which a meaning is arbitrarily added in order to form a linguistic or semiotic sign. The arbitrary link between form and meaning is in Lacan a product of the law, or the Symbolic. Once again, like in Freud, female sexuality, being the phallus, is defined from an essentially phallocentric position: "women must become, must 'be' precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the essential function of men" (Butler, 61).

In his article 'The Meaning of the Phallus' (1958) Lacan contends that "if the phallus is a signifier then it is in the place of the other that the subject gains access to it" (Mitchell and Rose, 83), claiming that the phallus as a signifier only receives its meaning when it is reflected, attributed meaning, in the desire of the other, in this case the female or the mother in Freud's phallic phase. Not unlike Freud, who privileged heterosexual desire, Lacan states that: "If the desire of the mother is the phallus", not to be interpreted as a mother literally desiring a physical phallus but rather her desire itself being or signifying the phallus, "then the child wished to be the phallus so as to satisfy this desire" (Mitchell and Rose, 83). The male child gains access to the signifier phallus in the desire of the mother, and thus has, whilst the female child does not have because she cannot satisfy the desire for the mother. The male child sees his phallus confirmed as signifier, from which a masculine disposition follows, and upon noticing a lack of a physical phallus, the feminine disposition of female children is defined in function of that signifier. So how do women become the phallus, what is to be the phallus? For Judith Butler to be the phallus is a function of having the phallus, it means "to be signified by the paternal law, to be both its object and its instrument, and in structuralist terms, the "sign" and promise of its power" (62). Lacan claims that to be the phallus is to engage in masquerade, but what do women mask? Do they mask the absence of the phallus and more importantly why do they? Lacan's answer is that women do mask the lack of the
phallus within the Symbolic, the paternal law, and through that masquerade female desire is hidden. Having and being the phallus is based purely on male desire, and indicates that the law, the Symbolic, is in fact a paternal law. Like Freud's work then, Lacan's theory seemingly consolidates both patriarchy and heterosexual normativity. Where does female desire surface? The answer is simple, it does not. The term 'masquerade' implies that it is somehow a willful and conscious process, but it is not women who mask, it is the Symbolic which masks and this is crucial to understanding Lacan. What cannot be overlooked in his work is the notion that the signifier phallus belongs to a structure, a law, and that its meaning is derived purely from that law, rather than being defined by Lacan himself. The signifier phallus is constructed in discourse, and Lacan, in the article mentioned above, claims that "ideal or typical manifestations of behaviour in both sexes" are "propelled into comedy" (Mitchell and Rose, 84) precisely because they are a product of a repressive law and therefore untruthful. Butler points out the ambiguity of masquerade and claims that on the one hand it "may be understood as the performative production of a sexual ontology, an appearing that makes itself convincing as a 'being'" (64), which comes close to Butler's own theory on gender performativity. On the other hand it can be interpreted as a "denial of a feminine desire that presupposes some prior ontological femininity regularly unrepresented by the phallic economy" (Butler, 64). Is there such a thing as femininity or masculinity predating the law, are there gender dispositions before the Symbolic? For Lacan it would seemingly be so, since in his article 'The Meaning of the Phallus' he claims: "I would say that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade" (Mitchell and Rose, 84). Does Lacan pretend to know what the essential parts of femininity are, and is there an essential femininity? This is where Butler and Lacan differ substantially. For Butler a "true body beyond the law" (127) is an illusion, and even if we subscribe to the idea of essential masculinity and femininity, there would be, in my opinion, no possibility of knowing what those dispositions actually are, for what was before the law we do not know and what is beyond the law we are yet to discover.

Opposite to those psychoanalytical theories which identify gender dispositions as a substantial part of identity formation from early on in life, is the theoretical work of the French feminist Simone De Beauvoir, for whom biological femaleness and sociological femininity are strictly separated. Rather than an internal development gender is externally patterned and imposed. In The Second Sex De Beauvoir states that "no biological, psychical or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society" (293). She
claims that Freud's phallic phase, a stage in which infants distance themselves from the mother's body, is not so much an internal process of identification, but rather a phase of "finitude, solitude and abandonment in an alien world" in which the child alienates its existence "in an image whose reality and value will be established by others" (De Beauvoir, 294). From very early on, external approval seems a crucial factor in establishing gender identity.

Female children are allowed physical affectations and care longer than male children, but rather than a privilege it is because "there are greater designs for him" (De Beauvoir, 296). From an early age boys are made aware of a feeling of superiority, not inspired spontaneously by the simple virtue of having a penis, but because "he feels it through the attitude of those around him" (De Beauvoir, 296). Rather than Freud's interpretation, for whom the penis leads the child to assume masculinity and a patriarchal superego, male superiority is nurtured by both fathers and mothers. Freud and De Beauvoir do however have one fact in common, the consolidation of gender identity follow from a loss, a dissociation from the mother's body. The male genital organ thus inspires pride whilst for female children their genital organs remain a taboo. Freud's penis envy could well be a consequence of this fact, rather than an active desire towards the mother. Even if the female child "does not really envy those who posses one" (303), not having a penis is decisive in the young girl's growth as "infantile coquetry" (De Beauvoir, 304) from early on emphasizes a submissive position rather than independence and superiority. Attributed a far more passive role by parents, environment and by extension society, for the female child anatomy is destiny. In his autonomy a boy pleases primarily himself, whilst a girl "must try to please" (De Beauvoir, 305). Puberty sees a continuation of this passivity as girls are pushed into a waiting role, waiting for a man, waiting for a bright future together, whilst for boys, in De Beauvoir's views, girls become "the attributes his sensuality requires" (394). Gender identity becomes a layer added to a physical sex, not an internal and active, although unconscious, identification but an external demand for recognition. It is in these demands made of women and men, the hierarchical relation between gender dispositions within a patriarchy is evident. According to the French feminist "the right of man to relieve his sexual desire is more or less openly recognized, whereas woman is confined within marriage: for her the act of the flesh, if not sanctified by a sacrament, is a fault, a fall, a defeat, a weakness" (De Beauvoir, 397). As will be shown in the chapter on misogyny, women have been blamed from "a fall" from purity throughout history. Within marriage that purity is safeguarded by the husband, for whom his wife has become an object, cherished when submissive but oppressed nonetheless.
Simone De Beauvoir also analyzed language and concluded that is thoroughly gendered. The subject is always masculine, an "unmarked universal" (Butler, 16) whilst the female body is marked with a certain otherness. Luce Irigaray agreed with De Beauvoir, but at the same time saw her using that phallogocentric language. A simple example from The Second Sex is the use of the personal pronoun 'he' when talking about the infant or the child, whether they are male or female. "Phallogocentrism offers a name to eclipse the feminine and take its place" (quoted in Butler, 16) Irigaray claims, but how is one to operate outside of such an asymmetrical signifying system? In Je, tu, nous: Toward a Culture of Difference Irigaray claims we should liberate language but at the same time realizes the sheer impossibility of it: "Subjective liberation requires language free from rules that constrain sexual difference or cancel it out (though if this were at all possible, it would be by magic)" (33).

A final theory analyzed is that of Judith Butler on gender performativity in her acclaimed study Gender Trouble, which will be used to examine the performative character of gender in Richard Yates's novel in the final chapter of this dissertation. Butler's work is related to De Beauvoir's work, but unlike De Beauvoir she does not radically disconnect sex from gender. For both however, gender identity as an inner truth, as it can be seen in psychoanalytical theory, is a fiction "inscribed on the surface of bodies" (Butler, 186). Unlike De Beauvoir, Butler does not subscribe to the idea of a "radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders (10). If gender is disconnected from sex, then both masculinity and femininity serve as a "free-floating article" (Butler, 10). In this way, masculinity might be attributed to a female body, and femininity to a male body. Since this is not the case, the discontinuity between biological sex and sociological gender ignores the fact that sex, like gender, is already a construct. Sex is produced and not "prediscursive" or "prior to culture" (Butler, 11). Sex as we know it does not prefigure Lacan's Symbolic, but is shaped by it. Where Lacan saw, as mentioned above, some notion of femininity before the law, outside of discursive construction, Butler deems both gender and sex to be culturally constructed:

"Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature, gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts.” (Butler, 11)
What De Beauvoir fails to do, is to "take into account the full complexity and subtlety of the law" (Butler, 127) when it comes to the supposedly naturally given sex. Biological sex itself is constructed in a way in which gender is more easily, or more logically according to the law, inscribable. Another focal point of *Gender Trouble* is to establish how a matrix of intelligible genders functions. Butler defines intelligible or culturally legible genders as "those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire." (23). The first task in a literary analysis of gender should be to define what is legible and what is not. Different from De Beauvoir, intelligible genders are not imposed from an early age, but they are enacted and performed. *Gender Trouble* does not look at childhood and a possible awareness of sexual difference early on, which in my opinion is one of its few weaknesses. If Butler defines gender as "a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (192) there is no further inquiry to how children become actors. Does enacting or performing an intelligible gender identity come naturally with the maturing of the child, or is the child taught to become an actor? Despite these uncertainties, Butler's theory on performativity leaves few other questions unanswered. Performing gender entails a "stylized repetition of acts" (190), also called gender acts, and serves as "a strategy of survival within compulsory systems" (Butler, 191). Those unwilling to perform according to the norms of these compulsory systems are penalized. If Butler sees possibilities of gender transformation, of a negotiation of what is intelligible within a sociocultural framework, because of the arbitrary rather than logical status of fixed gender dispositions, then the first question must always be to what degree any cultural framework, any "social temporality" (192), allows subversion or negotiation. The last chapter of this dissertation will apply Butler's performativity theory to two novels of Richard Yates, and analyze how performativity in Yates's novels corresponds with or differs from Butler.
3. Misogyny

From ritualized forms of woman hating in primitive societies to the patriarchal structuring of twenty-first century society, misogyny has been a recurring and pervasive phenomenon throughout universal history. Since "most forms of misogyny [...] involve some concept of purity and pollution" (Gilmore, 138) misogyny seems to originate in some kind of loss. Rather than associating impurity with male desire women have traditionally been identified as provoking sinfulness, subverting order and challenging morality, and their dubious legacy as "god-given ills" (Gilmore, 3) is persistent. This chapter will briefly define and analyze both causes and consequences of misogyny and examine how and in what forms misogyny is present within the cultural framework of Yates's novels.

From its very early days, Western society has been confronted with misogyny, both in mythology and scripture of various religious doctrines. A common theme is the loss of mankind's original innocence, whether it is Pandora, Zeus' poisonous gift for mankind, or Eve and the parable of Original Sin. Sent by the almighty to punish Prometheus for his insolence, Pandora opens the pithos, or Pandora's box, from which evil spreads over the world. The biblical story is similar, but it is not so much Pandora's actions as Eve's femaleness itself which causes the downfall of mankind. Not only is she herself easily corruptible, she also corrupts Adam by offering him the forbidden fruit. Outside of religious doctrine and mythology the founding fathers of the Western philosophical tradition, in particular Plato and Aristotle, advocated submissiveness and subordinated women's duty to obey to man's presumed ability to lead. Misogyny does not necessarily originate in classical times however, since even before antiquity diverse preliterate people spoke of "the vagina as a gateway through which evil enters the world, as something 'uncanny', the portal to a dark and menacing underworld." (Gilmore, 4). Classical Greece did however have countless female monsters and mythological creatures. Next to Pandora, there is Circe, the witch who turned helpless men into pigs. There are various kinds of nymphs, sirens and naiads who distract men from their truthful and heroic paths by the simple virtue of being women and of course there is the vengeful and fiery Medea who, betrayed by the hero Jason, killed her sons to retaliate. In his essay 'Medieval Misogyny' Howard Bloch states that denunciating women "constitutes something on the order of a cultural constant, reaching back to the Old Testament as well as to Ancient Greece and extending through the fifteenth century."³ I would argue it

extended well throughout the twentieth century and might still be extending. The Middle Ages had its witch hunts and saw various church fathers project Eve's corruptibility and sinfulness unto every woman. Throughout history misogyny has never not been present, as the Western literary canon saw figures such as Montaigne, Nietzsche, Strindberg and Sartre cherish misogynist sentiment.

A further historical survey, whilst surely valuable, would diverge from the central focus of Yates's novels, the twentieth century and its hierarchy of normative gender performances. Diachronic analysis does show however, that twentieth century male obsession with female purity and impurity is not in any way an isolated phenomenon, but has served as a cultural artifact throughout history. The American twentieth century, or at least until the 1960s, saw the status of gender hierarchy, valuing one and devaluing the other, as practically unquestionable. The belief in a natural divide between men and women went almost unchallenged until the second wave of feminism, even though in the first half of the twentieth century the works of for example Georg Simmel and Margaret Mead indicated the "cultural malleability of gender" (Jackson and Scott, 7). The logical status of that natural divide however, and thus a natural hierarchy, originates in a historically grown phobia and hatred of women. Inequality and oppression were justified by biological roles as biological femaleness, womanhood and motherhood were inextricably connected. The fact that womanhood and manhood are culturally defined by men, and thus also a product of cultural discourse throughout the ages, as mentioned in chapter 2, was ignored but for feminism it meant "that there are centuries of sociocultural values to be rethought, to be transformed" (Irigaray, 11). Theory on misogyny and oppression surfaced in the debate on inequality led by the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. The presence of misogyny in various forms and various sociocultural layers of twentieth century society has lead to multiple definitions within feminist theory, but most are based on common characteristics. In The Politics Of Reality the American feminist Marilyn Frye equates misogyny with "male chauvinism", "sexism" and "male supremicism", and in her own essays uses the term "phallism" (41), all of which point to a situation of oppressor and oppressed, or in case of her own terminology, a hierarchy between phallic and non-phallic which reminds us of Freud and Lacan. So much has been agreed upon, but definitions of oppressor and oppressed, or man and woman, vary infinitely. In Gender Trouble Judith Butler states that considering both oppressor and especially oppressed as fixed and stable categories "has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of 'women' are constructed" (19). The same goes for the oppressor. If the category is one, does it imply all men are oppressors
and none are oppressed? In her essay 'Oppression' Frye claims the term oppression is misused when applied to men and that it has become a fashionable term for every single form of suffering: "The woman's restraint is part of a structure oppressive to women; the man's restraint is part of a structure oppressive to women" (15). Frye does not elaborate on the meaning of "man's restraint" but if we are to interpret it as non-acceptable behavior to heteronormative standards, then how is the structure not oppressive to homosexual men? Is misogyny, as David Gilmore contend in his book Misogyny: the male malady an exclusively male problem and are all men misogynists? Can women who continue oppressive structures, as some do in Yates's novels, what Frye identifies as "our own internalized woman-hating" (53), be seen as misogynous? To what degree and how is misogyny a conscious phenomenon in the mind of both oppressor and oppressed?

Its causes are another topic of disagreement. In Strong Mothers, Weak Wives, Miriam Johnson individuates two explanations for misogyny. On the one hand there are "simplistic 'role theory' explanations of male dominance that suggest that to do away with male dominance, all we need to do is to redefine roles or eliminate gender-based role differentiation" (71). Another motivational explanation is psychoanalytical and focuses on "the generation of motivation that is nonrational and operates outside conscious awareness" (Johnson, 71). Johnson claims the latter to be the more satisfying alternative and individuates two hypotheses: the 'fear and envy' hypothesis and the 'tenuous masculine identity' hypothesis. The first stresses the importance of the preoedipal period and the bond of the infant with his mother, in opposition to Freud's phallocentric oedipal period. Central to the hypothesis is the fear of not being acknowledged by the mother, on whom the infant is dependent, which is "the prime motivating factor in men's compulsion to prove themselves and their manhood and to seek to possess many women or to attempt to diminish the self-respect of the woman." (74). The envy originates in an "awe for women's capacity for motherhood" (Johnson, 74), which almost seems a complete reversal of Freud's penis envy. According to Johnson we must accept these nonrational motivations "that make us expect perfection from mothers and fear abandonment and humiliation by them" but it is not enough, because it minimizes the "positive consequences that being mothered has for both men and women." (77). The 'tenuous masculine identity' hypothesis on the other hand centers on the shift from feminine identification to masculine identification in children. Because of the absence of a father in the upbringing of the child, the mother becomes the prime institutionalizing force of rules and good behavior. As a reaction against that power, the male child will try to prove his masculinity, because it is not a "secure sense of gender" (Johnson,
and will unconsciously do so throughout his life. Again in contrast with Freud, masculinity is not an identification with masculine authority, but a reaction against another possible form of authority.

Butler and Irigaray however argue within the logic of what Johnson calls "simplistic role theory" and claim misogyny and oppression to be firmly rooted in sociocultural constructions. In *Je, tu, nous; Toward a Culture of Difference* the French feminist Luce Irigaray claims that if a culture is to truly value women as equal to men but with respect for difference, we should change "the conceptions of truths and values structuring the social order" (22). Butler goes even further and claims we must cure ourselves culturally conceived notions of sex and gender: "The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities (127). Is misogyny a psychoanalytical condition and how is such a mass psychosis cured, if it can be cured at all? Or does the possibility of a solution lie within cultural revolution? Whatever the answer, in this dissertation I will follow Irigaray and Butler and adhere to a "simplistic" motivation behind misogyny.

In the novel's cultural framework, the postwar era in America, Gilmore claims *matriphobia* to be the most persistent form of misogyny, as a reaction to the supposedly emasculating effect of the "predatory" American matriarch's "entry into the workplace" (148). In order to keep women out of the workplace they were confined to the private sphere of the home, as a mother and a housewife. Central to their confinement was the togetherness narrative, as will be explained in chapter 4. Betty Friedan goes so far as to compare the role of the housewife in postwar America to the Nazi slogan "*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*" (24). I would however argue that no form of misogyny prevailed over another. Women who were not mothers experienced the same oppression, and maybe even worse, as women who were. Gynophobia, a phobia and hate of women's bodies was equally present, and may even be a direct consequence of phallocentric nurturing. The female sexual drive outside of marriage was to be condemned, and the choice of sexual partners lay invariably with men. Even if Friedan argues that femininity in the 1950s and 1960 included "the desires of the flesh" (31) and images of purity and pollution were not as clear-cut as they had been throughout history, those desires were only approved within marriage. According to Friedan the split in the image did not concern purity and corruption of that purity as much as housewives and their supposed counterparts or even enemies, career women. Those supposedly functioning outside of repressive structures such as marriage and the nuclear family were demonized. The 1947 psychological study *Modern Women: The Lost Sex* by Lundberg and Farnham warned against
careers and higher education, because they led to the "masculinization of women with enormously dangerous consequences to the home, the children dependent on it and to the ability of the woman, as well as her husband, to obtain sexual gratification" (quoted in Friedan, 28). Misogyny was surely also ideological and it refused women the possibility to bring their experience into their own subjectivity, even if it concerned, as Adrienne Rich testifies, matters of pregnancy and abortion:

"My individual, seemingly private pains as a mother, the individual, seemingly private pains of the mothers around me and before me, whatever our class or color, the regulation of women's reproductive power by men in every totalitarian system and every socialist revolution, the legal and technical control by men of contraception, fertility, abortion, obstetrics, gynecology, and extrauterine reproductive experience - all are essential to the patriarchal system, as is the negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers." (Rich, 33)

Thus rather than individuating one particular form of misogyny, I would argue it is omnipresent. As the last chapter of this dissertation will examine, misogyny was both ideological and personal. It was both passive in totalizing societal ideology and active in personal acts, the second reinforced by the first and vice versa. No part of a woman's life was under her own control, all were defined by and within male discourse. Trying to bring experience down from a collective subjectivity to a personal subjectivity is a crucial factor in dealing with oppression and misogyny, but as the last chapter of this dissertation will show, the possibilities are few to none. In this dissertation I will use Marilyn Frye's definition of misogyny: "cultural and economic structures which create and enforce the elaborate and rigid patterning of sex-marking and sex-announcing which divide the species, along lines of sex, into dominators and subordinates. Individual acts and practices are sexist which reinforce and support those structures, either as culture, or as shapes taken on by the enculturated animals." (38). Sex-announcing behaviour is to be understood as gender performances, sex-marking indicates the assessment of gender identity, even if the performance does not correspond with cultural standards. Different from Frye however, I will not approach categories of dominators and subordinates as completely continuous and coherent.
4. Togetherness, a containment narrative

"How did we ever get into this strange little dream world of the Donaldsons and the Cramers and the Wingates - oh yes, and the Campbells, too" (Revolutionary Road, 116) April Wheeler asks her husband Frank after having spent several tedious hours small talking, but for the most part drinking at the Campbell's place down the road on Revolutionary Hill. "Because everything you said was based on this great premise of ours that we're somehow very special and superior to the whole thing, and I wanted to say 'But we're not! Look as us! We're just like the people you're talking about! We are the people you're talking about!'" (Revolutionary Road, 116). What April fulminates against is what Betty Friedan in The Feminine Mystique (1963) identifies as "the end of the road" (32) for middle-class white housewives in postwar America: togetherness. Within the confines of marriage, Friedan defines togetherness as "vicarious living" (28). Togetherness attributes and continuously reinforces identity primarily through marriage and the raising of a family. The suburban heroine was first of all wife and mother, and only in the second place, if at all, a woman. It is what April dreads when during one of many fights she yells out that Frank has got her "safely in a trap" (Revolutionary Road, 28). In Strong Mothers, Weak Wives Miriam Johnson questions the status of these social roles as a single entity: "women are one thing when seen as wives and quite another when seen as mothers" (26). According to Johnson the mother role does not imply dependency or subordination: "the mother role involves caring for and nurturing dependents, while the wife role, if unmitigated by other status-giving relationships, involves being dependent on and in varying degrees subordinate to the husband" (26). Within the conjugal togetherness narrative however, the role of mother role does bring about economic dependence and does imply subordination, namely when it is forced upon women, for example when Frank Wheeler considers April's refusal to have more children a "sort of denial of womanhood" (Revolutionary Road, 244). Togetherness emphasized unity rather than individuality and ideally attempted "to weave both goals, the romantic couple and the child-centered home" (Weiss, 139) into a scene of domestic bliss. For Friedan it was a corrupted illusion, for many others togetherness in suburbia held out the welcome promise of fulfillment "after enduring years of hardships through the Great Depression and World War II" (Nicolaides and Wiese, 4). However insubstantial and volatile the concept might seem, it stirred up concrete problems. For Friedan it created 'the problem that has no name'. It was a "frantic illusion that togetherness can impart a spiritual content to the dullness of domestic
routine" (Friedan, 34). What could break that dull routine was to "permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role" (Friedan, 58), or as Miriam Johnson proposes, to emphasize difference without privileging it: "women need to define themselves, to construct themselves, not in the image of men nor in the image of what man say they are but in an image they can call their own" (23).

Throughout Yates's novels The Easter Parade and especially Revolutionary Road togetherness emerges predominantly within the private sphere of marriage, respectively in that of Sarah Grimes and Tony Wilson and that of Frank and April Wheeler. In Revolutionary Road however, it can also be identified both on a corporate level, notably in Frank Wheeler's ambiguous relation to the Knox Company, and within the Wheelers' small centralized community on Revolutionary Hill. Within the novels' cultural framework, togetherness serves as a "containment narrative" (Nadel, 4). In Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age Alan Nadel identifies the atomic age as an age in which "a relatively small set of narratives" was accepted "by a relatively large portion of the population" (4). In the Cold War era "conformity became a positive value in and of itself" and even a "form of public knowledge" (Nadel, 4). Personal narratives, "the composite of stories that individuals tell themselves so as to construct out of sensation a concept of identity" (Nadel, 245) were subordinate to these containment narratives, in which the focus lay mainly on promoting and even "fetishizing" (Nadel, 3) domestic security. Originally a political strategy to counter the communist threat, the "containment of atomic secrets" soon extended itself to the containment "of sexual license, of gender roles, of nuclear energy, and of artistic expression" (Nadel, 5). In Uncontained: Urban fiction in Postwar America Elizabeth Wheeler adds racial segregation and the containment of traumatic memory to the list. Central to the containment of gender roles were togetherness, the home and the idealized nuclear family. As Warren Susman writes in his essay 'Did Success Spoil The United States?': "Every major institution in the United States promoted the home, togetherness, and the family. One sign of this way was the family focus that proliferated in advertising: 'family-size carton, family room, family car, family film, family restaurant, family vacation.' (Quoted in Charlton-Jones, 152). The acceptance of this small set of narratives then, implies their exclusionary nature. Addressing Emily Grimes in The Easter Parade, her boyfriend Jack Flanders almost rhetorically asks her: "Doesn't every woman want a baby sometime?" (116). In the relationship, Jack clearly subscribes to preconceived notions of femininity: "I like being able to look up and see you. Moving in and out of the kitchen, hauling the vacuum cleaner,
whatever the hell you're doing" (*The Easter Parade*, 97). Not wanting to conform to Jack's notions of what womanhood and togetherness mean within a relationship, Emily tries to define her own role and soon after ends things with Jack. As the final chapter of this thesis will show however, Emily is left behind disillusioned and lonely. Klinkowitz appropriately defines her as "a person defined by what she cannot be and cannot have" (48) rather than a person defined by what she is or wants to be. Within the bonds of marriage togetherness is most prominent in *Revolutionary Road*’s young couple Frank and April Wheeler, and their children Michael and Jennifer. Throughout the novel husband and wife insist on nonconformity, and try to resist any possibility of being contaminated by the much dreaded togetherness. At the same time however, Frank Wheeler is secretly comforted by the thought of it and 'the Wheelers' and serve as "their culture's most representative members" (Klinkowitz, 18). April's "We are the people you're talking about" (*Revolutionary Road*, 116) seems a tragic realization of the inauthenticity of Frank's speeches, which always seem to come back to berating "the larger absurdities of deadly dull jobs in the city and deadly dull homes in the suburbs" (*Revolutionary Road*, 21). He thinks himself part of the happy few who are "painfully alive in a drugged and dying culture" (*Revolutionary Road*, 63). In his marriage however he values balance and symmetry above all. If April seeks to destroy the balance, by taking up household tasks which are typically his, what Johnson calls the "doctrine of separate spheres" (17), for example mowing the lawn, Frank seeks "to restore as much balance [...] possible." (*Revolutionary Road*, 41).

In attributing the household tasks into clear-cut patterns of husband and wife, Wheeler resembles the aforementioned Jack Flanders, who loves to see Emily "hauling the vacuum cleaner" (*The Easter Parade*, 97) The first is a self-proclaimed intellectual who places himself above aimless suburban drudgery, the second an insecure poet and academic, but both cling to the idea of togetherness. Being part of the 'Wheelers' is the easy way out, it allows Frank to dream of more without ever having to realize something. For April, who, being stuck at home, does not have the possibilities to accomplish her European dreams, 'The Wheelers' is the destruction of those dreams. For Friedan togetherness signifies "the disappearance of the heroine altogether, as a separate self and the subject of her own story" (32). Yates's novels address this issue directly. Examining identity construction and the heroine's story within and outside of marriage in a male dominated society, *The Easter Parade* juxtaposes the sisters Sarah and Emily Grimes, the first "striving to live a life of significance within a marriage that restricts and threatens her" (Charlton-Jones, 168), the second refusing to settle down on any other terms than her own. In *The Easter Parade*, conjugal togetherness surfaces in Sarah
Grimes and Tony Wilson's marriage through little gestures and mannerisms, for example when the couple intertwines arms when having the first drink of the night, that "old smiling, arm-entwining ritual" (The Easter Parade, 152). Rather than an authentic proof of marital bliss, togetherness is a ritual performed to keep up appearances, inside and outside of the marriage. It is reiterated to ensure identity as a unilateral agreement, its repeated performances deny Sarah Grimes a sense of self-worth. When her sister Emily, who lives and works in New York says she should come over more, Sarah responds: "I know; I'd love to; it's just that Tony hates it so. He hates the traffic, and he says everything's too expensive." (Revolutionary Road, 145). Clearly, the desires of the individual are subordinate to the validation of the unit. At times Tony Wilson completely dominates his wife's discourse: "I think you've about covered it, dear" he states "with a barely perceptible wink at their guests" (Revolutionary Road, 91) patronizing his wife who is recounting an anecdote to her guests.

As mentioned above, togetherness certainly also surfaces in the workspace and especially within corporate structures. According to historian Elaine Tyler May, in Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, the home and the family in the Cold War era "needed heavy protection against the intrusions of forces outside itself. The self-contained home held out the promise of security in an insecure world. It also offered a vision of abundance and fulfillment. As the Cold War began, young postwar Americans were homeward bound" (3). May extends Friedan's question "Why did women go home again?" (49) to young Postwar Americans in general, affirming that not only women but also male roles were highly regulated. Whilst in The Feminine Mystique the sole focus is the heroine, the enabling myth that is togetherness certainly also included men: "The man works in an office building downtown; the woman stays at home, surrounded by new, laborsaving appliances. Matters of sexuality and the body are controlled by the woman; matters of economy and production are controlled by the man." (Davidson, 7). Complementary to Friedan's 'Happy Housewife Heroine' is William Whyte's 'Organization Man', or the opposite, the "alienated corporate drone" (Davidson, 7) that is Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's Death Of a Salesman (1949). However stereotypical these representations might be, they do return in Yates's work. As those stereotypes "helped create a collective subject around which national agendas could be formed" (Davidson, 7), that collective subject is exactly what is examined in his novels. Revolutionary Road's Frank Wheeler might not completely fit the stereotype of the organization man but certainly has a lot of characteristics in common with him. In The Organization Man (1956), a critique of corporate conformity, Whyte describes men who work for and belong to the organization, and even though "they have no great sense of plight" (9),
they are defenders of the elusive American Dream. Their core values are "the sacredness of property, the enervating effect of security, the virtues of thrift, of hard work and independence" and they accept it as a "good proposition", not merely a fact of life, "that to make a living these days you must do what somebody else wants you to do." (Whyte, 10). However generalizing Whyte's study might be, especially his concept of 'belongingness', interpreted by the organization man as "the ultimate need of the individual" (Whyte, 11), is present in Yates's *Revolutionary Road*. Initially Frank Wheeler denies his need for 'belongingness' when he is looking for a job to which he will not become attached: "I want something that can't possibly touch me." (*Revolutionary Road*, 78). Later on in the novel however, we read that Frank "could not have denied a homely affection for the place itself, the Fifteenth Floor" in his corporate building and that "in a funny way he guessed he would miss old Knox when he quit" (*Revolutionary Road*, 83). Togetherness is secretly enjoyed by Frank, as it is welcomed by the organization man, for he "wants to belong together" (Whyte, 48). Free choice might prove burdensome, the comfort of the majority a safety net. Arthur Miller's play *Death Of a Salesman* depicts the opposite of Whyte's stereotype, a disillusioned aging salesman, discarded by his company, who reminisces the days when there was "respect, and comradeship, and gratitude" (Miller, 63) in the profession of salesman. Although they have different roles within their marriages, Loman's disillusionment corresponds with April Wheeler's desperation, and both cases leads to self-destruction. With Frank, Miller's protagonist shares only his marital infidelity.

The question then, is if togetherness is the specific result of the restrictive culture of the Cold War era, an age of restlessness and unease, or if it has served as a cultural artifact throughout American history. In my opinion, togetherness might be tracked back to early 17th century Puritan doctrine. One might wonder if the Puritan experience is still relevant in the 1950s and 1960s but in *The Puritan Ordeal* Andrew Delbanco states that a "grasp of Puritanism" is fundamental to an understanding of American culture and that "no matter how estranged we may feel from their experience, to speak of them (whether with recrimination or with reverence) is still in some sense to speak of our nativity" (216). Delbanco describes their doctrine as one of "a people in flight from manifold turbulence" (Delbanco, 21) for whom "the outer world loomed as irrational menace, full of 'foreign danger[s], introduced by perverted or defective' human beings." (22). To equal the foreign dangers the Puritans faced with the Cold War threat three hundred years later would be foolish, but certainly, the motivation behind the togetherness narrative is similar. President Ronald Reagan used the infamous 'city upon a hill' imagery, written down by John Winthrop in his 1630 sermon 'A
Model of Christian Charity' in his Cold War speeches in the 1980s. Reinforcing ideas of American Exceptionalism Puritanism "bequeathed to subsequent American culture a sense of the importance of God's purpose for the nation" (Campbell and Keane, 103). Although far more secularized, togetherness in the 1950s and 1960s meant to secure that exceptional country, even though it meant limiting certain liberties. In that same sermon Winthrop advocates a strong sense of community and holds the "bonds of brotherly affection" (NAAL, 91) in high esteem. In order to counter the harsh conditions the Puritans met with in the New World: "We must delight in each other, make other’s conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body" (NAAL, 101). A third kind of togetherness in Revolutionary Road therefore, next to marital togetherness and togetherness in corporate structures can be identified in a supposedly closely knit together community. Where The Easter Parade focuses more on outsiders, Frank and April Wheeler are part of a community in the Revolutionary Hill Estates. Describing the audience at the Laurel Players' first rendition of The Petrified Forest, an amateur theater group created to promote exactly that sense of community, Frank remarks: "Anyone could see they were a better than average crowd, in terms of education and employment and good health, and it was clear too that they considered this a significant evening." (Revolutionary Road, 7). Counting himself among "a better than average crowd" Frank Wheeler finds comfort in identifying with his suburban neighbors. Frank's conception of community might be far from Winthrop's brotherly intentions but much as those early Puritans Frank values a certain exclusivity and superiority. Like the interpretation of togetherness in the corporation, togetherness within the community promoted feelings of belonging. In Dismembering the American Dream: The Life and Fiction of Richard Yates however, Kate Charlton-Jones states "the colorless suburban homes he describes create a sense of longing, and not belonging" (210), a dangerous generalization, because for Frank suburbia creates exactly that sense of belonging. Whether that sense of belonging is authentic and corresponds with Frank's performance throughout the novel, will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation. Charlton-Jones however is right in stating that the character's suburban surroundings greatly influence their sense of identity. Above all, the Revolutionary Hill Estates depict balance, symmetry and tranquility:

"The Revolutionary Hill Estates had not been designed to accommodate a tragedy. Even at night, as if on purpose, the development held no looming shadows and no gaunt silhouettes. It was invincibly cheerful, a toyland of white and pastel houses whose bright, uncurtained windows winked blandly
through a dappling of green and yellow leaves. Proud floodlights were trained on some of the lawns, on
some of the neat front doors and on the hips of some of the berthed, ice-cream colored automobiles.”
(Revolutionary Road, 339)

As "monotonous, faceless, inorganically constructed arcadias" (Charlton-Jones, 197),
the Revolutionary Hill Estates are a presumed "ideal of egalitarian living" (199), but at the
same time suburbia acts as a "potent arbiter of social distinctions" and "the perception of
suburbia as the American Dream was often predicated on a restricted vision of belonging"
(Nicolaides and Wiese, 1). For those characters adhering to togetherness however the ideal
stands. In some seriously ironic foreshadowing the novel has Frank and April seeing their
new house for a first time, and has Frank concluding that:

"a sparse, skillful arrangement of furniture would counteract the prim suburban look of this too-
symmetrical living room. On the other hand, the very symmetry of the place was undeniably appealing -
the fact that all its corners made right angles, that each of its floorboards lay straight and true, that its
doors hung in perfect balance and closed without scraping in inefficient clicks" (Revolutionary Road,
31).

As "suburbia had become the spatial embodiment of the middle-class American Dream" 
(Nicolaides and Wiese, 4) the rigorous structuring of Frank's spatial surroundings and his
sense of identity grow ever closer. As the last chapter of this dissertation will analyze, Frank
Wheeler's loudmouthed rebellion hides what is underneath the surface, a deep need for
belonging.
5. A performative reading of Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* and *The Easter Parade*

If we are to acknowledge gender as a "social temporality" rather than an internal reality of the material body or a "substantial mode of identity" (Butler, 192), then the question arises as to what constitutes that social temporality, how it is enforced and especially what institutional powers, discourses and practices maintain it. Are those subject to the social temporality that is gender able to challenge its temporal character or do they acknowledge it as simply true? If legible gender performances are those which "the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler, 192), then how do possibly disruptive performances manifest themselves? If gender performances are believed by both actor and audience, are they performed consciously or unconsciously? At what point do these "sustained social performances" (Butler, 192) raise awareness and therefore possibly become unsustainable? If sustained gender performances conceal "gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, 192), then what are, if any, the possibilities to negotiate or subvert "the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders" (Butler, 190)? How is this tacit agreement questioned, or does the fact that it is tacit imply that a general unawareness of its constructedness? How do Yates's texts present gender performativity, and if Butler considers gender performances to be a "regulatory fiction" (192), do Yates's novels suggest anything beyond that fiction? In this chapter, I will answer the questions above by closely analyzing the individual performances of the novels' main characters.

Before looking at these questions, I will examine how Butler's "tacit collective agreement" (190), a normative framework of production and reproduction of intelligible gender dispositions, is established in Richard Yates's novels *Revolutionary Road* and *The Easter Parade* by looking at channels through which they are constructed, imposed and reiterated. Within the novels legible performances of both masculinity and femininity are predominantly shaped and institutionalized by popular culture, especially those depicted in Hollywood, both men's and women's magazines and advertising. Not only anti-communist propaganda but also various other confinement narratives found their way into everyday life through mass-consumption. From the early 1930s onward Hollywood promoted a "glamorous
world of romance and longing, of consumerism as a healthy 'activity' and of beauty that was intrinsically linked to power and material goods, as evinced by smart clothes and expensive cars and houses" (Charlton-Jones, 39). Hollywood tried to uphold morally high standards, for example through the Motion Picture Production Code, or the Hays Code, adopted in 1930. The code prescribed that in Hollywood productions the sanctity of marriage and the home had to be upheld. It further prohibited depicting "nudity, drug use, venereal disease, childbirth and miscegenation" (Charlton-Jones, 32). Good taste was of paramount importance and any forms of vulgarity, profanity and ridicule of national feelings were to be censored. Hollywood's stern censorship found its way through the 1950s and only dwindled with the rise of television and the influence of foreign cinema. Characters like Frank Wheeler in Revolutionary Road or Sarah Grimes in The Easter Parade are all too eagerly prepared to mirror their gender performances to those on the big screen, often oblivious to the fact that they are merely performances. In adopting certain mannerisms and imitating certain ways of speaking especially Frank resorts to a highly romanticized and idealized depiction of masculinity. In order to impress his secretary Maureen Grube with whom he is to have an affair, Frank both tragically and heroically paints "a portrait of himself as decent but disillusioned young family man, sadly and bravely at war with his environment." (Revolutionary Road, 101). Whilst for the reader it is clear Frank is only at war with himself, the theatricality of the act has them ending up on Maureen's couch after having escaped the Knox Company offices pretending to go out for lunch. Whilst the Motion Picture Production Code surely considered infidelity one of those things to be avoided, Frank seems to find in Maureen what he finds lacking in April, a willingness to perform submissiveness. Frank's distorted and romanticized conception of masculinity even goes so far that, when he comes clean to April about his affair with Maureen Grube, he arranges his voice to be "soft and strong with an occasional husky falter or hesitation that only enhanced its rhythm, combined the power of confession with the narrative grace of romantic storytelling" (Revolutionary Road, 292).

The influence of Hollywood is without a doubt also evident in certain performances of femininity. After having met Donald Clellon for a first time in her very early twenties, a man with whom she had a short-lived romance, Sarah Grimes "lowered her eyes like a movie star in a close-up. 'I think I may be in love with him.'" (The Easter Parade, 19). It does not even matter that Clellon suspiciously lied about his age and his profession, "she continued to meet and go out with him several times a week. The heroines of all the movies she had ever seen made clear that she couldn't do otherwise" (The Easter Parade, 21). Sarah's enactment of femininity also influences her younger sister, who in jealous admiration of her sister's
amorous adventures creates a feminine image of herself in the mirror: "She pouted and parted her lips very slightly, the way girls did in the movies when they were just about to be kissed." (The Easter Parade, 26). When Sarah meets her future husband Tony Wilson, Donald Clellon is quickly forgotten and in her youthful but slightly naive enthusiasm Sarah Grimes envisions her future husband looking "just like Laurence Olivier" (The Easter Parade, 23). At Sarah's funeral, the alluring picture seems to have changed as "an aging, bewildered Laurence Olivier" (The Easter Parade, 102) shows up drunk and laughing. Since on screen performances were rewarded with happy endings, surely within everyday interaction those normative gender performances must ensure happiness. Yates's novels however, show Hollywood's influence to be anything but positive.

Just as Hollywood promoted marriage and the nuclear family, magazines of all sorts encouraged certain gendered performances. In The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan argued that "judging from the women's magazines" available in her day, such as McCall's or Redbook, "it would seem that the concrete details of women's lives are more interesting than their thoughts, their ideas, their dreams" (39). Her statement is followed by mockingly asking if "the richness and realism of the detail, the careful description of small events, mask the lack of dreams, the vacuum of ideas, the terrible boredom that has settled over the American housewife?" (Friedan, 39). For Friedan the answer is clearly no, but that does not change the fact that magazines of that era depicted women primarily as mothers and wives and meant, by publishing articles more often than not related to household tasks, to reinforce those performances of femininity. In 1960 for example, the June edition of Time made 'The Suburban Wife, an American Phenomenon' its cover story and suggested that they were "Having too good a time [...] to believe that they should be unhappy" (Friedan, 11). Being a housewife implied feminine fulfillment, and who would be so ungrateful as to question that assumption? In Revolutionary Road we see Frank reading a nondescript magazine and obsessively returning to a certain page: "and he kept returning to a full-page, dramatically lighted fashion photograph whose caption began 'A frankly flattering, definitely feminine dress to go happily wherever you go'" (57). Esther Grimes, the mother of Sarah and Emily, might be that culture's most representative member since "She pored over fashion magazines, dressed tastefully and tried many ways of fixing her hair" (The Easter Parade, 57). Her daughter Emily's stance towards magazines is far more complicated, as we see her trying to write an article about her abortion, and fail. Next to the fact that "it didn't read well at all" (The Easter Parade, 81) we are implicitly made aware of the improbability of having the article published in a magazine among articles on self-polishing aerowax or advertisements
for the Frigidaire Imperial. Far from her interests, and to stress the hopelessness of the situation she herself "joined the editorial staff of a biweekly trade journal called *Food Field Observer*" (*The Easter Parade*, 79). This final chapter will analyze how Yates's characters function in their cultural framework, and show that if they are oppressed and subordinated, it is not because the author would have it so but rather because they are victims of structures of power.
5.1. *Revolutionary Road*

5.1.1. Frank Wheeler: "a state of total self-deception"

Considered legible in terms of masculinity will be those "sustained social performances" (Butler, 192) which are constructed through and within the confines of the togetherness narrative and the "doctrine of separate spheres" (Johnson, 17), and are heavily shaped, as the introduction to this chapter shows, by recurring gendered images and gender acts depicted in popular culture and advertising. Gender acts are defined as repeated performances which are "at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (Butler, 191) and at the same time imply the legitimation of that set of meanings. Following Butler's argument that "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed', but that the doer is variably constructed in and through the deed" (195), the subject does not freely create a sustainable gender identity but is constituted through "certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity" (198). These rule-governed discourses imply a hierarchical structure which imposes rather than negotiates gender identity. Within the novelistic world that power to impose that which is intelligible lies invariably with men, inevitably creating a silenced Other outside of discourse. In Yates's novels discourses on gender intelligibility are produced both on a wider social and cultural level and "sustained at the level of everyday interaction" (Jackson and Scott, 1). In discussing which masculine performances are legible this analysis will focus primarily on *Revolutionary Road*’s protagonist Frank Wheeler, who requires special consideration, since he can be seen performing both gender acts and acts that attempt to disrupt that "constituted social temporality" (Butler, 192) that is gender. A closer analysis of Frank's ambivalent performances will uncover which performance is in Butler's terms a gender performance, in other words which of those performances is believed by the actor, and which one is constructed out of a need to convince or deceive not only others but also and most importantly himself. Furthermore, this chapter will show how those legible gender performances, interpreted by its actors as a substantial factor in identity constitution, work oppressively and destructively, both for those who adhere to them as for those who act against them.

In his adolescent years Frank was eager to take on the world, nurturing the beatnik dream of hopping on freight trains and boxcars west, craving the "hobo jungles along the way" (*Revolutionary Road*, 18) over the comfortable dullness of life in the suburbs. Ironically
then, the Beat Generation, one of America's most prominent countercultural movements in the 1950s and 1960s, would come to despise Frank Wheeler and all that he represented. For writers like Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs, although theirs was an all boys' club, masculinity and femininity were not to be kept within rigid conventionalism and normative heterosexuality was not binding. Rather than belonging to the "neat-necktied producers and commuters of America" (48) as Kerouac's autobiographical narrator states in Lonesome Traveler (1960), direct and individual experience was imperative. The travelling hobo, for Kerouac a sacred figure in American culture, is for Frank all too readily calculated as he maps out multiple alternate routes and carefully chooses and lays out his travelling clothes. Instead of having Frank's dreams of ragged bohemianism bring a "sweet nostalgic pain to his eyes" (Revolutionary Road, 18), Kerouac's alter-ego Jack Duluoz in Desolation Angels would advise Frank to "shut up, live, travel, adventure, bless and don't be sorry" (31). Frank's youthful idealism seems genuine but he lacks a willingness to act. The adolescent Frank however differs considerably from what he values in his thirties, when his defiance of conformity seems to have become nothing more than a masquerade. The fact that he "rehearsed many times the way he would handle himself" (Revolutionary Road, 18) during his time on the road might foreshadow many of Frank's adult mannerisms and stylized gender acts.

In the first chapters of Revolutionary Road we read that Frank deems himself a "Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man" (23), a small-town college-educated intellectual whose struggle against mediocrity is, if not valiant, at least heartfelt: "It's as if everybody'd made this tacit agreement to live in a state of total self-deception [...] let's all be good consumers and have a lot of Togetherness and bring our children up in a bath of sentimentality" (Revolutionary Road, 68). Far from the likes of the French existentialist however, is the promptly adjusted image created by the narrator, who introduces Frank as "neat and solid, a few days less than thirty years old, with closely cut black hair and the kind of unemphatic good looks that an advertising photographer might use to portray the discerning consumer of well-made but inexpensive merchandise." (Revolutionary Road, 12). From the very opening of the novel, narrative omniscience frames Frank as everything he never set out to be. Whether the image Frank constructs of himself arises out of pretense or whether it is an unconscious performance, becomes increasingly clear as the novel progresses. The bubble bursts a first time when April, for whom her husband was, or at least as his performance suggested to her, "the most interesting person I've ever met" (Revolutionary Road, 24), accuses Frank of fitting, in his own words, "the role of dumb, insensitive husband" (Revolutionary Road, 26). Rather
than portraying a dumb and insensitive husband Frank romanticizes his masculinity. He makes sure "each gesture to cross a room or light a cigarette has the air of rakish romanticism to it that characterized their first courtship" (Klinkowitz, 21). Throughout the novel Frank ritualizes his performance of masculinity through small but significant gestures. In looking at the mirror for example, as Frank frequently and obsessively does, he arranges his face in a way which allows him to see "maturity and manliness in the kindly, resolute face that nodded back at him in the mirror" (Revolutionary Road, 221). April often catches her husband's reflected gaze as he is admiring himself, for example when he visits her in the dressing room after the Laurel Players' play: "Her eyes were in the mirror, trained on his for an uncomfortable moment before she lowered them to stare at the middle button of his coat" (Revolutionary Road, 15). She is literally looking away from his performance. His masculinity has a quality of play-acting to it as he continuously and deliberately practices his performance and pays "scrupulous attention to endless details: keeping his voice low and resonant, keeping his hair brushed and his bitten fingernails out of sight" (Revolutionary Road, 231). His masculinity is patterned and repeated, but is according to himself situated outside of Butler's "tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders" (190). Butler's quote resembles the by Frank much despised "tacit agreement to live in a state of total self-deception" (Revolutionary Road, 68), but it might actually be Frank who is living in a state of total self-deception. Rather than an act of gender, Frank's initial defiance of conformity is meant to be read an act against gender, not interpreting gender as a theoretical concept, but as the social temporality constructed in his culture. The aforementioned fight escalates to the point where physical violence is seemingly an option and Frank ironically ends up proving his wife's point. As notions of masculinity and pride are closely intertwined for Frank, he will not allow his manhood to be defined outside of his own discourse. It is only a first of many indications that those "certain rule-governed discourses" (Butler, 197) might also be Frank's discourses. His character is ambiguous, on the one hand his rebellious self, almost revolutionary one could say, searches to operate outside of a framework of what is culturally legible, on the other hand, he operates within and is characterized exclusively by that framework. Resolving these ambiguities requires a closer inspection of the performative character of both his performances and subsequently the awareness thereof.

If we are to read Frank's first performance as an act against gender, than we must question the consistency and continuity of that act. Butler sees the following as acts causing the disruption of gender intelligibility: "a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic
repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (192). In Frank's case, a failure to repeat acts of gender might be the most accurate. He cannot or will no longer engage in a "reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (Butler, 191):

"Wasn't it true then, that everything in his life from that point on had been a succession of things he hadn't really wanted to do? Taking a hopelessly dull job to prove he could be as responsible as any other family man, moving to an overpriced, genteel apartment to prove his mature belief in the fundamentals of orderliness and good health, having another child to prove that the first one hadn't been a mistake, buying a house in the country because that was the next logical step and he had to prove himself capable of taking it." (Revolutionary Road, 53)

The citation above convey a strong sense of the repetitiveness and obligatory character of culturally legible masculinity. The emphasis is on the family man, who has a balanced and orderly life and whose life seems designed beforehand. It is in this light, in order to escape having to repeatedly enact masculinity, Frank initially agrees to moving to Europe with April. Where better to fit a Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man than Paris? April suggests she will look for a job in Paris, so Frank will be able to, in her words, find himself and pursue his literary aspirations. Klinkowitz rightly states that the European undertaking is "a project April associates with his 'manhood'" (20) but as the analysis of April Wheeler's performance will make clear, her sacrifices are not as altruistic as they may seem. As we read further, Frank's enthusiasm about the European Dream starts crumbling as the reality of it is coming nearer: "He had a quick disquieting vision of her coming home from a day at the office - wearing a Parisian tailored suit, briskly pulling off her gloves - coming home and finding him hunched in an egg-stained bathrobe, on an unmade bed, picking his nose." (Revolutionary Road, 115).

April's suggestion threatens Frank's idea of masculinity, that same conventional masculinity he claims wanting to escape from. What is more, the fact that he gets a promotion and a bigger paycheck at the Knox Company and the fact April is pregnant, convince him to try and talk his wife out of their plan completely. If they stay, Frank is able to keep performing:

"The way for a man to ride was erect and out in the open, out in the loud iron passageway where the wind whipped his necktie, standing with his feet set wide apart on the shuddering, clangoring floorplates, taking deep pulls from a pinched cigarette until its burning end was a needle of fire and quivering paper ash and then snapping it straight as a bullet into the roaring speed of the roadbed; while the suburban towns wheeled slowly along the pink and gray dust off seven o'clock." (Revolutionary Road, 107)
What surfaces is the idea that the established notions of masculinity are comfortable to Frank. His initial performance serves to hide that sense of complacency, an uncomfortable truth for both himself and his wife. The morning after their fight following the disastrous performance of the Laurel Players, Frank wakes up with a hangover and sees his wife, clad in men's clothes, mowing the lawn. He plans "as soon as he'd had some coffee, to get dressed and go out and take the lawnmower away from her, by force if necessary, in order to restore as much balance to the morning as possible." (Revolutionary Road, 41). Again violence is an option, and we are made to believe that this is the performance the actor believes. When April breaks the news of her pregnancy, Frank's face "obediently paled and gaped into the look of a man stunned by bad news, but he knew he wouldn't be able to keep it that way for long: an exultant smile was already struggling up for freedom from his chest" (Revolutionary Road, 219). Life has come back to normal, his idea of manhood has been saved.

What reinforces the inauthenticity of Frank's performance and the improbable reading of his gender acts as possibly disruptive, is the fact that Frank prescribes normative performances of femininity to April, continuously disallowing her to define herself outside of male discourse. Frank expects her to be docile, "tamed" even, because what could be a better proof of his manhood than "holding that tamed, submissive girl and saying: "Oh, my lovely; oh, my lovely," while she promised she would bear his child" (Revolutionary Road, 53). Upon April's entrance on the stage during the performance of The Petrified Forest, she is focalized through her husband as a "tall ash blonde with a patrician kind of beauty that no amount of amateur lightning could distort, and she seemed ideally cast in the role" (Revolutionary Road, 8). Put on a pedestal, April moves "with the shyly sensual grace of maidenhood", a perfect fit for a self-proclaimed intellectual: "It didn't even matter that bearing two children had left her a shade too heavy in the hips and thighs" (Revolutionary Road, 8). The image of maidenhood as inextricably linked to conceived notions of femininity also emerges in The Easter Parade where Sarah Grimes testifies to her sister: "I was a virgin when I got married and I've been a virgin ever since" (154). As the play starts disintegrating and April's performance on stage does not hold, Frank reluctantly adapts his perception of his wife:

"Nowhere in these plans had he foreseen the weight and shock of reality; nothing had warned him that he might be overwhelmed by the swaying, shining vision of a girl he hadn't seen in years, a girl whose every glance and gesture could make his throat fill up with longing ("Wouldn't you like to be loved by me?"), and that then before his very eyes she would dissolve and change into the graceless suffering creature whose existence he tried every day of his life to deny but whom he knew as well and as
However blinded Frank is to falsely romanticizing his own masculinity, the inability of his wife to conform to his conception of femininity is reprehensible. Ironically, it was he who talked her into doing the play in the first place, more than probably to see his desires fulfilled, to acknowledge and to be able to brag about that virtuous Madonna on stage. The morning after the play, April's anger has subdued and to Frank it seems that "Everything about her seemed determined to prove, with a new, flatfooted emphasis, that a sensible middle-class housewife was all she had ever wanted to be and that all she had ever wanted of love was a husband who would get out and cut the grass once in a while, instead of sleeping all day." (*Revolutionary Road*, 45). Rather than asking questions, April is silenced and once again framed in male discourse. Unlike Frank, she does not necessarily perform gender acts, it is rather her husband who willfully envisions her doing so. How April reacts to Frank's expectations will be analyzed further on. In this light, it is relevant to touch on Frank's affair with his secretary Maureen Grube, whom he sees speaking in a "definitely feminine way" (*Revolutionary Road*, 83). Whether her performance is actually believed is left out of the novel and might count as one of its weaknesses. Frank however, finds in Maureen that submissiveness not readily available in his wife. Leaving the office at noon and ending up in Maureen's apartment fulfills a need not met at home. She is described by the narrator as a woman with "too-heavy make-up and too-careful hairdo" who overuses "words like 'mad' and 'fabulous' and 'appalling'"; the anecdotes she recounts seem to come right out of "a confectionery Hollywood romance of bachelor-girls in Manhattan" (*Revolutionary Road*, 100). It is a heavily romanticized image, like April's patrician beauty, which is sustainable not necessarily because of Maureen's willingness to perform, of which we know nothing, but rather because of the short time span of the affair. The short-lived affair allows Frank's Jean-Paul Sartre performance to be consistent, especially for Maureen, for whom it is a major factor of attraction. To conclude, Frank Wheeler shows how gender performances work oppressively and how, within the novelistic world, the imposing hierarchy is meant to keep power with men. Allowing or rather compelling himself to supposedly act outside of confined narratives of gender whilst expecting his wife to conform to them, exposes Frank as nothing more than a fraud. As the analysis of April Wheeler's performance will show however, his performance will have destructive results for his wife, and indirectly also for himself.
If Frank Wheeler's gender performance corresponds with normative masculinity, then April is undeniably a victim of that socially constructed fiction. As "discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture" (Butler, 190) April Wheeler is frequently dehumanized. On the one hand she is voiceless outside of her gendered place, on the other challenging the hierarchy which constructs that gendered place leads to repeated accusations of mental instability. Any possibility of negotiating her gender identity, even if Butler denominates gender identity as an "illusion discursively maintained" (Butler, 185), is denied. For April Wheeler it is a question of making that illusion workable, at least until a possibility of escape presents itself. As a subject, she exists primarily within the confines of male discourse, whether it is through Shep Campbell's obsessive desire, "had she still been a virgin when she met Frank? If not, it would somehow lessen his envy" (Revolutionary Road, 271), or through Frank's denigrating discourse on her mental health and accusations of being unfeminine. From the very start of the novel, we learn that April, when pregnant for a first time, planned to induce a miscarriage. Not wanting to be a mother has Frank reacting at the top of his voice: "Listen. Listen to me. You do this - you do this and I swear to God I'll -", to which April sardonically replies: "You'll leave me? What's that supposed to be - a threat or a promise?" (Revolutionary Road, 52). Discussing abortion in Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood, Kristin Luker identifies an "age of silence" (44) concerning abortion from the early twentieth century until 1960. It was in age in which the discourse on abortion was dominated exclusively by male physicians. Precisely because abortion stripped "the veil of sanctity from motherhood" (Luker, 205), the discussion within the household was silenced. The authority on abortion and motherhood lay with anyone but mothers. If the question of abortion was an "exclusively medical problem" (Luker, 48) then April Wheeler, in trying to introduce it into the dialogue of marriage, challenges the coercive imposition of motherhood. As she tries to make it discussable, Frank cannot grasp the fact his wife would even think about terminating her pregnancy, let alone allowing her to explain her reasons. As he eventually dissuades her, we read that "it seemed to him now that no single moment of his life had ever contained a better proof of manhood than that, if any proof were needed: holding that tamed, submissive girl and saying: "Oh, my lovely; oh, my lovely," while she promised she would bear his child." (Revolutionary Road, 52). He finds comfort in the thought that he himself is "essentially more stable than his wife. Because if the headshrinkers could have a
ball with him, God only knew what kind of a time they would have with April." (*Revolutionary Road*, 39). When, towards the end of the novel, she wants to terminate her pregnancy in order to be able to go through with their plans of moving to Europe, Frank reminds her that "She herself [...] had suggested the presence of something 'neurotic' in her wish to abort the first pregnancy" (*Revolutionary Road*, 238). But it is Frank rather than April, who throughout the novel associates April's wish not to have children with emotional disturbance. Through disruptive acts of gender, such as refusal of motherhood and her unwillingness to perform conventional femininity, April is demonized time and again, whilst at the same time she is one of the few characters capable of genuine self-reflection.

The novel opens with a rendition of *The Petrified Forest* by the Laurel Players, an amateur theatre group in which Frank sees "larger social and philosophical possibilities" (*Revolutionary Road*, 63). The version most known to those middle-class suburbanites living in the Revolutionary Hill Estates would probably be the 1936 film starring Humphrey Bogart, Bette Davis and Leslie Howard. In *The Petrified Forest*, Gabrielle, a young creative woman whose favorite poet is François Villon, is taken hostage by the notorious criminal Duke Mantee in the diner belonging to her father in Black Mesa, Arizona. Another guest present in the diner is Alan Squier, a disillusioned intellectual, whom with tales of his European adventures immediately rouses an amorous admiration in Gabrielle. Being tired of his life however, Alan Squier offers himself as a human shield for Duke Mantee in order to escape the police who by then have surrounded the diner. Before dying of his wounds, Squier, who carried his life insurance policy on him, adjusts this insurance so that Gabrielle can pursue her dreams and go live in France. With the Laurel Players it is April who plays the part of the young, attractive and creative Gabrielle, which accounts for Frank envisioning the play's heroine moving "with the shyly sensual grace of maidenhood" (*Revolutionary Road*, 8). The night starts off promising, as Frank confirms that "Anyone could see they were a better than average crowd, in terms of education and employment and good health" (*Revolutionary Road*, 7). Expectations are high as several people knew "she had attended one of the leading dramatic schools of New York less than ten years before." (*Revolutionary Road*, 8). When April walks out on stage for the first time she "caused the whispered word "lovely" to roll out over the auditorium" (*Revolutionary Road*, 7). Soon enough, the initial admiration gives way to disillusion. Several actors mix up their lines, leaving April to carry the performance on her own, and at the end "When the curtain fell at last it was an act of mercy" (*Revolutionary Road*, 10). April's failure to successfully play the part of Gabrielle foreshadows not only the cancellation of her European dreams, but also her refusal of performing her role as a wife and
mother, or at least as those are defined by her husband. The similarities between Gabrielle and April are obvious. Like Alan Squier it is Frank who rouses admiration with tales of his fighting in Europe and his intellect, but unlike Frank Squier makes Gabrielle's dreams to move to France come true. In failing to enact Gabrielle successfully the novel already informs us that their European plans will fall through long before they are mentioned. Frank's mannerisms and self-attributed importance contrast heavily with April who, "paralyzed in a formal smile" (Revolutionary Road: 11), leaves the stage in defeat and retreats to her dressing room in order to avoid the obligatory socializing afterwards. One might argue that April is trying to mirror her performance to that of Gabrielle, but as we learn that it was Frank who talked April into doing the play in the first place, it becomes clear that is his wish to watch her perform. Unlike characters like Sarah Grimes in The Easter Parade for example, April is not susceptible to feminine performances portrayed in Hollywood. Gabrielle's moving to France implies economic dependence, because it is Squier's insurance policy money who gets her there. Even though Gabrielle fascinates him because of her artworks and her love for poetry, physical attractiveness and her femininity play a crucial part. Unlike Gabrielle then, April offers to take a job in Europe and support her family, an act which introduces the central drama of the novel. From Frank's perspective, the play foreshadows a loss of power, a loss to control his wife's performances according to his own plans. As the heroine becomes a "graceless suffering creature" (Revolutionary Road, 13), Frank's inability to prescribe a gender performance to his wife leads to destructive frustration and physical violence.

Before Frank's refusal to go through with their plans of moving to Europe, April seems somewhat unaware of the artificiality of his "Jean-Paul Sartre sort of man" performance. Upon telling their children how they met, in an overly romanticized version of their first courtship, she reaffirms that "It's true, Frank. I mean it. You're the most interesting person I've ever met." (Revolutionary Road, 24-25). For Frank too, April was a "first-rate girl whose shining hair and splendid legs had drawn him halfway across a roomful of strangers." (Revolutionary Road, 24). In their thirties, when Frank surrenders to self-admiration and talks aimlessly about suburban mediocrity and its poisonous effects during their evenings at the Campbells, April applauds her husband. Rattling on about how they find themselves in a "cellophane bag" (Revolutionary Road, 136) from which it is impossible to escape, she admires his supposedly critical mind. Next to "a dissertation by Milly on lamb chops" (Revolutionary Road, 61) however, anyone might seem admirable. At the same time, from the very start of the novel April has the sense of realism that Frank lacks. For her husband, as mentioned before, mirrors serve not to reflect but to create an image of masculinity. April is
capable of a more honest approach: "Her face in the mirror, nude and shining with cold cream, looked forty years old and as haggard as if it were set to endure a physical pain." (*Revolutionary Road*, 16). Charlton-Jones justifiably defines her as "the keeper of his earlier self, with which he has secretly lost faith" (101). Whether she acts out of naivety or deliberately gives Frank an illusory sense of being in control, becomes increasingly clear as the fight in their car, after the Laurel Player's performance, ends violently. After repeatedly having asked him to leave her alone during the drive home, not wanting to talk about the miserable onstage performance, Frank gets the feeling she is blaming him:

"Number one, it's not my fault the play was lousy. Number two, it's sure as hell not my fault you didn't turn out to be an actress, and the sooner you get over that little piece of soap opera the better off we're all going to be. Number three, I don't happen to fit the role of dumb, insensitive suburban husband; you've been trying to hang that one on me ever since we moved out here, and I'm damned if I'll wear it. Number four -" (*Revolutionary Road*, 27)

As they get out of the car, the argument escalates further. Accompanied by the noise and headlights of oncoming cars she screams that he has neverfooled her, and we are made to understand that it is not the first and would certainly not be the last time he physically abused her: "I had to be your conscience and your guts - and your punching bag" (*Revolutionary Road*, 28). The argument escalates up to the point where April yells: "Look at you and tell me how [...] by any stretch of the imagination you can call yourself a man!" (*Revolutionary Road*, 29), and Frank raises his trembling fist only to change his mind at the last instant and hit the roof of his car. After having apologized for her supposedly irrational behaviour the day after, Frank seems to notice in her voice "a quality of play-acting, of slightly false intensity, a way of seeming to speak less to him than to some romantic abstraction" (*Revolutionary Road*, 108). April's apology, for Frank a sign of submissiveness, has a performative quality to it, and its authenticity is questionable. However, as we are made to understand that Frank's initial performance of masculinity is in fact nothing more than a "romantic abstraction", April seems aware of this from very early on. Since he makes nothing more of April's sudden change, who does so in order to avoid further physical violence or to keep him in check whilst looking for possible ways to escape those normative gender norms imposed on her, Frank sees himself fully in control again and is even so merciful as to allow "his wife to ask forgiveness" (*Revolutionary Road*, 110).
The true turning point in the novel is April's suggestion that she would look for a job in Paris: "The point is you won't be getting any kind of a job, because I will. Don't laugh - listen a minute (Revolutionary Road, 113). Frank, who keeps squeezing his shoulders "as if to dismiss the whole thing as an endearing whimsy" (Revolutionary Road, 114), is both frightened and threatened by the idea, even though she claims it is in his best interests, so he could fully exploit his intellectual talents. Whilst April is not necessarily a career woman, Friedan states that working women, "whose evil includes every desire of the separate self" (31) were seen as a threat to both men and the feminine woman. As Frank tries to belittle her wishes, by stating that "all this is very sweet and very -" (Revolutionary Road, 115) she turns away from his caressing hands and states that "For God's sake, Frank, I'm not being 'sweet'. I'm not making any big altruistic sacrifice - can't you see that?" (Revolutionary Road, 115). Again, what Frank identifies as submissiveness, what he is looking for in a woman and finds in his secretary Maureen Grube, is a performance in its own right. Whilst her husband agrees to go through with their plans, April plays the submissive wife because she foresees the possibility of escaping the suburbs and its oppressive gender norms. If she keeps on being "sweet", if she keeps on performing, Frank's reluctance to go might completely vanish. For if she could be "sweet" over here, why could she not over there?

As time goes on, Frank makes ready to say goodbye to his colleagues at Knox, but at the same time brings up a new argument against moving to Europe: "I don't know. It's just that this does seem a pretty inconsiderate thing to be doing, when you think about it, from the kids' point of view." (Revolutionary Road, 190). Hiding the fact that it threatens his masculinity, Frank tries to convince his wife to stay by using seemingly rational arguments. The romance gets stretched very thin as a "certain stiffness" (Revolutionary Road, 204) starts to characterize their day to day interaction. April tries to keep up with Frank's ideas of femininity, but in the way she holds him there is "a suggestion of effort to achieve the effect of spontaneity" (Revolutionary Road, 240). Trying to conform to certain specifications the artificial repetitiveness of her gender acts leads us to see through them. At work, some weeks before leaving for Europe, Frank gets promoted and April understands the futility of her performance. Being that "tamed submissive girl" for her husband has lead her nowhere. As she breaks the news of her pregnancy, her performance reaches a desperate point. When Frank suggests they postpone their European plans two or three years, April claims: "And it's my fault!" (Revolutionary Road, 219), but do babies not get born in Europe?

Through one final act of defiance then, a final "means of asserting power she never had in her marriage" (Charlton-Jones, 21), the novel shows us the repressive and destructive
character of gender normativity with which the protagonists are stuck. The novel does not in any way suggest a possibility for April to escape, a possibility of her realizing her dreams alone. She hopes Frank will find his earlier self again in Europe and thus the possibility of happiness exists outside of a framework of intelligible gender norms. The build up to the novel’s finale is a nervous joust, in which Frank obsessively calculates until when exactly April can perform an abortion at home, whilst April behind his back goes out to buy the material needed. In her unwillingness to carry his child, Frank sees a denial of womanhood, and when April asks "Is that what women are supposed to be expressing when they don't want to have children? That they're not really women, or don't want to be women, or something?", Frank's answer is very Freudian: "It does sound sort of logical, though, doesn't it? [...] I do remember reading something about a woman with a sort of infantile penis-envy thing" (*Revolutionary Road*, 244).

The morning of her abortion, April gives her final and most impressive performance. Breakfast is awkwardly peaceful, even if the night before they had their biggest fight yet. She is no longer convinced of the need of performing, since she realizes what a "subtle, treacherous thing it was to let yourself go that way!" (*Revolutionary Road*, 320). Her submissiveness is now merely a weapon to avoid raising suspicions. April even shows interest in his work at the Knox Company and as Frank leaves for work her acting leads him to once again see that "damned good-looking girl" (*Revolutionary Road*, 315). She is one of Yates's characters, like Sarah Grimes, who "have adopted a language not their own" (Charlton-Jones, 32) and who are now left completely devastated. She blames herself for having put up with it for so long. She has let Frank prescribe her performance and the only way to take back some of that power lost seems radical and is in no way a solution. Excluded from any decisions on her status as a mother and a wife, a self-induced miscarriage seems the only viable option to redefine her own personhood. Only when she dies Frank realizes his own involvement: "She wanted to do it last month and it would've been safe then. It would've been safe than and I talked her out of it. I talked her out of it and then we had a fight yesterday and now she - Oh Jesus. Oh Jesus. And she was so damn nice this morning." (*Revolutionary Road*, 337). The fact that she left a note for Frank might indicate that rather than inducing a miscarriage, she was trying to commit suicide. The question remains unanswered, but if the only options were self-induced miscarriage or suicide, the answer is irrelevant. The novel ends with Helen Givings talking about April to her husband, who only hears a "thunderous sea of silence" (*Revolutionary Road*, 355) as he already turned off his hearing aid. A new couple moves into the Wheelers' house as Frank moves to the city and their children move in with Frank's
brother. Like *The Easter Parade* the novel develops in circular motion. Starting from a situation of normalcy, the main trauma of the novel follows from the unquestionable status of that normalcy, only to return to a new situation of normalcy for a new couple. New revolutionaries or new Campbells, who is to say? What is certain however, is the absolutely devastating effect of prescribing normative gender performances, in a way that to escape them, as April tries, is in no way really an escape.
5.1.3. John Givings: the madman in the attic

If Frank Wheeler represents what is intelligible in terms of masculinity, John Givings, the son of the Wheelers' landlady Mrs. Givings, is a perfect example of a male character that lives outside of "the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders" (Butler, 190). Throughout the novel Givings is Socrates, repeatedly asking the right questions in order to destabilize that agreement. According to Butler, those discrete genders are "obscured by the credibility of those productions - and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them" (190). In Givings' case the punishment consists of internment in Greenacres, a private resting home and a "really excellent place" (Revolutionary Road, 171) as his mother claims upon first mentioning her son to the Wheelers. Helen Givings explains that her son "hadn't been at all well" and because of "overwork and one thing and another" John had suffered from "a complete nervous breakdown" (Revolutionary Road, 171). In trying to reintegrate her son into the community after his isolation in Greenacres, Mrs. Givings suggests a visit to the commendable young Wheelers. Upon arriving Frank immediately constructs an unmanly image of John based on his external appearance, especially his clothes which are "suggestive of orphanage or prison" (Revolutionary Road, 193). In the course of three visits "the tragic demon the suburbs are designed to repress" (Charlton-Jones, 66) is continuously dehumanized. Not only is he presumably insane, he is assessed non-masculine. If Butler claims that "discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture" (190), then John's unwillingness to perform causes his exclusion from contemporary culture. The process of dehumanizing starts with Mrs. Givings' first words, and encourages April and Frank to make sure their children are away at a birthday party when he first enters their house. John Givings is morally ambiguous, on the one hand he smashed his parental house completely and cut their telephone wires for fun, on the other hand John is a character who despite his insanity has the "integrity lacking in the dominant Yatesian figure" (Charlton-Jones, 64).

Givings is initially focalized through Frank: "For a few seconds it seemed that his face might be permanently locked in this monstrous parody of a friend-winning, people-influencing smile" (Revolutionary Road, 194). Only after having spent an afternoon with him. Frank and especially April conclude that "he's sort of nice, isn't he? And intelligent. I thought some of the things he said were sort of brilliant." (Revolutionary Road, 203). After introductions are made, Helen Givings soon gets anxious about her son's derisive tone in
questioning Frank about the aversion for his job and the couple's plans to move to Europe. John is guilty of "Being Tactless" (Revolutionary Road, 198), his frankness leads his mother to resort to frequently intervening with insignificant little outbursts: "Oh, look, the sun's coming out!" (Revolutionary Road, 197). Taking the conversation outside, John remarks:

"I like your girl Wheeler," he announced at last. "I get the feeling she's female. You know what the difference between female and feminine is? Huh? Well here's a hint: a feminine woman never laughs out loud and always shaves her armpits. Old Helen in there is feminine as hell. I've only met about half a dozen females in my life, and I think you got one of them here. Course, come to think of it, that figures. I get the feeling you're male. There aren't too many males around, either." (Revolutionary Road, 201)

April is female and not feminine, which to John clearly is a construct or a performance, but in his discourse there still seem to be authentic maleness and femaleness. Is there some true gender identity for which masculinity and femininity serve as a facade, a Lacanian masquerade? Charlton-Jones rightfully claims that the novel's "narrative revelations about performance continue to imply the possibility of 'being' without performance as an integral feature" (17), but do they also imply gender identity is more than a discursively maintained "regulatory fiction" (Butler, 192)? An initial reading of John Givings' discourse would lead us to believe so, but throughout the rest of the novel authentic selves are not necessarily gendered. So what does Givings mean when talking about feminine and female? I argue Givings confronts femininity with femaleness not because one is constructed and the other authentic, but rather to isolate femininity as a sociocultural given. Femaleness is never defined by Givings, whilst femininity clearly is. Femaleness seems open to definition and it involves some degree of free choice. If April is female and not feminine it is because she defines, or tries to define, womanhood herself outside of imposed normativity. A binary sense of authentic manhood and authentic womanhood are present in the novel. They are however highly individual and unregulated. If Yates's novels show a "prescient awareness of gender politics" (Charlton-Jones, 152) I argue it is in the opening up of the possibilities for both womanhood and manhood. Within his novels especially female characters feel the need to bring their experience into their own subjectivity, to define their own identity.

Frank's aforementioned masquerade is also noticeable in his changing stance towards John Givings. Whilst during a first visit Givings made a lot of sense, a second visit leads Frank to define John as a "full-fledged mental case for April to observe and contemplate" (Revolutionary Road, 240), simply because the questions he asks subvert the image Frank
created of himself. During a third and final visit to the Wheelers John learns about the
cancellation of the Wheeler's plans and asks: "Don't people have babies in Europe?"
(Revolutionary Road, 300). Turning to Frank he states: "I wouldn't be surprised if you
knocked her up on purpose, just so you could spend the rest of your life hiding behind that
maternity dress." (Revolutionary Road, 301). Frank bursts out in a rage as everything he has
so carefully constructed is punctured with simple logic. For Charlton-Jones, Givings is "like
the fool in King Lear" who with "often-impeccable logic" (64) tries to see through any kind of
social mask characters put up. In a way, Givings introduces the grand finale of the novel, as
Frank starts admitting to himself that he does not even want another child. Givings' fate
however, is similar to King Lear's fool. He is not mentioned again and will probably end up
where he started, Greenacres. Charlton-Jones claims that Yates "equally speaks through Frank
Wheeler and Shep Campbell as well as through John Givings" (125). I argue Yates does not
speak through any of his characters. Yates shows rather than identifies with, and in the case of
John Givings, the author shows how the fool meets his end. He is an inconvenience, a
madman to be kept in the attic. His cure is electroshock therapy rather than acceptance, he is
to be silenced rather than listened to.
5.2. *The Easter Parade*

Central to *The Easter Parade* are the sisters Sarah and Emily Grimes and how they interact with a normative framework of gender performances. Respectively embracing and refusing normative femininity neither of the Grimes sisters are able to live satisfactorily, and like Frank and April Wheeler, they serve as their culture's most representative members. In 'Doing Gender' West and Zimmerman claim that gender performativity does not always imply enacting "normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity" but also engaging "in behavior at the risk of gender assessment" (Jackson and Scott, 45). This is the case for Emily Grimes, who is seen to be a "de-formity" (Butler, 190) within the normative framework, assessed as being unfeminine by both her mother and her lovers, and within a wider societal framework, because of her unwillingness to perform the role of wife and mother. Having more possibilities than April Wheeler, whose marriage is a "trap" (*Revolutionary Road*, 28), Emily's disruptive performance is situated outside of such obligations, but since "doing gender is unavoidable" (quoted in Jackson and Scott, 46), or rather it is required and therefore willingly projected even on those who do not enact an intelligible gender, her defiance of gender normativity does not entail satisfying existence within the fictional world. In Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, the author comments on this "unavoidable" status of enacting or being assessed as a certain gender and defines it as a necessary strategy of survival. Rich testifies of feeling like a "fake" in 'doing' her gender, in performing femininity whilst not feeling really 'feminine': "This sense of acting a part created a curious sense of guilt, even though it was a part demanded for survival" (25). Rich continues that she for the first time felt "not-guilty" when she was "visibly and clearly pregnant" (25). The visual character of her pregnancy, "visibly and clearly" indicates that her sense of guilt did not originate within herself, but existed because of a lack of external approval which in turn has become deeply internalized. It is this lack of approval which denies Emily, even though she herself is not looking for approval, the possibility of a fulfilling life. "Doesn't every woman want a baby sometime?" (*The Easter Parade*, 116) her supposedly bohemian boyfriend of the time Jack Flanders asks her. Following Rich's claim that "motherhood as institution has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities" Emily's answer is clear, but the question remains how those female potentialities are allowed or not allowed to develop outside of marriage and motherhood. Sarah Grimes on the other hand will be shown to enact her femininity according to socially constructed standards, but like her sister her performance does not lead to
fulfillment. Her enacting of femininity, imposed primarily by her mother Esther Grimes, leads her to attract and eventually marry Tony Wilson, a man for whom every possibility of negotiating that femininity is out of the question. As he dominates her both through physical violence and by monopolizing her discourse both on the level of everyday interaction and by restricting her creativity, Sarah's performance will eventually lead to her death. As Tony Jr., Sarah's son claims that her death was caused by "liver ailment", a consequence of her alcoholism, "complicated by a fall she took in the house" (The Easter Parade, 184) we are, very much like Emily, left in the dark about whom or what exactly caused this fall. Yates's novels thus show how gender performativity both within and outside of established norms does not lead to fulfillment for women, as the pervasive power of the hierarchical structuring of those norms seems inescapable and destructive.

From a young age both girls live with their divorced mother Esther Grimes, nicknamed Pookie, a woman who seems "pledged to achieving and sustaining an elusive quality she called 'flair'" as "she pored over fashion magazines, dressed tastefully and tried many ways of fixing her hair" (The Easter Parade, 7) and by whom normative femininity is prescribed at a very early age. Pookie seems to hail the creed that "Anatomy was her destiny" (Friedan, 60) as notions of physical attractiveness and femininity are inextricably linked and guarantee feminine fulfillment. In Of Woman Born Adrienne Rich deplores us to see female "physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny" (40) but within the cultural framework of the novel the female body has little to no possibilities of being anything more than destiny. As Sarah at the age of eighteen has a "lovely full-breasted figure that made men turn around on the street and made Emily weak with envy" Pookie tries to comfort her youngest daughter Emily, who has an overbite at the age of fourteen: "You'll be very attractive" (The Easter Parade, 17). From early on in the novel Pookie's obsessive focus on female beauty leads to favoring one daughter over the other. In looking in the mirror, a recurring theme in Revolutionary Road where Frank arranges and rearranges his face time and again, in such a way as to convey a sense of masculinity, Emily's presumed ugliness leads to drastic conclusions: "Who could imagine kissing a mouth like that? Who, for that matter, could bear to be close to her body for any length of time?" (The Easter Parade, 14). Rather than "the object of a female subjectivity experiencing and identifying itself" (Irigaray, 59) it is clear that the female body functions as an object of male discourse, even if that discourse is in this case primarily produced by Esther Grimes, for whom feminine beauty is crucial in finding a husband and thus fulfillment. Ironically Pookie herself divorced her husband because she felt "'stifled'; she wanted freedom; she always used to compare herself with the woman in A Doll’s
"House" (The Easter Parade, 134). However, as we are made to understand that this is "her version" (The Easter Parade, 134) of the facts, Pookie, very much like Frank Wheeler in Revolutionary Road, adds a dash of romanticized heroism to her own failures. Returning to the physicality of the body, in Je, tu, nous; Toward a Culture of Difference the French feminist Luce Irigaray argues for equality not through egalitarianism but through emphasizing difference. She opposes "the "patriarchal social body" which "constructs itself hierarchically excluding difference" and "the female body", which "engenders with respect for difference" (45). Whilst in Yates's text we see a "patriarchal social body" at work, it would be wrong to assume that all female bodies within the text engender "with respect for difference". Esther Grimes's obsession with feminine beauty is a continuation of, rather than a rupture with that patriarchal social body which defines women as the other and the non-masculine. Does this imply that characters like Esther Grimes or Maureen Grube in Revolutionary Road, of whom we do not know their inner thoughts, only externally perceptible discourses, misrepresent 'women', or are in fact not 'women' but merely the product of a misogynous mind? For Irigaray it seemingly would be so, but in The Politics of Reality feminist Marilyn Frye asserts that women "acquiesce in being made invisible, in our occupying no space. We participate in our own erasure" (2). Whilst both Irigaray and Frye embrace a generalizing 'we', it is Judith Butler in Gender Trouble who warns against a stable subject: "By conforming to a requirement of representational politics that feminism articulate a stable subject, feminism thus opens itself to charges of gross misrepresentation." (8). If 'woman' is a stable category, as it can be seen in Irigaray and Frye, Butler argues that feminism must "remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism" (Butler, 18). A monolithic unified subject does not only deny differentiation, it "mimics the strategy of the oppressor" (Butler, 18). I do not argue Esther Grimes is part of what constructs gender intelligibility, nor that she is its prime institutionalizing force, but that through her continuation of normativity and the imposition upon her daughters she also is a victim of her oppressive and misogynous culture. She is "confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable" (Frye, 4) in a way that she has thoroughly convinced herself, and will try to convince her daughters, of the naturalness of those forces and barriers. As the social body which ensures gender hierarchy does not stand back and question itself, neither does Pookie. When Betty Friedan states that the Feminine Mystique "makes its own fiction of fact" and "seeps into every corner of our culture" (43) it is Esther Grimes who raises her daughters on the foundations of that fiction. The identity crisis caused by the Mystique, the inability to find fulfillment in the role of housewife and mother, is in Friedan's words a necessary evil "simply
to become fully human" (Friedan, 59). In the cultural framework in which the novel's characters function, experiencing that crisis does not humanize but dehumanizes them. Characters like April Wheeler, John Givings and Emily Grimes, who try to define their identity outside of gender normativity, end up disillusioned or worse, and assumptions of mental instability are always lurking right around the corner. If Esther Grimes imposes certain cultural values on her daughters, the opening lines of the novel already announce the consequences of the imposition of those cultural values: "Neither of the Grimes sisters would have a happy life" (The Easter Parade, 3). Initially both Sarah and Emily perform to their mother's and thus their culture's standards. As Sarah brings home her first boyfriend, Donald Clellon, Pookie is charmed by "such an attentive suitor" (The Easter Parade, 19). When Emily asks Sarah what she sees in him she "lowered her eyes like a movie star in a close-up. 'I think I may be in love with him.'" (The Easter Parade, 19). As their involvement continues Pookie learns that Clellon did not go to college, lied about his age and profession and the attentive suitor is now merely "a child!" (The Easter Parade, 21). Clellon moves out of the picture, and Tony Wilson, in whom Sarah sees a regular "Laurence Olivier" (The Easter Parade, 23), enters her life. Emily is envious of her older sister's relationship and envisions herself "riding in that splendid old car" with Tony and Sarah, "with her hair blowing attractively in the wind, strolling with them along some deserted beach and then coming back to Manhattan at midnight and sitting in their special booth at Anatole's while the pianist played their song." (The Easter Parade, 24-25). Rather than getting to know Tony both seem to fall in love with an abstraction, and the narrator informs us that "Everything about Sarah's romance with Tony was almost too nice to be borne." (The Easter Parade, 25). Performing femininity has produced a charming man and the fiction maintains itself. For Charlton-Jones Sarah's engagement with Tony serves as one of those "fatal choices" caused by "the mother's words and manners" imposed upon her daughters, which "are seen as morally suspect for their association with the fakery of the cinematic world" (40). When Sarah and Tony get married in 1941 Emily enters Barnard College, a liberal arts college for women in New York. Her father Walter Grimes, whom she is able to see more of now she is living in the city, states: "You'll live in the world of ideas for four whole years before you have to concern yourself with anything as trivial as the demands of workaday reality - that's what's nice about college." (The Easter Parade, 33). The world of ideas does not cure Emily of her gullibility, as she meets a soldier named Warren Maddox who is about to be sent off to Europe. Maddox claims he likes "to get to know a girl" (The Easter Parade, 37) but is really just in it for sex. After having made love on the grass of some darkened and desolate park, her first sexual experience seems
to awaken in Emily a sense of discomfort. The romantic qualities of a feminine girl granting a
desperate soldier being shipped off to Europe what could be his final wish seems to be a
distorted version of reality: "Only after turning back to watch him walk away did she realize
how much was wrong; they hadn't exchanged addresses and promises to write; she wasn't
even sure of his last name." (The Easter Parade, 39).

In a period of three years her sister gives birth to three sons and her father dies. Emily
goes through various failed relationships, which in some cases are just "six romantic,
melancholy weeks" (The Easter Parade, 55). Attending a college party she meets Andrew
Crawford, a graduate assistant in philosophy. Since Emily thinks he "looked as though he
ought to spend more time outdoors" (The Easter Parade, 50) Crawford is not a typically
masculine man. Shyly asking her number only to ask her out a year later, "she noticed too that
he didn't grope for her breasts and her thighs right away, as boys usually did; he seemed to
enjoy just hugging and kissing" (The Easter Parade, 58). As the relationship evolves,
Andrew's impotence becomes an ever growing problem, not so much for Emily but for
himself. He decides he ought to go see a psychoanalyst and promises Emily to return within a
year with a marriage proposal. Crawford keeps his promise as they get married a year later
and Andrew returns with the following diagnose: "That's what Dr. Goldman keeps telling me.
He says I've spent my life apologizing." (The Easter Parade, 68). What Andrew has been
apologizing for his entire life is not performing normative masculinity. Much like the
aforementioned lack of approval felt by Adrienne Rich in Of Woman Born, Crawford
internalizes his sense of guilt and is shown to be thoroughly convinced of doing something
wrong. The novel, unlike Revolutionary Road, thus also explicitly shows the destructive
character of gender normativity when it comes to masculinity. The pressure of performing
both his gender and a literal sexual performance is immense. It even goes so far as to when he
gets to meet Sarah and Tony, "your beautiful sister and your dashing, romantic brother-in-
law" (The Easter Parade, 71), Andrew completely breaks down: "I'll bet you masturbated
over him. Didn't you?" (The Easter Parade, 75) Judging himself unable to compete with
Tony's masculinity he thinks himself inadequate, not good enough, and his jealousy ends up
dissolving the marriage. Frustrated as he is however, claiming that he hates her body, a form
of physical repugnance which might indicate misogyny, I argue Andrew Crawford is a victim,
much like Emily will become a victim later on in the novel. The absence of dialogue on his
impotence in the relationship is representative of the level of indoctrination Andrew is subject
to. Since Emily does not really complain about his sexual problems, the internalization of
gender normativity causes Andrew to consider himself a "de-formity" (Butler, 192). Rather
than a possibility of "gender transformation" (Butler, 192) however, it becomes an impossibility. Marilyn Frye argues that the term 'oppression' has become "dangerously fashionable" and states that "When the stresses and frustrations of being a man are cited as evidence that oppressors are oppressed by their oppressing, the word 'oppression' is being stretched to meaninglessness" (1). But how do impotent men, or homosexual men, also present in the novel, operate as oppressors? Once again, generalizing oppressor versus oppressed implies an "effort to identify the enemy as singular in form" (Butler, 18) and ignores the fact that coherence and continuity of categories such as 'men' and 'women' also imply a certain normativity.

After the divorce with Crawford Emily takes a job with a trade journal called the Food Field Observer. "It was pleasant undemanding work" but Emily secretly hopes it will deliver her a job with a "real magazine" (The Easter Parade, 79). We learn that during those years "there were a good many men" and that in "the space of two years she had two abortions" (The Easter Parade, 80). Trying to write an article about her experiences with the title 'Abortion: a woman's view' she opens with the lines: "It is painful, dangerous, 'immoral' and illegal" (The Easter Parade, 80) but concludes that "something was wrong" (The Easter Parade, 81). What is wrong is that Emily seems to be writing her article within the confines of male discourse. In calling it "immoral and illegal" she resembles Frank Wheeler, for whom abortion is simply unthinkable. Unable to bring her experience into female subjectivity, the article ends up in a cardboard box after several hopeless revisions. In Of Woman Born Adrienne Rich testifies that, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century abortion was considered a "form of irresponsibility, a refusal by women to confront their moral destiny" and a "trivialization or evasion of great issues of life and death" (267). She claims that women wanting to terminate their pregnancy were guilty of two crimes, on the one hand the abortion itself as an illegal act, on the other the "crime of not wishing to be pregnant" (Rich, 268). Speaking from a personal point of view, Rich states that it is "crucial, however, in abortion as in every other experience (especially in the realm of sexuality and reproduction) that women take seriously the enterprise of finding out what we do feel, instead of accepting what we have been told we must feel" (Rich, 269). Having women try to express what they do feel is central to Yates's novels, but as Irigaray rightfully claims women "remain the locus for the experience of concrete reality, but they leave the matter of its structuration to the other" (Irigaray, 25). Although Emily is seen struggling to put her experience into her own words in this case, a later article will succeed and there is the slumbering conscience of the need for female subjectivity. A possible new and slightly more satisfactory opening sentence for the
article is: "Like many girls of my age, I had always assumed that abortion is a dreadful thing -

to be approached, if at all, with the fear and trembling one reserves for a descent into the outer
circles of hell." (The Easter Parade, 81).

To make things worse, Emily's thirtieth birthday in 1955 leads her mother to state: "I
just feel it's time for you - oh I won't say "settle down"; Lord knows I never settled down; I
just mean." (The Easter Parade, 82). Settling down, getting married and having children is
exactly what Pookie means, and her other daughter Sarah clearly serves as an example to
Emily. Pookie however complains that Sarah never invites her anymore, and the novel
already hints at the domestic violence Sarah falls victim to. It is only when Emily and Jack
Flanders, a boyfriend of the time, visit Sarah and her husband that suspicions start to grow. As
they learn that Sarah is writing a book on Tony's ancestor, Sarah claims that it gave her "a
wonderful feeling just to be doing something again" (The Easter Parade, 93). Jack Flanders,
Emily's boyfriend and a celebrated poet himself reads a brief excerpt an claims: "And she
does write well." (The Easter Parade, 95). Her husband however remarks: "Might even be a
little money in it, Tony said, chuckling" (The Easter Parade, 94). Both sisters are restricted in
their discourse, Emily by societal constraints, Sarah primarily by the denigrating discourse of
her husband. As they move to Iowa, where Jack Flanders is to teach a poetry course at a local
university, the once rebellious and innovative poet starts showing signs of being, like Frank
Wheeler and Tony Wilson, contaminated with normative masculinity and the will to describe
normative femininity to Emily. Throughout their relationship Emily has been clear on not
wanting to have children, but Jack cannot leave it at that: "'Know what?' Jack said, smiling at
her from the breakfast table. 'The way you carry on with that dog, anybody'd say you want a
baby'." (The Easter Parade, 116). Met with Emily's blank stare he adds: "Doesn't every
woman want a baby sometime?" (The Easter Parade, 116). Flanders resembles Frank
Wheeler, not only in his assumption that motherhood is desired by every woman, but also in
firmly romanticizing his masculine performance: "Do you think you might consider marrying
me? He took both her hands and held her at arms' length. His eyes were shining, and his
mouth was curling into a shape of shyness and pride like that of a boy who's just stolen his
first kiss" (The Easter Parade, 116). As Emily ends her relationship with Jack, she moves
back to New York determined to have a better life, and "she would be free" (The Easter
Parade, 117).

Working as a copywriter in New York, Emily rarely sees her sister. It is only when
Sarah calls to inform her that Pookie is in a coma caused by her alcoholism, the sisters sit
down and actually talk. Upon asking Sarah if she is still writing, Emily learns that she has
given up both her book on Tony's ancestor and another project, humorous family-life sketches, because Tony thought "they weren't funny" (The Easter Parade, 128). Visiting Pookie in the hospital, Emily painfully notices how her mother, no longer in a coma, has completely lost her mind: "And isn't it wonderful how everything's worked out so well for us? Just imagine! Sarah's a real princess, and look at you." (The Easter Parade, 139). However far this might be from reality, it is what Pookie has always wanted for her daughters. Thus rather than being painfully truthful like John Giving's presumed insanity in Revolutionary Road, Esther Grimes' factual mental instability leads to a distorted vision of reality. Indirectly, the novel that suggests that, rather than attributing madness to characters who try to disrupt normative gender performances, the real madness lies with those who actually believe in that normativity.

As they start seeing each other more often Sarah is for Emily no longer a source of envy but a "plump little overdressed matron" (The Easter Parade, 145) and the jealousy of her sister's body and her femininity seem nonsensical relics of the past. The Wilsons visit New York and the sisters meet for lunch, after which Emily seems relieved that they do not have to see each other for a while again. That same night however Sarah calls up Emily and asks her to come over to the hotel where she and Tony are staying. Emily discovers her sister's bruised face and demands an explanation: "Happens all the time. I guess it's been happening once or twice a month for about - well, twenty years. It's not usually as bad as this." (The Easter Parade, 150). Immediately after, Sarah starts minimizing the facts: "It's a marriage, Sarah said. If you want to stay married you learn to put up with things. Besides, I love the guy." (The Easter Parade, 151). Sarah almost obliterates herself, since to be feminine means "to take up little space, to defer to others, to be silent or affirming of others" (Frye, 32). Her submissiveness takes on unprecedented forms, and fits into Frye's definition of oppression: "For subordination to be permanent and cost effective, it is necessary to create conditions such that the subordinated group acquiesces to some extent in the subordination" (Frye, 33). Despite the underlying and silenced struggles the couple keeps up appearances by performing for example the "Old smiling, arm-entwining ritual" (The Easter Parade, 152) with drinks in their hands, before the eyes of a completely disgusted Emily. Confronting Tony about abusing her sister solves nothing as Sarah, completely acquiescing in her submission, keeps playing her role. She has always thought the institute of marriage sacred, even if it denies her every possibility of personhood and is an example of Friedan's "vicarious living" (28) through and through. As Emily falls for Howard Dunninger, a man who is still very much in love with his ex-wife Linda, Sarah's problems disappear from her mind, primarily
because of her unwillingness or inability to leave her husband. Her sister however makes a nice topic of conversation, a caricature, for whomever will listen: "You have no idea how helpless she is - a funny little middle-aged woman with terrible clothes and bad teeth and without a skill to her name" (*The Easter Parade*, 170). Sarah gets admitted for acute alcoholism, and when they see her again both Howard and Emily noticed that "The lower half of Sarah's face was collapsed" (*The Easter Parade*, 180) and that she had false teeth. A year later, in 1968, when Sarah was to turn forty-seven, Emily receives a phone-call from one of Sarah's sons that her sister has died of a liver ailment complicated by a fall she took in her house. At the funeral, Tony and his colleagues are seen "laughing and talking at the same time" (*The Easter Parade*, 188).

As Emily grows suspicious of the reasons of Sarah's death, Howard becomes more and more restricting. Emily grows increasingly confused at work, and gets reprehended for her carelessness. Unable to understand that rather than about money, Emily still dreams of a journalistic career Howard states: "Why don't you quit the damn job, Emily? You don't have to work. We don't need the money." (*The Easter Parade*, 197). Howard's business trips to California are a lame excuse to see his ex-wife Linda, about whom throughout his relationship with Emily he cannot shut up. He comes clean to Emily and leaves, and to add to the misery, Emily quits her job after having taken too many insults from her boss. She writes a final, and in my opinion crucial article, significant in the change she underwent, from a young and gullible girl to a disillusioned and unemployed woman in her forties. The article is called 'On the dole - a woman's story' and its opening lines are the following: "They tell me there simply aren't any jobs. Perhaps no one can fully explain this predicament, but at the risk of displaying an easy and all to fashionable self-pity, I will hazard a guess: I am a woman, and I am no longer young." (*The Easter Parade*, 211). After all these years, she seems able to bring her experience into her own words, her own subjectivity. And whilst it is only for herself she writes the article, she seems pleased with it. Her increasing isolation leads her to call up Sarah's son Tony Jr., who pities her and invites her over. Ironically, she ends up in a suburban housing development, not unlike that of the Wheelers in *Revolutionary Road*, where Tony Jr. lives in a house with a "neat lawn" (*The Easter Parade*, 225) and a girl who is "a fantasy come to life" (*The Easter Parade*, 223). The circular movement of the novels thus suggests a continuation of the pervasive effects of gender narratives and their spatial embodiment in suburbia rather than a possible rupture. When Tony Jr. states that his aunt strikes him "as the original liberated woman" Emily responds "liberated from what?" (*The Easter Parade*, 221). His answer is: "Well you know - from all the old, outmoded sociological concepts of what a
woman's role should be." (The Easter Parade, 221). The novel ends with Emily sardonically stating: "I'm almost fifty years old and I've never understood anything in my whole life." (The Easter Parade, 226), and indeed, there could be no other conclusion. Within the cultural framework in which she acts, Emily does not understand anything. Sarah seems to have understood its restrictions and expectations, but ends up worse than Emily nonetheless. In this way, Yates's novels expose the absolute inability to escape gender normativity, uncovering its oppressive and misogynous character.
6. Conclusion

This dissertation meant to show that in the novels *Revolutionary Road* and *The Easter Parade* of the American realist, misogyny is produced both at a level of everyday interaction and on a larger ideological level. I argued it is not the product of a misogynous mind, as various critics have claimed, but rather that misogyny is the result of oppressive structures of gender hierarchy within the novels' cultural framework. Accusations of misogyny and patronizing women are the result of equating the voice of the author with the voices of characters like Frank Wheeler and Tony Wilson. I have argued that, rather than to identify these voices with authorial vision we should interpret them as representative of their culture. In addition, I have shown how for Yates, gender proves to be performative rather than natural.

Discussing gender, I have analyzed the differences between psychoanalytical and more sociologically oriented theoretical work on gender identity. Following Simone De Beauvoir and Judith Butler, I have argued gender is an external process rather than the result of psychosexual maturity. According to De Beauvoir, Freud's phallocentric views are flawed, primarily because they privilege the phallic over the non-phallic and define the latter in function of the first. Butler's criticism of Freud consists of the fact that when Freud talked about masculine and feminine, he spoke in terms already culturally determined. Children do not take on gender identities as a natural consequence of maturing and identifying with the father or the mother. What they identify with is already constructed. Freud's disciple Jacques Lacan recognized masculinity and femininity as constructs within a cultural discourse, in his own terms the Symbolic, but still proposed notions of authentic femininity and masculinity outside of the law, outside of culturally fixed gender dispositions. If Lacan argues that within the Symbolic women reject or mask essential parts of their femininity, then what are those parts? I followed Butler in affirming Lacan's speculative character and that outside of cultural laws, there are no fixed notions of femininity and masculinity. The French feminist Simone De Beauvoir saw a radical discontinuity between biological sex and sociological gender, and famously claimed that we become our gender from very early on in life. Gender identity is, like the hierarchic relation between masculinity and femininity, imposed by our parents during childhood. Superiority and submissiveness are taught and thoroughly external to our physical bodies. Judith Butler follows De Beauvoir in affirming the cultural construction of gender identities, but claims that next to gender, sex is also constructed, rather than being a neutral surface to which something is added. The supposedly natural state of biological sex is
already a rigid binary structuring which facilitates the binary projection of gender dispositions upon those bodies. In addition, gender is not only imposed, it is constantly and coherently enacted or performed. Less theorized in *Gender Trouble* is which role gender identities play in childhood. At which point does the enacting become an enacting, in other words, when do children become aware of having to enact within compulsory systems? Can we speak of imposition of gender until a certain age, at which it is actively engaged with as a strategy of survival? The third chapter of this dissertation briefly introduced misogyny, which throughout history has taken on various guises. I argued it is omnipresent and no single form of misogyny is dominant within the novelistic framework. It is both present on an ideological level, especially within the togetherness narrative, and on the level of everyday interaction, disallowing women to bring their own experience into female subjectivity. The fourth chapter discussed the togetherness narrative mentioned above and shows how it confined women's roles to those of mother and housewife. Valued above all were the sanctity of marriage and the nuclear family, in which both husband and wife had clear-cut roles. As the prime enforcer of what was culturally intelligible in terms of gender dispositions, the togetherness narrative meant to secure a certain sense of safety. Whether it was within marriage, in the workspace or within a community, togetherness involved a need for belonging, a need for approval. The final chapter closely analyzed Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* and *The Easter Parade* and showed how gender proves to be repeatedly enacted and created through various gestures and mannerisms. The chapter examined how gender hierarchy in postwar America repressed women in every part of their existence. Frequently silenced, the women in Yates's novels are thoroughly oppressed. They are defined in male discourse and every attempt to define themselves ends miserably. The tragical deaths of both April Wheeler in *Revolutionary Road* and Sarah Grimes in *The Easter Parade* are not the product of the misogynous mind of Richard Yates. They are the result of their confinement, their inability to exist outside of what was culturally legible. In addition, the narrative development both novels is circular. Notwithstanding being written fifteen years apart, both novels end in the suburbs, where the central trauma is seemingly forgotten and a new situation of domestic bliss announces itself.

To conclude, I acknowledge that the idea for this thesis arose out of admiration for the author Richard Yates. I do believe however that enough textual proof has been given to support my thesis statement. Having read *Revolutionary Road* multiple times, I have always been astonished by accusations of misogyny. Whilst scholarly work on gender in Yates's work was practically non-existent until Kate Charlton-Jones published *Dismembering the American Dream: The Life and Fiction of Richard Yates* at the end of 2014, when this dissertation was
already in the works, Yates's reputation as patronizing and misogynous has been consistent, especially in popular culture. It would be ignorant to deny the fact that Yates had troublesome relationships with women in his private life, but to hold that into account when analyzing his novels is to deny the author's insight into the gender politics of his day. It is my sincerest hope that future scholarly and non-scholarly work on Richard Yates will hold into account the fact that an author is never completely his work and vice versa, and that the status of alter egos is never conclusive.
7. Works cited


