

Lilijana Burcar
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

2023, Vol. 20 (1), 153-169(228)
journals.uni-lj.si/elope

<https://doi.org/10.4312/elope.20.1.153-169>
UDC: 821.111(71).09-31Ondaatje M.:141.72

Ongoing Objectification, Marginalization and Sexualization of Women in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and *Divisadero*: Old Patterns, New Disguises

ABSTRACT

The year 2023 marks Michael Ondaatje's 80th birthday, a landmark in the author's life and an occasion for literary critics to look back and revisit what are perhaps some of the more troubling aspects of his literary production. Ondaatje's poetry and fiction have received little attention from feminist literary critics, which is due to the author's conservative take on the figuration of female characters and representation of women. While some critics have proposed that *The English Patient* (1992), and therefore also by extension his novel *Divisadero* (2007), might signify a turning point in Ondaatje's otherwise problematic gender politics, this article demonstrates that earlier patterns of women's objectification, sexualization and marginalization found in Ondaatje's poetry and fiction persist in both of these seemingly more progressive works, albeit in new forms and disguises. This article also introduces a new concept to the field of (feminist) literary theory, the so-called blazon in prose.

Keywords: Michael Ondaatje, feminism, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *The Cinnamon Peeler*, *The English Patient*, *Divisadero*

Nadaljevanje popredmetovanja, marginalizacije in seksualizacije žensk v romanih *Angleški pacient* in *Divisadero* Michaela Ondaatjeja: stari vzorci, nove preobleke

IZVLEČEK

Leta 2023 obeležujemo osemdeseto obletnico rojstva kanadskega pisatelja in pesnika Michaela Ondaatjeja, kar je pomemben mejnik v avtorjevem življenju in hkrati priložnost za literarno kritično srenjo, da ponovno preuči vidike avtorjevega literarnega ustvarjanja, ki ostajajo problematični. Ondaatjejev pesniški in literarni opus je požel zelo malo zanimanja med feministično literarno kritično srenjo zaradi izrazito konservativne naravnosti njegovih del pri upodabljanju ženskih likov in podajanja predstavnosti o ženskah. Medtem ko so nekateri kritiki roman *Angleški pacient* (1992), in kasneje v navezavi z njim tudi roman *Divisadero* (2007), označili za prebojnega, saj naj bi predstavljal odmik od konservativne spolne politike, prispevek pokaže, da oblike popredmetovanja, seksualizacije in marginalizacije žensk tudi v teh dveh domnevno bolj progresivnih delih, ki temeljita na Ondaatjejevi tipični konstelaciji moških in ženskih osrednjih likov, niso odpravljene, pač pa se ohranjajo v posodobljeni, manj vpadno agresivni preobleki. Prispevek vpelje nov strukturalni koncept v polje literarne (feministične) teorije, t. i. blazon v prozi.

Ključne besede: Michael Ondaatje, feminizem, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *The Cinnamon Peeler*, *Angleški pacient*, *Divisadero*

1 Introduction

The year 2023 marks the 80th birthday of Michael Ondaatje, one of Canada's most prolific and prominent living writers. Despite his enduring success, Ondaatje's novels and books of poetry have drawn very little feminist attention. Writing in 1994, Lorraine York brought up the question of the missing feminist critique or "the-not-yet-written feminist criticism" of Ondaatje's fiction and poetry (1994, 71). This question was to be raised again almost thirty years later by literary critics such as Robert Lecker, who asked why the representation of women in Ondaatje has "not actually been approached in any depth" (R. Lecker, email message to author, January 8, 2022). A still valid answer to this overwhelming question was offered by York herself in what to this day remains one of the rare critical feminist essays on Ondaatje, titled "Whirling Blindfolded in the House of Woman: Gender Politics in the Poetry and Fiction of Michael Ondaatje". York hypothesizes that

feminist critics shied away from Ondaatje because they assumed there was nothing to write about, or that, if they did write, they would end up compiling a survey of 'images of women' in Ondaatje – in essence, a catalogue of Atwoodian victim positions." (1994, 71)

In other words, from a feminist perspective, Ondaatje's fiction and poetry are deeply problematic and in their essence conservative. His fictional and poetic worlds, as argued by critics, are based upon the re-inscription of the patriarchal symbolic order and the reproduction of "cultural male bias" (Ellis 1996, 24), which in his earlier works preceding the publication of *The English Patient* is most clearly reflected in "the romanticization" of masculine violence along with its sexual codification directed at women (Bök 1992, 109).

In this respect, some critics consider Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), and by extension his novel *Divisadero* (2007), which is also based on a constellation of male and female central characters, as signifying a turning point in his conservative gender politics.¹ These two

¹ The intervening novel between these two is *Anil's Ghost*, published in 2000. Unlike the rest of Ondaatje's novels that carry a constellation of male and female central characters, with the latter marginalized and the narrative points of view tipped in favour of male characters as central observers, *Anil's Ghost* is, exceptionally, told from the point of view of a female focalizer. This has led many mainstream critics to view *Anil's Ghost*, including one of our own reviewers, as automatically emancipatory and unproblematic in terms of gender binaries. When trying to dispute feminist criticism of Ondaatje in particular, mainstream critics and reviewers of scholarly articles alike make a point of referring to Ondaatje's novel *Anil's Ghost* (2000). They claim that the novel represents a major departure from the author's conservative gender politics for the simple reason that it "us[es] a woman as the focalizing figure" (Reviewer B, Accompanying comments, April 5, 2023). But as is very well known in feminist literary theory, having a woman character as a central focalizer does not in any way guarantee that such a literary text will be automatically emancipatory and free of patriarchal paradigm, its hierarchically arranged masculine-feminine binaries and harmful gender constraints. Thinking in these terms is in fact biologically deterministic and deeply flawed. A closer analytical look at Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* proves this point.

The main protagonist and central focalizing figure is a Sri Lankan woman, educated in the UK and working in the USA as a forensic anthropologist. This, according to Ondaatje, is supposedly a male-dominated profession. She is sent to Sri Lanka during the civil war as an employee of the United Nations' Centre for Human Rights in Geneva. She not only excels in her profession but also loves being "one of the boys" (Ondaatje 2011, 143), who constitute the *crème de la crème* of forensic doctors dispatched to different corners of the world by international human rights agencies. Ondaatje makes his female focalizing figure in *Anil's Ghost* truly one of the boys not only in spirit but also in her name. With her mind set on being a successful woman, she barter away her childhood female name for a male one. Anil, as this woman explains and who mainstream critics ironically take as a rare example of female empowerment in Ondaatje's fiction, is "her brother's unused second name" (Ondaatje 2011, 63). It is her brother's masculine name that

works are believed to usher in a less problematic model of masculinity that departs from earlier explicit violence directed at women, while also offering an improved representation of women (Bök 1992; York 1994; Ellis 1996). Yet a closer comparative look at *The English Patient* and *Divisadero*, as we demonstrate in this article, reveals that the pattern of women's objectification, sexualization and marginalization characteristic of Ondaatje's early poetry and fiction continues to inform these two seemingly progressive novels, albeit in new forms and disguises. An in-depth analysis of *The English Patient* and *Divisadero* reveals a shift from an earlier explicit pattern of gendering to a more refined, toned-down version. We show that this seemingly more benign pattern of gendering, which admittedly is no longer based upon

gives her orientation, stability and security, a feeling of belonging and self-worth. Her adopted masculine name is a ticket that in combination with her hard work opens the door to the homosocial world of well-paid male professionals. Ondaatje exceptionally allows a career woman to enter this homosocial circle of high-ranking professionals, providing she sheds her original feminine name and identity, which works towards the symbolic preservation of masculine homogeneity. Here, instead of building upon the problematization of masculine-centred public and work-related spaces, Ondaatje perpetuates the old, gendered divide and stereotype by having the woman adapt to masculinity as the *modus operandi* of professional worlds. To count as equal and to fit in, it is women that must adapt and not vice versa, for this might spell reaching out and meeting halfway by both parties, thus disturbing the patriarchal paradigm. Instead, the central position of a woman in this novel, which according to mainstream critics represents a significant digression from the rest of Ondaatje's novels, in which women feature as peripheral and marginal to men, seems to derive from symbolically embracing masculinity.

Equally problematic is the way in which Ondaatje's central female character secures her masculine name. Out of an array of options, Ondaatje opts for the sex trade. This points to the ongoing sexual objectification of women in Ondaatje's texts, which is never a fate meted out to his male characters:

Her name had not always been Anil. [...] She had tried to buy it from [her brother] when she was twelve years old, ... She gave her brother one hundred saved rupees, a pen set he had been eyeing for some time, a tin of fifty Gold Leaf cigarettes she had found, and a sexual favour he had demanded in the last hours of the impasse. (Ondaatje 2011, 63–64)

The central female protagonist and focalizer of the novel acquires her new masculine name and a more empowering masculine identity through a trade exchange with her brother, which involves a trade with her own body. This stands in stark contrast to Ondaatje's male characters, most typically exemplified in *The English Patient*, for whom change of identity or loss of national identities derives from their agency and acts of heroism and never depends upon their reduction to objects of sexual commodification and somebody else's sexual pleasure. The latter holds true for the female central focalizer in Ondaatje's only novel that delivers the narrative through the lens of a female character. Her admission to the masculine world and her seeming empowerment leads through the backdoor of making herself sexually available. This is, as implied rather than problematized in the novel, a price a woman must pay or even willingly pays to eventually make it in a men's world.

But once in, women in this supposedly emancipatory fictional world are themselves given to perpetuating harmful binaries of femininity and masculinity. We learn that this career woman's success in the forensic labs where she works itself depends on "mak[ing] it a point to distinguish *female* and *male* traits as clearly as possible" (Ondaatje 2011, 133, *our italics*) as though masculinity and femininity were biological givens and not in reality socially assigned characteristics and roles. According to the central female focalizer, women forensics can supposedly handle cadavers of all ages better than men because they are "geared to giving birth, protecting children, [and] steering them through crisis" (Ondaatje 2011, 133). It is the assumed universal and natural ability to give birth and to be a mother that supposedly makes women "better at dealing with calamity in professional work than men" while "men need[] to pause and dress themselves in coldness in order to deal with a savaged body" (Ondaatje 2011, 133). Ironically, the central character is not a mother. The fact that women have the biological ability to give birth supposedly makes them by default better equipped for examining decomposing bodies, which is a textbook example of biological essentialism and biological determinism par excellence. When it comes down to gender politics, Ondaatje's focalizing character does not voice views that would enable this central female character to break out of the confines of gendered binaries. Her thinking is mired in biological determinism and based on the essentialization of assigned traits of masculinity and femininity as indisputable biological givens. Having a female focalizer is not a game-changing narrative technique in its own right. What matters is the content. Therefore, such thinking is itself part and parcel of biological determinism, to which mainstream literary critics not versed in feminist literary theory are more than prone to succumbing.

explicit masculine aggression and sexual violence against women, still revolves around the re-inscription of women's secondary status as the objectified and marginalized other and as the commodified sexualized and bodily other, orbiting around a tight-knit male homosocial centre. To prove this, the contribution sheds light on the premises of the overt patriarchal paradigm that informs Ondaatje's first novel, *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976)², and his most popular collection of poetry, titled *The Cinnamon Peeler* (1989), which includes poems that Ondaatje wrote between 1963 and 1990. These two works are pivotal reference points as they literally frame the first three decades of Ondaatje's writing career. For this reason, they are brought in and read against *The English Patient* and *Divisadero* to show that instead of there being a remarkable paradigm shift, there is instead still a stunning consistency in women's objectification and their ongoing sexual commodification, with homosocial patriarchal bonding between men and hegemonic masculinity remaining the central axes of these two seemingly more progressive fictional worlds.

In this way, this article also attempts to redress the gaping hole in the feminist critique of Ondaatje's fiction and poetry, which peaked in the 1990s but never picked up after that, as feminist critics, justifiably, turned their attention elsewhere.³ Admittedly, this text is in its own way an exploration of what York has termed women's "victim positions", which still remains an open chapter of feminist critique on Ondaatje and which this article attempts to close. Our approach, however, does not function on the level of mere descriptive renditions and listings of "images of women" at the receiving end of male violence, which was predominantly the case with feminist close readings of literary texts in the 1980s and the early 1990s. As York implies in her seminal feminist essay on Ondaatje, it was this factor, along with Ondaatje's conservative gender politics, which presented itself as a deterrent and the reason that feminist critics in the late 1990s and from that point onwards avoided engaging critically with Ondaatje. They came to fear that a textual approach based on a mere description and enumeration of women's positions as victims, which Ondaatje's works seem to invite by default, would help to reenforce harmful binaries of femininity and masculinity. They feared it would help to perpetuate an essentialist view of women, whose identity in the patriarchal symbolic order remains dependent on the assigned status of marginalized and objectified other and on being a perpetual victim at the receiving end of masculine violence (Brown 1995). Our contribution departs from the pattern of mere descriptive textual investigations

² *Coming Through Slaughter* was Ondaatje's first novel. Prior to that, in 1967, Ondaatje published his first collection of poems, titled *The Dainty Monsters* (1967), which was followed in 1970 by *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left-Handed Poems*. The latter is not a novel proper but a pastiche of "poems, prose, photographs, interviews, and even comic books, which combined create a meditation on the nature of heroism and violence" (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2023).

³ By the early 1990s, Anglo-American feminist literary criticism tended to criticize male-authored patriarchal texts by merely describing the presence or absence of women and the restricted, traditional roles assigned to them in such works. At the same time, feminist literary critics had more important and urgent tasks to see to than simply dwelling on male-authored texts, as these began to increasingly constitute just one segment of the entire literary production and by extension also of college syllabi for literature courses. Feminist scholars and literary critics increasingly turned their attention to the recuperation of a lost female literary canon and to an ever more expanding field of contemporary feminist literary production, which required its own critical assessment. This new, blossoming literary field turned out to be more alluring and engaging, as feminist literary writings aimed to address and problematize patriarchal social organization and its constraining effects on men and women alike. For this reason, they offered, and still do, alternative modes of being and acting in the world, far removed from the pattern of women's passivization, desubjectivization and commodification found, for example, in the works of then established male authors such as Ondaatje.

and relies on an analytical, deconstructive method. In doing so, it brings together a wide and complex variety of interdisciplinary insights, produced by feminist scholars over the course of the last four decades, both into women's body objectification and commodified sexualization, and into the processes of women's objectification and marginalization in general. These interdisciplinary feminist investigations, which first emerged in the field of cultural and sociological studies, remain united under one common banner. Their aim is to make the ongoing processes of women's othering, body objectification and sexualization "strange"; that is, no longer tenable and therefore no longer acceptable.

2 Women's Body Objectification and Marginalization

The Cinnamon Peeler is a collection of poems spanning the period between 1963 to 1990 when Ondaatje wrote his first major works *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, and *In the Skin of a Lion*. The collection establishes the template for multi-layered forms of homosocial bonding. These include representations of the poet and his male friends (to whom some of the poems are dedicated) and other mostly deceased fellow artists, primarily literati and poets (such as Christopher Dewdney, Wallace Stevens, Robert Creeley, Peter Handke, Henry Rousseau, Rainer Maria Rilke, Pablo Neruda, Marcel Proust, Miguel de Cervantes, and Federico Garcia Lorca), scientists (Charles Darwin), politicians (John F. Kennedy), philosophers, and other male figures that command authority in their respective fields. It is exclusively with them that the poet speaker engages in a direct communication, referring to them most often as a source of inspiration or even envious admiration. In this homosocial poetic landscape two female artists are mentioned in passing (Bessie Smith, Emily Dickinson). Meanwhile, men appear as each other's mental companions and spiritual mentors, immersed into "thinking chaos" (Ondaatje 1992, 39) and the production of poetic lines as "tracks of thought" (Ondaatje 1992, 41). Women, on the other hand, pop up sporadically as voiceless bodies, mirroring flora and fauna at best but most often as anonymous sexualized bodies to be laid claim to. In both cases, women function as "passive objects of the male explosive creativity" (Bök 1992, 116). Women walk in and out of this collection of poems primarily as "naked" bodies (Ondaatje 1992, 84), and as bodies already shared with other men. A woman's stomach, for example, is kissed by the poet speaker to bless those men who kissed this part of the same woman's body before him, as in "Rock Bottom" (Ondaatje 1992, 151). This form of homosocial bonding, which is cemented through the exchange of women between the poet and his male friends, further rests on the reduction of women to anonymous bodies also shared between the poet speaker and his contemporary or long-deceased fellow artists in their own lines of poetry. In this way, if the poet speaker is at one point "aroused by Wyatt's talk of women who step / naked into his bed chamber" (Ondaatje 1992, 55), at another point he is also full of admiration for Rousseau and his visage of "a naked lady / who has been animal and tree / her breast a suckled orange" (Ondaatje 1992, 46).

In Ondaatje's homosocial poetic landscape, a woman most often appears as a particular kind of a "naked body". This is an assemblage of fragmented and sexualized body parts, held in the gaze of a single male or in a mirrored gaze of multiple male observers who share in their spiritual companionship and acts of poetic creativity. The collection features a thinking and

creative male subject versus women who feature as a collection of sexualized and fetishized body parts. While the poet speaker and his male companions appear wholesome, representing mind and spirit, sporadic women reduced to sexualized body fragments represent the outer margin of their homosocially reconstructed human centre. Painted in this manner as the ultimate other and something closer to nature than culture, women are always on the outside. That is, they are always on the other side of the homosocial world inhabited exclusively by the poet speaker and his fellow artists. This is best exemplified in “Tin Roof” as follows:

Oh, Rilke, I want to sit down calm like you
or pace the castle, avoiding the path of the cook, Carlo,
/.../
I have circled your books for years
/...
I can see you sitting down
the suspicious cook asleep
/... /
 Us and the coffee,
all the small charms we invade it with.

As at midnight we remember the colour
of the dogwood flower growing
like a woman’s sex outside the window. (Bök 1992, 122–23)

While men are engrossed in each other’s spiritual worlds and their “weaving [of] language into artistic creation” (Miller 2016, 31), women are desubjectivized and marginalized as a faceless and voiceless collection of eclectic and sexualized body parts, scattered on the outer rim of men’s homosocial world. Defined and controlled by the masculine gaze of the male observer and reduced to an assortment of sexualized body parts to be “repeatedly put together and taken apart” according to the male poets’ whims and erotic desires (Montrose in Miller 2016, 29), women further assume the status of absent presence. They pass from “a potentially speaking subject to a sexualized physical object” to be eventually claimed and triumphantly possessed by the poet speaker ((Miller 2016, 32). This is most clearly encapsulated in the title poem of the collection, “The Cinnamon Peeler”, in which the opening lines read as follows:

If I were a cinnamon peeler
I would ride your bed
and leave the yellow bark dust/on your pillow

Your breasts and shoulders would reek
you could never walk through markets
without the profession of my fingers

floating over you.

//...//

Here on the upper thigh

at this smooth pasture

neighbour to your hair

or the crease

that cuts your back. This ankle.

You will be known among strangers

as the cinnamon peeler's wife. (Ondaatje 1992, 156)

The woman's identity and subjectivity are non-existent and instead are derivative of that of the poet speaker. Reduced to a truncated and fetishized body, the woman disappears only to reappear as an assortment of sexualized and commodified body parts, which are mapped and claimed by the male speaker's hands. Reconfigured as an eclectic collection of body parts, the woman has no voice, no self, and consequently no power. As an assemblage of fragmented body parts, she can be unproblematically made to "serve men's ends" (Jones 2000, 91) or, more specifically, sexual desires other than her own.

Ondaatje's elision of women as subjects and their remoulding as fragmented and sexualized bodies is of course not his own invention. It is a faithful reinvocation of the Renaissance genre of blazon, especially its Petrarchan convention, whose problematic patriarchal principles Ondaatje follows to the letter. Blazons are conceits or poems that in their entirety "dwelt upon and detailed the various parts of a woman's body" held in the dissecting and defining masculine gaze of the male poet (Cuddon 1991, 97). As noted by C. John Stout, in this poetic genre, "the female body is taken apart and fetishized so that the male poet can demonstrate his verbal prowess, his wit, and his technical expertise. In this process, the man speaks and the woman is silent" (2003, 54). Just as importantly, in this poetic genre and by extension in Ondaatje's poetry, "men make possession of the female body, dismembering it, caressing it with words or insulting it, while [the woman], to whom their poems are ostensibly dedicated remains absent" (Stout 2003, 57). Worse, with Petrarch the woman becomes an absent presence and, to rephrase Charles Sorel's then contemporary critique, "a beautiful monster" (Mandell 1996, 569). Petrarchan convention, which dominates the genre of blazon, is based on "the listing of body parts" usually "from the hair down" and on "the use of hyperbole and simile in describing lips like coral, teeth like pearls [hair like fine-spun gold, breasts like ivory] and so on" (Baldick 2001, 28). A Petrarchan blazon is therefore a head-to-toe inventory or a catalogue of women's body parts which are aligned with minerals, metals, and other precious, and, most importantly, tradeable objects in nature. It emphasizes and links the commodified riches that the woman's body parts are equated with and subsumed under the worldly possessions the poet speaker as the woman's lover and owner of her body finds or symbolically places himself in charge of. With each body part compared to a treasure in nature or to a valuable object, the woman is again fixed as a possession and as an interchangeable commodity to be bartered among men in their competitive pursuit of symbolic wealth. Within the Petrarchan convention of blazon, however, this does not

necessarily translate into explicit sexual fetishization of the woman. However, the woman is again commodified and effaced as a subject, her body parts come to stand for tradeable commodities in nature manned by those constituting the homosocial centre of humanity. As a result, she is made to disappear as a human by being realigned with nature rather than culture once her body parts come to stand for precious objects found in nature or when they come to stand for its flora and fauna. This is exactly the form of women's body fragmentation, othering, and marginalization also at work in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and *Divisadero*.

Divisadero, first published in 2007, is set both in the United States and France. Each of the two settings, as is typical of Ondaatje's intercontinental novels, features women not as independent entities, as is the case with the men populating the same literary world, but as an obligatory part of male-female pairings. The narrative is framed and focalized primarily through the eyes of central male protagonists. These include Coop, a professional gambler, then the pre-First World War obscure writer Lucien Segura, and Rafael, a post-war child attached to Segura's refurbished estate at the end of the twentieth century. Even when the two token female characters, Claire and Anna, occasionally take the central podium, their perspective is muted and abstracted. Their energy is channelled toward maintaining the love for their men or toward the investigation and advancement of the lives of other men but never women. Anna's career thus revolves around "exhuming mostly unknown corners of European cultures" with her "best-known study [...] of Auguste Maquet, one of Alexandre Dumas' collaborators and plot researches" and another one being that of "George Wague, the professional mime who gave Collette lessons in 1906 to prepare her for music-hall melodramas" (Ondaatje 2008, 148). It is also in this capacity that Anna, an American researcher now dedicated to the recovery and canonization of Segura's forgotten writings, encounters Rafael, with whom she almost immediately enters into a love liaison. And it is this amorous liaison rather than the nature of her work that defines her role in the novel. Here, women appear primarily as erotized or brutally sexually commodified bodies and as sexual bait, like Bridget. They hover on the perimeters of the men's world and are held in the gaze of male focalizers, while men in this homosocially centred literary world function as independently standing and, most importantly, fully rounded persons with a clear presence of mind and spirit. The poetic conventions of the blazon are translated into and made to fit what we might refer to as a blazon in prose. In the short vignette titled "Two Photographs", Segura the writer and his biographer Anna are typically juxtaposed in this manner, which serves to entrench a classical and hierarchically arranged gendered binary. The opening lines read as follows:

There are two photographs pinned up the wall of the kitchen in Dému. One is the picture taken of Lucien Segura in his last phase of his life, sitting on a garden bench with a dark branch fanning over him. [...] what is most informal is the openness of his face, as if it has just been blessed. His laugh, for instance – there is no attempt to hide the shaggy randomness, or even the unsightly gap of a missing tooth. This was a discreet man who used to laugh internally, in a hidden way. (Ondaatje 2008, 194)

The vignette offers an image of a man pictured as a persona. It provides an intricate insight into his own inner psyche and personal characteristics one can read from his face and his manner of laughing. This is a person the reader can identify with.

Not the same goes for Anna, the woman in this dyad. It is not only that she pops up as a woman without a name, but she is also instantly reduced to a body. She is a mere body silhouette that belongs to a nameless woman, and with which one of course cannot identify but can only observe and assess through the lenses offered by the narrator:

We are much closer to the subject in this picture.... The woman's figure is naked from the waist up, just about to break free of focus. The tanned body wilful, laughing, because she has woven the roots of two small muddy plants into her blond hair, so it appears as if mullein and rosemary are growing out the plastered earth on her head. There's a wet muck across her smiling mouth, and on her lean shoulders and arms. It is as if her energy and sensuality have been drawn from the air surrounding her. (Ondaatje 2008, 195)

Unlike the man's face, which is defined by his laughing and which in turn is a sign of his lively interior world and exuberant mental presence, the woman, in this gendered binary typical of Ondaatje's works, is doubly reiterated as a body. First, she is cast as a body figure, and then as just a body that laughs. There is no psychological profile to this woman who is only a body without a face, and a specific kind of "beautiful monstrous body" at that. Her body is an evocation of the Renaissance blazon, with the roots of muddy plants woven into her blonde hair instead of precious gold and with earth plastered over her shoulders and arms, thus forming a new earth-like assemblage of body parts. Instead of radiating with the sun-like rays, symbolized by gold-spun threads woven into the golden locks of Renaissance ladies, her head is the head of mother earth itself. It sports plants that seem to grow from the crown of her head, which is itself redefined as the crust of the earth.

The woman, reconstituted as an assemblage of body parts that imitate or melt with the flora and fertile earth, is realigned with nature and ultimately reconstructed as a sensual rather than a rational, thinking body. Turned into a sensual body, the woman ends up as an eroticized body closer to nature rather than culture. Reconstructed as a body that by default cannot be rational but only sensual, it inevitably invites its own sexualization under the objectifying gaze of the narrator and the reader alike. Typically for Ondaatje, this sensualized or eroticized body assemblage that is a woman appears ensconced between two men, with whom the vignette opens and closes. The first one looks at us from the photograph and is the man of discreet laughter. The other one is Anna's lover turned photographer, who observes and captures her image through the lenses of a camera, fixing her as a body: "We look at this picture [of the woman as a body] and imagine also the person with the camera, we can see the relationship between the unseen photographer and this laughing muddy woman" (Ondaatje 2008, 195). It is this homosocial structuration, with the woman remoulded as an assemblage of monstrously beautiful and eroticized body parts sandwiched between two men, two persons, that also underlies the rest of the novel.

Similarly, *The English Patient* may depart from Ondaatje's earlier pattern of overt and taken-for-granted masculine violence and systemic sexual abuse targeted at women (Ellis 1996, 22), but it continues to reinscribe and perpetuate the gender binary of transcendent and universal masculine bodies/subjects on the one hand, and dismembered and commodified, fragmented and sexualized female bodies on the other. This gendered binarism is the underlying axis of

the central narrative, framed by the English patient, or Count Almásy, a desert explorer and map-maker. As a desert map-maker who charts geographical phenomena, he inevitably puts himself at the service of imperial powers but is himself not to be domesticated and owned by imperial cartography and its signifying system. He and his fellow map-makers start out as “German, English, Hungarian, African” only to, as Almásy emphasizes, become gradually “nationless” (Ondaatje 1993, 138). Almásy appears as a transcendent and universal human body, as a prototypical universal masculine body, operating on par with the sand desert, which itself cannot be “claimed or owned”, and where nations by default are made sooner or later “historical with sand across their grasp” (Ondaatje 1993, 22, 18). As Almásy walks out of a burning plane in the desert, his charred body comes to signify the dissolution of national borders and ideological inscriptions. By the time he ends up in a villa in Florence and retells his story on his death bed, with “all identification consumed in a fire” (Ondaatje 2008, 48), it is no longer the side he worked for that matters but the bonding with other males who have directly participated in the war as sappers (Kip) or as spies and intelligence agents (Carravaggio), working for the other side. Their coming together, their bonding and immersion into each other’s stories, and eventually their mutual appreciation, depends on the exchange of the ideas and knowledge, on the mutual admiration they come to share for each other’s craftiness and expertise, out of which Hana as their nursing body is excluded.

While the male protagonists in the novel are defined by their expertise and as transcendent and omnipotent masculine bodies, not weighed down by particulars, the two women, Hana and Katharine, are divested of their own agency and body fluidity typical of the men in this novel. The two women, and consequently the forms of embodiment they are allowed to enact, are “tied to the institution of femininity” (Burcar 2007, 107). While Hana is reduced to a nursing body appended to the homosocial national centre, Katharine, the focal woman in the story, is reduced to a fragmented sexualized body, whose parts are to be laid claim to by her lover, a desert explorer and map-maker. Ondaatje thus perpetuates the problematic gender binary of masculinity and femininity and, with the Almásy–Katharine story occupying central place, the naturalization of the woman as an assemblage of sexualized body parts rather than a subject. Katharine’s personal name is revealed only when we are already well into one third of the novel. Before and after she is referred to either as Clifton’s wife or as Almásy’s lover and a nameless female body defined by her nakedness and sexual availability. As an assemblage of body parts, she is not a woman who can speak or stare back, let alone explore and map.

This gender paradigm of passive women, who are reduced to objectified and sexualized naked bodies, and of agential men, who are defined by their profession and expertise, is best captured in the section describing Almásy’s thoughts during one of his expeditions into the desert. Here he thinks of Katharine in their love nest, left behind in a room in Cairo: “In the desert the most loved waters, like a lover’s name, are carried blue in your hands, enter your throat. One swallows absence. A woman in Cairo curves the white length of her body up from the bed and leans out of the window into a rainstorm to allow her nakedness to receive it” (Ondaatje 2008, 141). Katharine as the central woman of the story enters and exits the novel as a passive, sexualized naked body to be owned or as an assemblage of fragmented, eclectic body parts to be laid claim to, but never as a person. As captured and dismembered

through the masculine and cartographic gaze of her lover, which is also the reader's gaze, she is from the start a mere cluster of "awkward limbs climbing out of a plane" (Ondaatje 2008, 144). She is a pointed "elbow" next to a campfire (Ondaatje 2008, 107), a "sweating knee beside the gearbox" inciting Almásy, a sensuous mouth drinking "the chlorinated water [with] some coming down her chin, [and] falling to her stomach" (Ondaatje 2008, 149), and a sweating "shoulder" that Almásy makes possession of: "This is my shoulder, he thinks, not her husband's. This is my shoulder" (Ondaatje 2008, 156).

In this process of body reduction and fragmentation, parts of Katharine's body are claimed and appropriated on the part of the male observer in a specific way, through the cartographic masculine gaze. As Almásy maps the desert, so he also maps Katharine's body or rather its parts, referring to them and realigning them with geographical features of a desert landscape. This is another technique of objectifying a woman as part of nature, that is, as an assemblage of geographical phenomena through which a male explorer passes or claims on his or others' behalf. Katharine's body parts come to resemble such geographical phenomena. During a dance when their affair is already over, Almásy deliberately pushes against her so that his throat lands "at her left shoulder on that *naked plateau*, above the sequins" (Ondaatje 2008, 244, italics added). And, most importantly, he becomes obsessed with mapping and claiming Katharine by giving a name to what he considers the most erotic part of her body, the "*hollow indentation* at her neck" (Ondaatje 2008, 162, italics added). It is this part of her body, already described in semi-geographical terms as if one were describing land depressions on the terrain, that he and the rest of his companion cartographers come to nickname the Bosphorus: "There was that small indentation at her throat we called the Bosphorus. I would dive from her shoulder into the Bosphorus!" (Ondaatje 2008, 236). Contoured and pinned down as the Bosphorus strait, this part of the woman's body allows for the imprint, the agency, and the expansion of the masculine lover, the map-maker. For Almásy and the reader the woman does not exist as a person with her own thoughts and desires but as an assemblage of eroticized body parts that resemble or duplicate geographical phenomena, inscribed and by analogy claimed by the male explorer.

Under Almásy's cartographic masculine gaze, this assemblage of eroticized body parts that is Katharine is also to be eventually "translated into the text of the desert" (Ondaatje 2008, 236), so that both can be finally contained and claimed. When wondering how to describe Katharine to his listeners in the villa in the north of Italy, Almásy proposes he can do this "the way I can arc out in the air the shape of a mesa or rock" (Ondaatje 2008, 235). This also echoes an earlier mention of how desert landscape is inscribed and claimed by other fellow mappers, captured in the following scene:

Someone seen bathing in a desert caravan, holding up muslin with one arm in front of her. Some old Arab poet's woman, whose white-dove shoulders made him describe an oasis with her name ... the old scribe turns from her to describe Zerzura. (Ondaatje 2008, 140–41)

Feminization and eroticization of the land, which proceeds on the backs of women's body fragmentation and objectification, serves as a double strategy of patriarchal and imperial containment, with women "serving as mediating and threshold figures by means of which

men orient themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge” (McClintock 1995, 24). Similarly, when Almásy writes his book on the Libyan desert in order to record his discoveries and present the mappings of the terrain not yet charted by Westerners for the London Geographic Society, he is unable “to remove [Katharine’s] body from the page” (*EP*, 235). Along with the desert that he charts into existence, he is also preoccupied with Katharine’s “nearby presence . . . or if truth be known with her possible mouth, the tautness behind her knee, the white plain of stomach” (Ondaatje 2008, 235). What Ondaatje perpetuates and reinforces here is the classical masculine cartographer’s gaze, starting with the feminization and erotization of the Libyan desert as a whole: “The desert of Libya. A sexual, drawn-out word, a coaxed well. The *b* and the *y*” (Ondaatje 2008, 257). As observed by McClintock in a different context, within the patriarchal gendered paradigm, the claiming and inscribing of lands, which proceeds by the latter’s feminization and erotization, is pictured and encoded “as a relation of power between two gendered spaces” (1995, 24). The feminization and sexualization of the land, which proceeds on par with the sexualization and fragmentation of women into parts of bodies to be translated and inscribed into landscape, serves as a strategy of containing the unknown, symbolized by women who are constructed as the marginal other in homosocial patriarchal world. Once feminized and eroticized as the passive and yielding other like the woman whose body parts it mirrors, the land can be “spatially spread” and rendered “safe for male exploration” and expropriation (McClintock 1995, 23). At the same time, women reduced to body parts are contained and circumscribed as manageable, instrumentalized objects. Symbolically merged with and built into the landscape as its body parts, they are again “the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, [given purpose to] and, above all, owned” (McClintock 1995, 31). Katharine also features as a beautiful monster, an assemblage of body parts, with which Almásy inscribes and acts upon the landscape while he refuses to be inscribed and acted upon himself.

3 Women’s Sexual Objectification and Subordination

In Ondaatje’s oeuvre, body objectification and sexualization of women feeds into and is structurally supportive of women’s sexual subordination. Ondaatje’s homosocial, masculine-centred literary worlds rest upon men’s sexual dominance over women, with women featuring as sexual instruments to be brutally violated and appropriated or at least placed in the service of men’s sexual desires and demands. While Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and *Divisadero* may abandon the earlier romanticization of explicit sexual violence against women and their brutal sexual degradation as a central element of male bonding and hegemonic masculinity, they still rest on the entrenchment of the phallogentric view of sexuality and the inscription of women as mere physical objects of men’s sexual gratification. In this sense, violent scenes of women’s sexual dehumanization that constitute the essence of being a woman in his first novel *Coming Through Slaughter* find their almost identical, albeit toned down renditions in both *The English Patient* and *Divisadero*.

Coming Through Slaughter runs amok with sexual violence and is rife with sexual victimization and humiliation of women who feature as sexual pawns in the hands of men. Mocked, brutalized, and slashed for real or in the voyeuristic eyes of their male observers, the women ranging from “mattress whores” (Ondaatje 1976, 118) in the streets of New Orleans to

the protagonist's different wives feature as sexualized punchbags. They are to be used and systematically abused in what is defined as the normal sexual pleasure of men. These actions are consequently not condoned by the narrator nor does the main protagonist sympathize with the plight of the women. On the contrary, as pointed out by Thomson, "the narration negates their subjectivity and assigns an absolute knowledge of them as objects" (1993, 37). Moreover, reduced to sexualized bodies to be violated, the women serve as mute "sites of coercive compliance" (Visano 2002, 57) with their own sexual degradation and brutalization or they feature as those who desperately want to be sexually violated and degraded, which is especially the case in Ondaatje's later works. While the latter applies to Katharine's portrayal in *The English Patient*, the former applies to *Coming Through Slaughter*. Here, in various sexually violent and by default phallogocentric scenes, women are brutally objectified and violated by men, a pattern which resurfaces intact in *Divisadero*, supposedly Ondaatje's most lyrical novel to date. In *Coming Through Slaughter*, we read:

I press myself into her belly... I lift her arms and leave them empty above us and bend and pull the brown dress up to her stomach and then up into her arms. Step back and watch her against the corner of my room [...]. Cool brown back. Till I attack her into the wall my cock cushioned my hand sat the front of the thigh pulling her at me we are hardly breathing her crazy flesh twisted into corners" of the room [of the room]. (Ondaatje 1976, 61).

This hardly differs from a similar scene of sexual violence in *Divisadero*, which depends upon Ondaatje's subscription to the patriarchal codification of the masculine pleasure principle as animalistically raw and penis-centred. Men feature as sexual agents and possessors and the women as the passive, inert body to be acted upon, and to be violently possessed and consumed:

What had been innocent – a celebration! – abruptly made him a voyeur. His daughter's forearms and open palms were flat against the mildewed wall as Pierre tugged her white hips and shoulders toward him, his body digging into her again and again, and again [...]. Lucien thought of her small hand brushing away the erasure rubbings from his pages [when she was a child]. (Ondaatje 2008, 239)

Here Ondaatje unproblematically adopts what in a different context has been recognized as the patriarchally driven pornographic construct of "consensual rape" (Pease 2019, Smith 1995). Scenes of rape as the ultimate form of sexual violence against women and violation of their bodily and mental integrity are disguised as objectively neutral, taken-for-granted scenes of male eroticized pleasure and reinscribed and naturalized as integral to male-female heterosexual relationships.

In *Divisadero*, the reader's encounter with the sexual degradation and brutalization of women is no longer direct but is made seemingly distant and removed. Sexual violence and the woman's objectification are artificially diffused by being transmuted and sublimated under the voyeuristic gaze of the third party, the father who observes his daughter from a distance and, with the narrator's focus being diverted elsewhere, to his daughter as a little girl, while her adult status as an object of sexual violation and brutalization is thus not only taken for granted but *implicitly* endorsed. *The English Patient* employs a similar

decoy tactic of introducing and naturalizing sexual violation of women in the process of inscribing patriarchal heteronormative and masculine-centred sexual paradigm. Here it is Katharine who demands of Almásy that she be “ravished” by him, placing herself not only in the position of a sexual object but one to be brutally acted upon. In her only sexual dream in the novel she imagines the two of them being “bent over like animals”, with Almásy “yoking her neck back so she has been unable to breathe within his arms” (Ondaatje 1993, 236, 149). Ondaatje again subscribes to the patriarchal and phallus-centred pornographic discourse, in which women are imaginarily depicted “as enjoying how they are being used and violated by men” (Papadaki 2021, n.p.) and presented as those who “desperately want to be bound, battered, tortured, humiliated, and killed, or merely taken and used” (MacKinnon 1984, 326). This is a form of displacement whereby women, who are positioned as “sexual objects available for men’s consumption” (Papadaki 2021, n.p.) supposedly invite and desire their own sexual subjugation and dehumanization.

While *The English Patient* and *Divisadero* may depart from explicit sexual violence, brutalization, and degradation of women with women no longer uniformly appearing “as passive victims of male volatility” (Bök 1992, 116), in these two novels female characters continue to feature as sexual objects who are there to serve the needs of men. Women are by default treated as silently compliant and readily available physical objects, facilitating the sexual desire and gratification of men. In line with the patriarchal phallic organization of sexuality that Ondaatje upholds, male sexual desire and eroticism are in turn themselves narrowly and mechanistically construed with “the penis as the focus and male ejaculation” as the apex and “the end of the sexual event” for both parties involved (Stick and Fetner 2020, 784). In these constellations, where women are reduced to a body or its silent parts and treated as readily available instruments for the sexual gratification of men, women’s feelings are not only disregarded but annulled and obliterated. Precisely with the woman being instrumentalized, her feelings as a human being “need not be taken into account” at all (Papadaki 2021, n.p.). Women are thus totally desubjectivized and dehumanized.

In this vein, Ondaatje’s fiction consistently demonstrates a preoccupation if not obsession with one particular type of sexual posture already encountered in the bestial sex imagery dreamed by Katherine in *The English Patient*. In *Divisadero*, too, there is virtually no other sexual position but the one where women are compliantly bent over and men do whatever they please. In *Divisadero*, whose Bloomsbury edition features a book cover with a woman’s torso but no head, we read Cooper thinks of Bridget as “his willing and diligent lover” (Ondaatje 2008, 124). When they first make love or, rather, have sex, it is on the hood of a car:

They stopped, left the car open so music filled yards of the desert night, and she bent over the hood of the Chrysler, the heat from its engine against her t-shirt. He could hardly grip her because of the sweat on her shoulders. (Ondaatje 2008, 122)

The women in *Divisadero* at this point only start to diligently bend over or are being bent over. In another scene involving Roman and Marie-Neige, who again comes across as a silent and compliant body there to facilitate her man’s sexual pleasure, the entire affair is described from a masculine point of view in a totally mechanical manner, as is prototypical of Ondaatje’s style of writing. We read:

He touched the soft and small delight of her face, [...] she turned and put her arms out along the thick rim of the barrel where in the water was the moon and the ghost of her face. Roman moved against her, and in the next while, whatever surprise there was, whatever pain, there was also the frantic moon in front of her shifting and breaking into pieces in the water. (Ondaatje 2008, 221)

In another instance we are privy to exactly the same kind of sexual objectification, with the woman represented as a silent instrument of man's sexual gratification:

On his knees, behind her, he pulled her thighs back to him in a slow rocking, as if he wanted her now to search for him, the heat of her cave onto his coldness, [...] and he moved into her, her softness and the unknown warmth. (Ondaatje 2008, 262)

In these representative scenes, with women reduced to objects for man's gratification, Ondaatje's men appear as "powerful, active and dominant" and women as silent, submissive and pliable bodies that "complement men's sexuality", supporting and mirroring their phallogentric subjectivity (Stephen 1994, 225).

Only in rare instances, when the focalizer is not the male protagonist and/or the narrator and the sexual encounter is exceptionally described from the point of view of the woman, is this sexual position abandoned. But the same does not go for the phallogentric organization of sexuality and the hierarchical binary of active and agential men versus passive and inert women who lack sexual autonomy. This paradigm continues to be firmly entrenched. This is the case with Hanna in *The English Patient*. Here we encounter a typical patriarchally defined female complementary dyad, with one woman, Katharine, being sexually commodified and violated as though this is an extension of her own sexual desire, and the other woman in the novel, Hana, whose sexual desire is positioned as secondary and dependent. It is presented as being derivative of male masculine pleasure, which in turn takes centre stage:

She holds an Indian goddess in her arms, she holds wheat and ribbons. As he bends over her it pours. As [Kip] moves [inside her], she keeps her eyes open to witness the gnats of electricity in his hair. (Ondaatje 1993, 218)

Hana is presented as a passive body whose sexual pleasure remains obscure. In this patriarchal phallogentric organization of sexuality – within whose framework man's pleasure is prioritized but also reductively concentrated on the penis while the clitoris is removed from view, so that women's multiple erogenous zones are whittled down to and erroneously equated "only with the vagina" in order to "comply with the coital imperative" (Plessis 2015, 4) – female pleasure comes to be "seen as unimportant and/or mysterious" with women turned "into passive receptacles" (Stephen 1994, 225).

In line with the patriarchal phallogentric organization of sexuality, Ondaatje does not acknowledge multiple erogenous zones of women's bodies and their own sexual pleasures and sexual agency. In this way, he shies away from "a wider range of sexually pleasurable activities [in heterosexual relationships] that are less reflective of a male-centred model of sexuality" (Plessis 2015, 3). Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and *Divisidaro* thus, too, subscribe

to phallocentrism, with women serving as mere physical objects of male gratification. By not acknowledging multiple and reciprocally mutual pleasures, Ondaatje inadvertently reinscribes damaging feminine and masculine roles that in a sense constrain his own male protagonists too, while also reinscribing masculine (sexual) domination. Feminists have long claimed that “the possibility of an alternative and empowered female [and male] sexuality in heterosexual relationships requires male sexuality to depart from patriarchal and phallocentric identities” and that “empowered female sexuality” cannot emerge without the promotion of “alternative models of male sexuality” (Plessis 2015, 3). Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and *Divisadero*, considered his breakthrough novels in terms of supposedly reformed gender politics, sadly do not live up to this task, either.

4 Conclusion

Representations of women in Ondaatje’s supposedly more progressive novels *The English Patient* and *Divisadero* remain locked in a problematic homosocial model of patriarchal male bonding and modified hegemonic masculinity, which rests on the inscription of women as an objectified and sexualized body or an assemblage of body parts orbiting on the outer limit of masculine-centred worlds. Token women are allowed in, seemingly on an equal basis, only to be again perfidiously reinscribed as the objectified and sexualized other (like Katharine in *The English Patient* and Bridget and Marie-Neige in *Divisadero*), or simply as the feminine other conscripted into the service of grooming and catering for the male homosocial centre (Anna in *Divisadero* and Hana in *The English Patient*). This feminine other that languishes in the shadow of masculine-bonded groupings of male characters too poses and is again defined as a sexually inert body to be acted upon. Its erogenous zones and hence its sexual autonomy and agency need yet to be recovered if not discovered. It is alas no wonder that feminist critics to this day continue to avert their critical gaze from Ondaatje’s oeuvre, seeking their pleasures in greener pastures.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the Slovenian Research Agency [grant number P6-0265].

References

- Baldick, Chris. 2001. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bök, Christian. 1992. “Destructive Creation: The Politicization of Violence in the Works of Michael Ondaatje.” *South Asian Connections*, Special Issue of *Canadian Literature* 132: 109–24.
- Burcar, Lilijana. 2007. “Re-mapping Nation, Body, and Gender in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*.” In *The Flesh Made Text Made Flesh Again*, edited by Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, Katerina Kitse-Mytakou, and Effie Yiannopoulou, 99–110. New York: Peter Lang.
- Cuddon, J.A. 1991. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books.
- Ellis, Susan. 1996. “Trade and Power, Money and War: Rethinking Masculinity in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*.” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 21 (2): 22–36.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica, The Editors of. 2023. “Michael Ondaatje.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 11th, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michael-Ondaatje>.

- Jones, Rosalind Ann. 2000. "Blond chef, grande conquête': Feminist Theories of the Gaze, the blazon anatomique, and Louise Labé's Sonnet 6." In *Distant Voices Still Heard: Contemporary Readings of French Renaissance Literature*, edited by John O'Brien and Malcolm Quainton, 85–106. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Lecker, Robert. Email message to author, January 1, 2022.
- MacKinnon, A. Catharine. 1994. "Not a Moral Issue." *Yale Law and Policy Review* 2 (2): 321–45.
- Mandell, Laura. 1996. "Demystifying (with) the Repugnant Female Body: Mary Leapor and Feminist Literary History." *Criticism* 38 (4): 551–82.
- McClintock, Anne. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.
- Miller, J. Naomi. 2016. *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Ondaatje, Michael. 1976. *Coming Through Slaughter*. Toronto: Anansi.
- . 1992. *The Cinnamon Peeler*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- . 1993. *The English Patient*. New York: Vintage International.
- . 2008. *Divisadero*. London: Bloomsbury.
- . 2009. *Divisadero*. Toronto: Knopf Random Vintage Canada.
- . 2011. *Anil's Ghost*. London: Vintage.
- Papadaki, Evangelia (Lina). 2021. "Feminist Perspectives on Objectification." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta (Spring Edition, December 16, 2019). <https://plato.stanford.edu>.
- Pease, Bob. 2019. *Facing Patriarchy: From a Violent Gender Order to a Culture of Peace*. London: Zed Books.
- du Plessis, Rory. 2015. "A Discourse Analysis of Male Sexuality in the Magazine Intimacy." *African Journal of Primary Health Care and Family Medicine* 7 (1): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/phcfm.v7i1.691>.
- Smart, Carol. 1995. *Law, Crime and Sexuality: Essays in Feminism*. London: Sage.
- Stephen, Kylie. 1994. "The Legal Language of Rape: A Feminist Reconstruction of Rape." *Alternative Law Journal* 19 (5): 224–28.
- Stick, Max, and Tina Fetner. 2020. "Feminist Men and Sexual Behaviour: Analyses of Men's Sex with Women." *Men and Masculinities* 24 (5): 780–801. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X20980789>.
- Stout, C. John. 2003. "Le Blason Contemporain: On Women Poets' Objectifying of the Male Body." *Romance Studies* 21 (1): 53–69. <https://doi.org/10.1179/ros.2003.21.1.53>.
- Thomson, Tracey. 1993. "The Changing Representation of Women in Michael Ondaatje's Prose." Master's Thesis, McGill University.
- Visano, Livy A. 2002. "A Critical Critique of the Cultures of Control: A Case Study of Cyber Rape." In *Sexual Violence: Policies, Practices, and Challenges in the United States and Canada*, edited by James F. Hodgson and Debra S. Kelly, 51–71. Westport: Praeger.
- York, M. Lorraine. 1994. "Whirling Blindfolded in the House of Woman: Gender Politics in the Poetry and Fiction of Michael Ondaatje." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 53: 71–91.