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# The Crisis of American Masculinity in James Herne's Margaret Fleming (1890)

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#### **Abstract**

Hailed as the first modern American play, James A. Herne's *Margaret Fleming* reflected the theatrical realism depicting the serious and realistic conditions of the modern individual toward the end of the nineteenth century. Touching on core issues such as sexual infidelity in Victorian familial settings, morality, and devotion, Herne's play was initially praised by scholars for featuring a subversive feminist ending. The critical literature around the play focused thus on the appeal of the New Woman while disregarding Herne's naturalism in depicting a masculinity in crisis. This article argues that the theme of emasculation targeting the white American men in the Gilded Age is a theme that is implicitly interwoven through the portrayal of immigrant characters, emasculating concerns in relation to the feminization of American culture, failure to live up to the ideals of self-made man, and protestant work ethic that is considered to trap the male in an iron cage.

**Keywords**: Modern American drama, *Margaret Fleming*, James Herne, masculinity and the Gilded Age, New Woman.

# James Herne'in *Margaret Fleming* (1890) Oyununda Amerikan Erkekliğinin Krizi

#### Öz

James A. Herne'in, ilk modern Amerikan oyunu olarak kabul edilen *Margaret Fleming* adlı eseri, modern bireyin ondokuzuncu yüzyılın sonlarındaki ağır koşullarını betimleyen dramatik gerçekçiliği yansıtır. Viktoryen dönem ailesindeki cinsel sadakatsizlik, ahlak ve bağlılık gibi temel konulara değinen oyun, başlangıçta, dönemin normlarına aykırı bir feminist sona sahip olduğu için övgü toplamıştır. Oyun hakkındaki eleştirel literatürse Yeni Kadın'ın cazibesine odaklanmış ve Herne'in kriz içindeki erkekliği betimlerken başvurduğu natüralizm unsurlarını pek dikkate almamıştır. Bu makale, "Yaldızlı Çağ" döneminde beyaz Amerikalı erkekleri hedef alan emaskülasyon temasını, oyundaki göçmen karakterlerin tasviri, Amerikan kültürünün kadınlaştırılmasına ilişkin emaskülen endişelerin ortadan kaldırılması, Amerikan ideallerini yaşayamama ve erkeği demir bir kafese hapsettiği düşünülen Protestan iş ahlakı gibi konularla bağlantılı olarak inceler.

**Anahtar Kelimeler**: Modern Amerikan tiyatrosu, *Margaret Fleming*, James Herne, Yaldızlı Çağ ve erkeklik, Yeni Kadın.

#### Introduction

Before Eugene O'Neill popularized American theatre in the early twentieth century by employing themes of familial disintegration, dissolution, and failure to find a self that compensates for loss, American drama was subjected to melodramatic suspense, spectacle, stereotypes, and intrigue. Eugene O'Neill's *Long Days' Journey into Night* (1956) employed, for example, naturalistic elements that depicted characters suffering from drinking, addiction, and illness to give insight into their troubled psyches. O'Neill's autobiographical recount of events revealed how heredity, environment, and alienation in familial settings caused overbearing grief to the point of no return.

Before such a turn, melodrama pulled the middle-class audience to the American stage. Spectacular displays, for instance, attempted to bridge the growing gap between weakening Puritanism and a highly materialistic profit-oriented way of life in William Vaughn Moody's The Great Divide (1906), while also dealing with the stereotypical tragic mulatto archetype embodied through a romantic entanglement between George and Zoe in Dion Boucicault's The Octoroon (1859). Juxtaposed against such dramatic concerns, European playwrights such as August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen were attempting to create a type of drama based on the serious, realistic conditions reflecting the modern individual's problems. Hailed as the first modern American play that was inspired by such theatrical realism in Europe, James Herne's *Margaret Fleming* deals with modern themes such as adultery, morality, personal sacrifice, and devotion. Having been criticized for being an "expensive artistic luxury" (Murphy 94) as well as for being "thin and commonplace, dull beyond description, and badly acted" (Perry 156), Herne's play received much backlash, public vilification, and critique. However, its earlier success within Boston's elite educated circles was later taken to Chicago's New Theater for a brief revival run in which Herne's daughter and widow's performances brought commercial success. The play's revival six years after James Herne's death at Chickering Hall in Chicago with a limited audience is regarded to be a precursor performance to the experimental "little theater" of American Modern Theatre (Foertsch 75). Even though the play was ahead of its time and was not exactly the first non-commercial little theatre on the American stage, it functioned as the necessary step towards a theatre stripped from concerns of box office success by pioneering off-Broadway and Off-Off Broadway productions in the later years (Hewitt 171). Herne earned a posthumous recognition for reflecting an ongoing and vet underrepresented radical transformation of cultural representations during the Gilded Age. As Wilmeth and Bigsby observe, while theatre was becoming a capitalistic enterprise, old virtues of white American idealism and manhood were attacked by individualism, mechanization of the workspace, and immigrants who were employed in low-cost jobs (6). Out of the clash between the Jeffersonian yeoman, the heroic artisan, and the genteel patriarch, there emerged the capitalist as victorious instigating the archetype of the self-made man whose masculine anxieties are reflected in Herne's realist play.

That Mrs. Herne reconfigured Margaret at the end as a character exerting a superior moral authority over Philip makes the play rather problematic in terms of its scholarly evaluation with progressive feminist identification. Such discrepancy invites a deeper analysis of the gender dynamics of the Gilded Age to exemplify and understand how not only domestic ideology, but also masculine codes and archetypes as prescribed norms were reflected on the American stage during a period of cultural transition. Indeed, the dramatic deviation from the sentimental and romantic melodrama to psychological realism that relied on detail, local color, and complex characters exemplified through the play holds a mirror to the shift of class and gender dynamics of the period. However, the literature around Margaret Fleming tends to focus on the appeal of the New Woman and the feminist premise of the play for the American audience while disregarding Herne's realism in depicting a masculinity in crisis that plagues the male characters in the play. Therefore, this article argues that emasculation targeting the male in the Gilded Age is a theme that is implicitly interwoven in Herne's play.

Americans' definition of manhood in the post-Revolutionary period changed drastically, as American masculinity was juxtaposed and defined by the rapidly growing industrialization, which ideally fostered a space for self-made men to prosper. This era saw the clash between the gentile patriarch who was effeminate, aristocratic, patriarchal, and peculiarly a corrupted "Anglophilic, mannered rogue who traveled to England and returned a dandy" (Kimmel, Manhood 11) and the heroic artisan who was "independent, vitreous and honest . . . formal in his manners with women, stalwart, and loyal to his male comrades" (Kimmel, Manhood 12). The two archetypes failed to dominate, and American masculinity was then closely associated with energetic, muscular, mobile, and highly active involvement in the workspace. The self-made man was poised to continually push boundaries by becoming highly mobile and aggressive in a workspace that is both volatile and demanding high degrees of masculine energy. Success in business and working endlessly to become a self-made man have become the aspiration of the American men towards the mid-nineteenth century. In this highly competitive workspace, American men felt that their manhood was under constant surveillance. Such manhood "had to be proved in the eyes of other men" (Kimmel, Manhood 20) since the eagerness to find success in the workplace driven by market-oriented

masculinity and the rapid currents of change in urban living caused anxiety (Kimmel, *Essays* 47).

Embedded in the play are emasculative factors such as immigrants, the feminization of American culture, failure to live up to the ideals of a self-made man, and a protestant work ethic that is considered to trap the male in an iron cage. This symbolic form of emasculation targeted native-born white men as it was equated with the loss of previously enjoyed privileges, positions, and entitlements that were challenged by immigrants, the freed African Americans, and collective feminist movements. Rapid industrialization, technological advancements, construction of urban cities, increasing immigration from the South to the North as well as immigration from all over the world into the United States instigated a manhood that was linked to economic success in the volatile market sphere. This need to adjust one's masculine identity according to the increasingly mobile and highly competitive nature of the capitalist business market created the mythology of the self-made man who was prescribed to be independent, manly, and responsible for his family as the breadwinner. A failure has therefore meant anxiety, loneliness, isolation, and sometimes addiction, and this sense of emasculation of not living up to established masculine ideals was further juxtaposed with effeminacy, womanish softness, timidity, and self-indulgence. Analyzing what lies underneath the male anxiety in the play prompts first a genealogy of masculinity in the Gilded Age.

### The Gilded Age and American Manhood

As the Gilded Age was marked by massive industrial growth and prosperity, the American man's social mobility to upward ranks was granted by the premise of adhering to the tenets of the self-made man who would rise the ladder through hard work, perseverance, and an iron will. As Tjeder formulated, the ladder of success or the basic tenets of the idealized American self-made man in the nineteenth century comprised of following virtues: industrious, temperate, prudent, integral, economical, punctual, courageous, and persevering while morality and honesty are presented as the backbone of success, riches, honor, and happiness (217). However, the increasingly competitive nature of the market added a layer of disillusionment and anxiety to the

already anxious self-made man: the working-class men pursuing the ideals of the self-made men slowly lost control of the waning economic freedom, for which capitalists were blamed as they were accused of imposing a form of slavery on the working men. However, as the workforce was monopolized and competition for work increased, there appeared a "new sense of an oppressively crowded, depersonalized and often emasculated life" (Kimmel, Manhood 62). In the late nineteenth century, growing marketplaces established in industrial cities because of the urban transformation changed the consumer behavior of working-class families, forcing them to pay for manufactured goods. The urban spaces that were created for the housing, entertainment, and educational needs of working-class families fostered a culture of sustenance that was marketed in the structures of the marketplace (Trachtenberg 121). As self-provisioning has gradually transitioned to canned and manufactured sustenance, not being able to adjust to this new market structure where the American man had to sell his labor to feed his family exacerbated the masculine anxiety when failed. Furthermore, the postbellum migration of African American men to the northern cities paved the way for them to benefit from participating in the marketplace and the industry. Even though discrimination and segregation still existed in businesses such as the cattle industry in the nineteenth century, African American men "worked, ate, slept, played, and on occasion fought, side by side with their white comrades, and they were often paid the same wages as white cowboys and, in the case of certain horse breakers, ropers, and cooks, they occupied positions of considerable prestige" (Porter 124).

If one is to claim that there was a crisis of masculinity at the turn of the century in the United States, that American men were confused about what is meant by being a real man, one should first identify "the rigid role prescriptions that constrain male behavior and that prevent men from more fully expressing intimacy and vulnerability" (Kimmel, "The Crisis" 89). New waves of migration from Europe and the South added to the anxiety of the self-made man as the masculinity of the self-made man was threatened by these groups seeking the fulfillment of the American dream. To ease such distress, the exclusion of African Americans, Native Americans, non-binary people, and women from the definition of American masculinity was enforced. This was closely tied to Social Darwinism as such groups were not only considered effeminate and unreal men, but their inferiority had to be scientifically

proven to categorize them as groups carrying "society downwards and favor[ing] all its worst members" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 67). Social Darwinism during the Gilded Age could be considered as a direct attack on early feminist movements in terms of deeming any effeminate form of behavior as damaging to the collective supremacy of white society as the eugenic ideals of the social Darwinists "concluded that, although they should be educated, women cannot compete successfully with men, and are, by nature, best suited to domestic life" (Paul 223). Women were deemed frail and weak, completely dependent on men by proponents of Social Darwinism in America who painted an image of the subservient female in the familial space of the American family: the man would "cease to love his wife when she becomes masculine and rebellious" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 72).

However, the nineteenth century workplace saw the labor participation of African American women freed from slavery and immigrant women who sought not only jobs such as household production and domestic service but also clerical and factory employment. As Daphne Spain observes, there were many opportunities towards the end of the nineteenth century for women to change their jobs and apply for employment traditionally held by men (202). The textile mills employed women who excelled at their jobs after being introduced to the knowledge of the machinery and being employed in government services helped women learn the technological know-how that was exclusively controlled by men (Spain 172). The reflection of such drastic change in the marketplace exacerbated critiques about the feminization of American culture, which had to be avoided. The New Woman fed on the feminist movement that attempted to subvert a traditional and sexist association of women with a "natural sphere in which ... she is more conversant with objects than with their necessary connections and relations" (Dew 688) which were attributed to men. Indeed, there grew an overemphasis on American men's return to the homely space where American women would provide comfort, which was already being challenged by the notion of the New Woman. However, sentimentalism as a feminizing force had to be excluded from the definition of American manhood to ensure patriarchal hegemony. As Douglas indicates, many American men in the early nineteenth century behaved as if following the codes of the self-made man represented the greatest good whilst also recognizing that "the pursuit of these "masculine" goals meant damaging" (12), even though "they had agreed to put on a convincing show and to lose as the fakery involved was finally crippling for all concerned" (12).

In the highly competitive workspace where retaining a job became a defining characteristic of manhood, how one showcased one's masculinity complemented the image. The effeminate clothing that was associated with the gentile patriarch gave way to plain clothing to instill men with the necessary trust and self-confidence needed for business. The American masculine body also underwent a re-construction by the standards of this new capitalistic workspace where a masculine prototype comprised of facial features (long, pale, and thin), long slender legs, and a thickset chest was promoted for success (Kimmel, Manhood 21). As American men were shaped to meet the corporeal demands of the newly industrialized market. disillusionment and anger plagued the American men, which stemmed from either failing such demands or the addition of the new labor force of immigrants and African Americans in the already volatile and competitive market. However, as Rotundo points out, the image of the self-made men standing isolated and alone at the workspace was also a product of the established belief in the separation of spheres and many middle-class working men enjoyed the camaraderie, partnerships, clients, and rivalries at work (195). The myth of the self-made man climbing the ladders alone did not always present the whole picture: the socio-economic sphere along with its subcultures demanded close contact but it was this prescribed norm as part of the mythology of manhood in the Gilded Age that necessitated constant "reimagining of manliness creating cultural stress and personal strain for middle-class men as the end of the century approached" (Rotundo 221).

Being an American man meant and relied on the exclusion of those deemed as unmanly boys such as the African American men who were considered lacking the qualities that defined manhood. As the political power of the white men was challenged by the naturalization of immigrants and freed African American people who gained the right to vote, there grew anti-immigrant and racist sentiments that equated black individuals with immigrants in calling them an ignorant mass that burdened American democracy (White 329). The anti-immigrant juxtaposition of the ignorant Irish with the illiterate African Americans to satirize their alleged political deficiency was stereotypically displayed inside magazines. For example, The Bavarian-born political cartoonist Thomas Nast who was known for his support for

the abolishment of slavery took an anti-Reconstruction and an anti-Catholic turn and depicted both stereotypes in his famously quoted cartoon "The Ignorant Vote- Honors Are Easy," pointing out to the cynical Republican politics during the disputed 1876 election between Samuel J. Tilden and Rutherford B. Hayes (985).

The archetype of the self-made man instigated the image of the free and mobile individuals pushing hard for gain as opposed to the emancipated African American men whose economic dependence was still hindered by chattel slavery. Indeed, the emasculation of the American men from the capitalistic workspace, which stemmed from the introduction of the capitalistic hierarchy that removed any work-related self-autonomy, added more to that anxiety. The gap between the urban class elites and the working class widened while America was undergoing rapid industrialization. The class distinction was also used as an attack on the masculinity of the American man. The working class was deemed "nothing but a gutter rabble" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 30) whereas the members of the working class attacked the urban elite, accusing them of being sissified European dandies, which connoted the idea of shielding the real American masculinity from effeminate European and Anglophilic influence.

The minstrel shows that attempted to instigate an established archetype of the ridiculed black individuals were also reflective of such masculine unease as they worked towards a "symbolic appropriation of the black man's sexual potency" (Kimmel, Manhood 25). Women audiences were regarded as the corruptors of culture, art, and theater for having a civilizing effect on men as managers sought to satisfy female theatergoers. As Butsch observes, the feminization of American theater resulted allegedly from the market's influence on mass culture, which was voiced by theater critics who saw theater as art and therefore masculine whilst refusing to call it entertainment and effeminate (398). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, American manhood had to be defined by marketplace success. However, the entitlements belonging historically to the self-made white men were endangered by immigrants flooding the country and the market. Just as minstrel shows projected white men's sexual and economic anxiety, Harry Grimes' racial drama The Chinese Must Go (1879), for example, revealed how the Chinese immigrants were seen as a threatening form of masculinity that shifted the market dynamics by offering cheaper labor (Ou 80). Furthermore, this sense of exclusion played a significant part in the definition of American manhood in a post-revolutionary era as women and immigrants were also regarded outside of the realm of American manhood as the workplace had to be an exclusively white-male space to retain privileges. Additionally, riots targeting the immigrants who agreed to work for less fostered further racism and division. To illustrate, Irish immigrants were deemed inferior, drunkard, and subhuman counterparts to the whites.

As R. W. Connell formulated in *The Men & The Boys*, masculinities only exist in their social engagements with others, and they are actively culturally constructed with the available resources and conditions in their respective historical periods (218). As the self-made man became the dominant archetype of American manhood in the nineteenth century, the post-revolutionary era marked an increasing racism towards those who were cast outside of American manhood. Such hostility played a key role in the construction of whiteness during the Gilded Age that embodied controversies, challenges, responses, and anxieties of American men by being counterposed against the racist evaluations of non-white archetypes.

### **Emasculation in Margaret Fleming**

Employing themes of adultery, rejection of maternal duties, and disease, Herne sought to incorporate the realistic drama's antimelodramatic techniques of not including musical intermissions, suspense, and happy endings, which bode well for reflecting the emerging New Woman on the American stage (Wegner 19). The critical conversation surrounding the play revolved around the question of how the play reflected the gender inequality between men and women and the reason for such established double standards was attributed to a patriarchal structure favoring men to uphold economic superiority, power, and privilege (Thifault 52). However, the scholarly criticism is centered around placing the New Woman in Margaret Fleming within the American context by focusing merely on the question of how domestic cultural ideology that fostered a female-centered morality hindered female empowerment. This critical tendency sprung from the fact that the initial premise of the play was neglected because the play had a different ending.

The play's ending was subjected to alteration many times. Apart from its original ending where Philip becomes an alcoholic like Joe and Margaret leaves Philip for good, the revival at Chicago in 1892 featured a Chekhovian ending where Margaret provided a return to work as an antidote to redemption for Philip and herself, contrasting with the earlier feminist premise of the play. Indeed, the 1890 version of the play featured Margaret leaving Philip and refusing to forgive him as she stood alone on stage while the curtain fell. After the revision and reconstruction of the play by Mrs. Herne on account of a fire that destroyed the original text (Nagel 423), Margaret Fleming's ending which echoes Nora's defiance was appropriated into one that pointed to a hopeful reunion. Margaret's renunciation of wifehood exemplified through the lines "The wife-heart has gone out of me" (Herne 262), was interpreted in the 1940s as an Ibsenesque influence revealing "deep concern with the problems of women and women's rights and position in modern society" (Bucks and Nethercot 323). Additionally, Mullenix focused on how abortion was implicitly suggested by Philip to cover up adultery, which, acting as a patriarchal tool, renders the female body as a passive site at the behest of medical authority (63). Pizer's critique in 1955 marked again how the play functioned as an American version of realistic drama that dominated Europe as Herne "has taken a bolder flight, with intent to enforce a great social lesson by means of a story of powerful interest, somewhat in the manner of Ibsen" (265). On the other hand, Shepherd-Barr claimed that the play cannot easily be categorized as belonging to the oeuvre of the New Woman but "the seemingly conventional Margaret may represent the epitome of maternal instinct . . . her final ambivalence about the need for a husband once his reproductive duties are done suggests a far more plausible New Woman than . . . the angel in the house" (233).

The play's first act opens in Philip Fleming's textile factory where mundane work is interrupted by his old Irish immigrant friend Joe Fletcher. Joe's lamentation of his familial disintegration and the fact that he was kicked out of his own house by his immigrant German wife provides an early comic relief with implicit undertones of emasculation. Philip's textile business is also threatened by his neglect of management. Dr. Larkin's entrance, which echoes Dr. Rank's naturalistic cynicism in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, as well as his scolding comments on Philip's betrayal of his wife Margaret's trust as a member of the cultured elite in Massachusetts for having an illegitimate affair with an immigrant also

serves as a commentary on waning masculine authority. Juxtaposed against Margaret's glorified wifehood and motherhood, Philip's fatal mistake of impregnating his young German mistress Lena Schmidt, and his thoughtless behavior to ignore a patriarch's moral concerns signal further masculine tensions. In Act II, Lena's sister Mary, who is later revealed to be Joe's wife, is employed in Fleming household while Margaret's post-natal distress is diagnosed as glaucoma, which would cause blindness if Margaret were continuously upset. Margaret's decision to visit Lena on her dving bed after giving birth to Philip's son in Act III and the melodramatic exposition of the illicit affair with a letter cause Margaret to go into shock but the audience is struck by Margaret's maternal display of love for the illegitimate child by taking the child to her breast. In the last act, Margaret rejects wifehood but displays maternal strength as a sacrifice for the sake of the children. A partial reconciliation with the now disheveled Philip is hinted at on the condition that he will go back to work and play his role as a father to both of his children.

The end of the Civil War marked an era of unprecedented economic growth in the United States. Technology was the driving force for change as it forced the steel industry, road infrastructures, and railroads to be created for the war. Large textile and steel factories dominated the American workforce. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, New England textile mills employed more than a thousand workers, which changed dramatically in ten years after the northern businesses continued to benefit from huge economic growth through the establishment of electric factories. James Herne's play in this respect makes a social commentary on American manhood by juxtaposing the enervating office space that was considered to be causing emasculation with a Victorian house that symbolized the feminization of American culture. Indeed, new technological advancements such as "the main supply belt in the finishing room [which] was repaired a few times" (Herne 239) as well as the new purchases by Boston posed a threat to the working-class American man as they replaced men at factories, culminating towards the idea that the advancement of machinery necessitated the decline of apprenticeship. Joe Fletcher who embodies the unmaking of the self-made man worked together with Philip in the mill but lost the job because of heavy drinking as Dr. Larkin diagnoses the malady:

Doctor: (shaking his head) He is a sad example of what liquor and immorality will bring a man to. He has indulged his appetites until he has no real moral nature left. (Herne 242)

The fact that Philip's father fired Joe could have been the result of the advancement in the machinery that required fewer men at the mill. Joe's immigrant Irish background, his marriage to a German immigrant, and his stereotypically displayed drinking problems are also factors that contributed to his unemployment given that the Fleming family as one of the established New England families embodied a nativist, patriarchal, and domineering manhood that subjugated nonnatives. As non-natives, immigrants and freed African American people from the South poured into the northern parts, nativist manhood had to be exercised by the established white American exercise of ruling over the market. However, such emerging competition was seen as a threat to the nativist privilege enjoyed by families like the Flemings. Furthermore, industrialization and a rapidly growing yet highly competitive marketplace created an emasculated life where manhood's initial promise of autonomy and self-control was no longer possible. Immigrants such as Joe Fletcher were not able to establish their shops, control their fate, and own agricultural lands but they were forced to work at factories and obey the commands of their bosses, which they deemed as institutionalized slavery. Joe's inability to perform as a self-made man, which was the prescribed modal of manhood at the time, caused him to become a drunk bum and disheveled man.<sup>1</sup> Herne's character description also gives one hint on how Joe clings to the salesman archetype as a panacea to the ills and dissolution brought by having been an unmade self-man:

Several lengths of chamois are dangling with the sponges across his breast and back, draping his right hip and leg. In one hand he has a weather-beaten satchel. He carries by a leather thong a heavy stone hanging from a cracked plate. There are two holes in the rim of the plate through one of which runs the thong by which it is carried. The other, the big stone, is fastened to it with a piece of chain. He carries it unconscious of its weight. There is a pervading sense of intimacy between

the man and his equipment, and from his battered hat to his spreading shoes the stains of the road, like a varnish, bind them together in a mellow fellowship. (Herne 239)

Joe tries to survive by selling tonics and wares as a miserable salesman. Philip's pity on Joe prompts him to buy a sponge from him and he is later sent to the Fleming estate so that he can sell Ms. Fleming's dog "a bottle of cough mixture" (Herne 241). This humiliation stems from the fact that upward mobility was barred from him as he failed to adjust himself to the norms set by the self-made man. Joe also sells remedies including "Inventor of Dr. Fletcher's famous cough mixture, warranted to cure coughs-colds, hoarseness and loss o' voice. An infallible remedy for all chronic conditions of the *pull-mon-ary* organs" (Herne 240), which reflects his search for a remedy for his masculine wound given that deficiencies in pulmonary organs connote sexual impotence. Herne's description which shows how intimate Joe is with his equipment reveals that Joe is a character who attempts to heal the emasculation brought on not only by unemployment but also by marriage. Joe's relationship with his immigrant German wife Maria offers more than comic relief. Maria's physical tomboyish strength, a show of physical violence, superiority over Joe, and her employment at the Fleming house are all emasculating factors that trouble Joe's masculinity: Maria "swoops upon him, digs her hands into the loose folds of his coat between the shoulders and drags him to his feet" (Herne 252) while Philip laughs behind Joe. As Michael Kimmel notes, many men in this era refused to adhere to the rules of self-made masculine codes as they accepted their failures at work, social life, and marriage, resorting to alcoholism as well as creating a communal legacy of failed self-made men who "were not only escaping economic dislocation but running away from self-made manhood, away from the settled responsibility of a boring, unpleasant job that such a gender ideal seemed to require" (Manhood 75). However, Herne's depiction of such failure is unique in the sense that Joe continues to believe in the need to fulfill masculine codes to become a self-made man, which was ideally available to all types of manhood.

Through the juxtaposition of Philip with Joe, Herne reflected on the class difference shown not only in the way they dressed but also in attitude and language. Philip, who is depicted as the domineering

patriarch that "carries an umbrella and a raincoat... is a well-dressed, prosperous, happy-looking man about thirty-five" (Herne 238), speaks a sophisticated language whereas Joe's dialogues are given in an Irish accent and Maria is depicted as a character with broken English. Furthermore, Philip and Margaret's well-established high middle-class American family is juxtaposed against the immigrant family of Joe and Maria, a marriage in ruins. This is a realistic juxtaposition on stage by portraying immigrants without embellishment or idealization but with having to deal with real societal problems. Additionally, exposing the unpleasant and sordid problematization of a Victorian marriage was not a pattern one would observe in the mainstream melodrama of the 1890s. Herne's critique of the masculine codes that entrapped and suffocated American men in the Gilded Age was explicit in the original version of the play, which had an interval of four or five years that depicted Joe and Maria being back together and running a shop. The couple kidnaps the Fleming family's baby Lucy and has her working for them in a shop, but Maria's conscientious heart gives in and she helps Margaret and Lucy have a happy ending. This subversive version of the play depicts Joe having a superior masculinity that triumphed over the nativist as Philip becomes a wandering bum. The final scene is at a police station where Margaret leaves Philip, never to return. However, another version of the original text of the play sheds light on the details of this naturalistic take where Margaret partly loses her memory and is forced to spend time in an asylum while Philip loses the mill and resorts to drinking. The end of the play is marked by a high sense of naturalism in revealing how environment, disillusionment, and individual failure bring ruin for all: Joe and Maria are arrested for snatching baby Lucy who as a five-year-old grows a fondness for beer, whereas Philip violently attacks Joe for forcing him to confront his own demise once again (Bucks and Nethercot 319). This version depicts Joe healing from his masculine wounds where he opens a shop with Maria after getting back together. It not only reveals how environment determines personality and character, but it also partly subverts a pronativist narration visible in Katherine Herne's reconstruction of the play after her husband's death in terms of providing a provocative feminist ending that emasculates Philip and empowers Margaret. The rejection of wifehood amplified by the premise of the Ibsenesque New Woman finds an American resonance in Margaret's rejection of familial bond and motherhood when confronted with a choice between wifehood and motherhood. This feminist premise reflects the period's growing concern among men who felt emasculated by feminism, which they deemed as the ultimate cause for the sissification of American manhood.

Men felt uneasy since the bureaucratization of the marketplace, industrial growth, and technological advancement that limited the dependency on physical labor allowed a post-civil war surge of women into public spheres. American women campaigned for more rights, entered universities, claimed improvements in their voting rights, and challenged men's dominance at work. Men claimed that participation of women in the workforce would cause female workers to imitate men. Underneath this fear, as was exemplified by Maria's masculinized attitudes that emasculated Joe and caused a masculine worry for Philip as his patriarchal authority waned, lies a concern for losing the male privilege. This male privilege is a hereditary one that is passed through inheritance. Herne's stage directions of Philip's office include "pictures on the wall, including one of the mills and one of Philip's father as a young man" (238), which is a reminder for Philip that the nativist privilege earned through hard work by his father as a self-made man brings many responsibilities. It is visible in the play that Philip suffers not only from difficulties at work but also from anxiety over possibly making wrong decisions as he compares himself constantly to his father who as an authority watches over him. This results precisely from the belief that masculinity which necessitates success at work, family, and marriage had to be proved in the eyes of other men, which is exemplified in the play by the portrait of the father. This trope echoes the absent authority embodied through the count's boots in Strindberg's Miss Julie, which threatens Jean's masculine energy as he finds himself in a liminal state stuck giving into his desires in the absence of authority and the patriarchal authority of his master that he must always subdue even in the physical absence of authority. The absent authority in Herne's play manifests itself through the concern that wealth emasculates manhood, causing enervation, passivity, and effeminacy. Philip's background as a womanizer and that he "had so many girls" (Herne 241) as well as his failure to believe in his lie that he now has "got through with all that foolishness . . . sowed [his] wild oats" (Herne 240) shows his masculine failure to live up to the ideals of the self-made patriarchy inherited from his father. Herne's portrayal of the New Woman through Margaret triggers an emasculative anxiety for Philip since the established idea that women are weak, helpless, and subservient is subverted

#### **Confronting True Womanhood and Further Masculine**

#### **Anxieties**

After Philip is confronted by Dr. Larkin about his indecency with Lena, the audience is introduced to Margaret who is depicted as the epitome of the Victorian woman. Her portrayal by Herne paints the perfect image of the angel in the house: her existence as a Victorian woman in "a dainty house dress" (249) is connected to "the luxurious garden in brilliant sunshine" (249) where she spends most of her time with Lucy. The French windows, piano, and fireplace along with the image of a well-bred woman feeding her baby showcase the idealized subservient American woman. Historically, the separation of spheres based on gender envisioned a domestic role for women against the backdrop of a rapidly industrialized America, culminating in the formation of the ideology of the cult of true womanhood. As Welter points out, women in the nineteenth century were to be chaste, pious. homely, and yielding to male authority as the female was conceptualized as a caregiver, nurturer, and a wife who sought after no earthly pleasures (152). However, this ideology heavily rested on the insistence by this new capitalistic marketplace that women should provide solace and comfort for the men who were subjected to hard work in a highly volatile and competitive marketplace. The ideology of true womanhood was embedded in the firm belief in the maternal role of women, which had political as well as spiritual connotations as to "preserving the memory of the American Revolution and to securing its legacy within a stable, peaceful, and permanent American nation" (DuBois and Dumenil 202). True womanhood instigated a subservient, stoic, and homely female imagery that sacrificed her life for the betterment of the American nation as republican motherhood dictated by not only attending to the homely sphere but also teaching, lecturing, and writing, all of which contributed to the installment of the cult in the psyches of both women and men alike. Margaret's sacrifice and the fact that she chooses to feed Philip's illegitimate child are partly indicative of true womanhood. Her defiance of wifehood is overshadowed by her sacrificial motherhood which fits with the ideals of the cult of domesticity. As a realistic play heightened with melodramatic elements, Margaret Fleming was praised for challenging the status quo by having a female character almost defy male authority but "the context of a female facing a moral decision served the processes of compensation and recuperation and thereby reinforced dominant gender ideology" (Stephens 49). Herne's feminism was criticized for reinforcing dominant gender codes and ideology of the progressive era. That Margaret saves Philip in the end by being morally superior to him was regarded as a reinforcement of gender lines.

Maria Bindley as an immigrant character posed a stark contrast to Margaret: Margaret was a woman on which the spotlight was turned. she was happy with her baby whereas Maria was in the shadow and weeping. Furthermore, Margaret's femininity is juxtaposed against Maria's masculine energy which displays raw crude power when dealing with Joe Fletcher. Maria's broken English, the use of colloquial language, realistic dialogue, and her immigrant accent are employed to add realism to the immigrant experience by the playwright as opposed to the melodramatic language and words surrounding Margaret's character that are exaggerated and overtly emotional. While Maria's German accent points to the alienation and bafflement created by having to learn a foreign language, Joe's indecent language symbolizes the lack of morality and pseudo-honesty (Griffiths 50). Maria is also depicted as a supporting character who facilitates the dramatic climax: her sister Lena is Philip's supposed lover, and she dies in childbirth and writes a letter, which triggers events leading to the death of the marriage between Philip and Margaret. One can argue that she was the epitome of female rejection of subservient womanhood in Ms. Herne's version as she renounced the duties of a devoted wife and she was not subservient to Joe Fletcher, which emasculated Joe.

The culture of domesticity was intrinsically an answer to the question of where to place women in a middle-class familial setting. Originally a middle-class phenomenon, the ideology of the cult was morphed into an encompassing characteristic of defining who the true woman was in the nineteenth century. Such womanhood was embedded in American culture by "ministers in sermons and physicians in popular health books [containing] women [who] did much of the work in spreading these ideas" (DuBois and Dumenil 161) by partaking in religious activism and organizations. However, this ideology has also eliminated the possibility of unitary women's activism as "adherence to the ideology of true womanhood helped people of the middle class to distinguish themselves from what they regarded as their social and economic inferiors" (DuBois and Dumenil 160), fostering the moral association of the domestic sphere as the rightly noble space for women juxtaposed against men's powerful roles in the marketplace.

This association harkens back to the devaluation of women's economic role before the imposition of true womanhood. As men failed to meet the demands of the increasingly competitive marketplace after repeated economic turmoil one after the other, women's sphere "became a matter of economic survival" (DuBois and Dumenil 163), pushing women to acquire new ways of economic participation that would challenge the ideals of true womanhood. This in turn has caused men to feel anxiety as their entitlement to certain positions in the economic sphere was challenged by women who have broken out of the ideals of true womanhood by challenging men.

As the middle class began to exert influence in political and social areas, the adjustments of womanhood were ideologized by the codes of true womanhood, which confined middle-class women to the domestic sphere. However, the accounts of women conflicting with such framing present clear opposition. The infamous characterization of the female as a "fine creature of emotion rather than of philosophy" (Dew 688) was challenged by women who pushed for change. The first female factory workers in the first half of the nineteenth century not only helped in "opening up new vistas of personal independence and economic contribution for their sex" (DuBois and Dumenil 165) but they also created female societies and acted unitarily against illtreatment in the workspace. Even though the manufacturers of Lowell factories attempted to adjust to this new exclusively female labor force by moral corrections such as the creation of boarding houses for them and Lowell's female workers enjoyed a rather short-lived experience. their example was an "indicator that women were beginning to imagine themselves as part of the political process" (DuBois and Dumenil 169). Another reality that stood outside of true womanhood was women who faced extreme poverty in cities. Lena and Maria both stood outside of the ideals of true womanhood as they faced discrimination, subjugation, and injustice by men. The fact that Lena had previously worked in the mill run by Philip Fleming is indicative of how immigrant women challenged societal impositions. Her unemployment was the result of her affair with Philip who perversely legitimized the affair in his eye and disregarded the child that was born since injustice against immigrants was enforced by nativists who cast them as non-citizens preving on entitlement that was justifiably theirs.

Philip's extramarital affair with Lena Schmidt reflects the dwindling patriarchal authority of the nativist privilege. Philip does not marry "out'n the mill" (Herne 241), he chooses to marry Margaret Thorp of Niagara instead of following in the footsteps of his father to form a respectful marriage. However, committing adultery with a German immigrant woman whom he met in the mill and Margaret's insistence that "people will soon forget" (Herne 262) that he is a man are signs of waning male privilege. Philip's immorality is depicted as a forgivable action because of a male privilege as was internalized by Margaret, Dr. Larkin, and others, but the only person who rejects such a notion is Maria whose hypermasculinity exemplified through her fantasy of vengeance by a pistol supersedes Philip's masculinity. Indeed, Philip's masculine control of the incidents befalling him is feeble and weakwilled. He is often depicted as effeminate and passive, spending an entire evening only thinking about his affair without any proper action. His physical frailty, need for medicine and phials, attempted suicide, and having a female child that does not guarantee the continuation of his father's legacy are all emasculative factors.

Philip's escape from his native home and his inability to face the consequences of his affair, for him, stems from the need to escape from the emasculation from which he suffers at home, civilization, and enervating workspace. Escape as a cure to heal masculine wounds is often depicted as a remedy for the aggrieved American man. Emasculation at work for Philip also derives from the stringent Protestant work ethic, a Puritan legacy that puts masculine impositions on his manhood, that entraps him in a cage whereby accumulating wealth is determined as a crucial condition for manhood. The play's ending where Margaret breastfeeds an infant has also religious overtones. Philip's masculine anxiety is linked to Margaret's "godlike prominence," which is a reference to the nineteenth century cult of Christian motherhood "encouraged to breast-feed, oversee, and educate her child" (Douglas 75) regardless of the child's status. Herne here subtly touches on the established view of the feminization of American manhood as one of the main reasons for men's emasculation at the turn of the century. As an antidote to the feminization of the Victorian household, Philip leaves civilization only to find that his masculinity and his identity necessitate having a proper family even though he blemishes his nativist legacy and family. The reconciliation of Philip and Margaret offers a remedy, but the rejection of wifehood is a further wound in

the prescribed notions of nativist American masculinity. Herne's original ending where Philip is denied any form of reconciliation with Margaret foresees that Philip might turn into a bum like Joe, resorting to alcoholism to have a temporary "relief" to heal emasculation, which was perceived as a threat that has always hung above the American men's head like Damocles' Sword in an increasingly competitive and challenging economic sphere.

#### Conclusion

Margaret Fleming's premise as the first modern American play questioning how industrialization alienated men who were not able to fulfill masculine codes determined by the ideals of selfmade upward mobility was overlooked by the existent scholarship surrounding the play. Joe's transformation from a laborer to a bum represented the unmaking of the self-made man. The injustice that derives from privileging one class or race over another was also criticized by Herne's display of masculinity that is in crisis. The white nativist privilege that is propelled by a patriarchal authority embodied through the Puritanical legacy of the self-made man causes masculine anxiety for Philip, exposing that such exercise and preservation of white male privilege during the Gilded Age cast marginalized groups such as immigrants and African American people aside as they challenged the enjoyed privilege. Dr. Larkin's comment on how Lena is a product of her environment as she is an immigrant living under terrible conditions, reveals that the way she is forced to live dictates her fate, which prompts a societal criticism here by Herne in that the increasingly anti-immigrant sentiments castigates the immigrants as others and it is the white nativist privilege losing its grip on changing cultural dynamics that must be blamed for what happens to Lena. In a way, there is a reason why Philip seeks pleasure in an immigrant woman with no family and background so that nobody asks about her should something terrible happen to her. Philip took advantage of her because she was a German immigrant trying to survive. Herne hints that it was this nativist privilege that caused injustice. Philip's surprise attempt to transfer the family bonds, guardianship, and money as a gift to Margaret implicitly reveals his guilt and adultery. Secretly buying forgiveness for his infidelity also shows that Philip is a man who feels alienated in his marriage. He is a businessman of transactions as

even when he seeks pleasure, he sees it as a transaction, which is best exemplified by the revelation that he does not owe anything to Lena whom he never loved. Philip is therefore unable to realize a self of his own as his manhood is always overshadowed by that of his father.

Herne's detailed realistic setting enhanced through colloquial language and accents provided the American audience with a slice of life that staged the shifting class, gender, and cultural values towards the end of the nineteenth century. One can interpret that each character knows the other since the mill in the play as a setting provides work for immigrants and others. Herne's description of Philip as a welldressed, prosperous, happy-looking man in her thirties connotes a perfectly conventional gentleman, painting a peaceful, prosperous, tragedy-free space, which makes the fall of Philip all the more tragic and realistic. The play was also hailed as a realistic study of character and environment. It is so shocking for the audience that Margaret, upon learning about her husband's indecency that shatters the very core of her identity as a devoted wife in the bond of marriage that is considered sacred by Victorian morality, does not simply shut the door behind her and leave but feeds a baby not her own, which was quite controversial at the time when it was staged. As Meserve observes, Margaret's sensitivity to societal ills such as parentless children, illnesses, and illtreatment of lower classes along with her sense of morality surpasses a fading masculine authority (158). The fact that Margaret goes blind at the end of the play and the idea of presenting illness, with scientific discourse and facts are elements of naturalistic drama since illnesses. diseases, and sickness are hard truths and parts of life. Herne felt that the depiction of these realities had to be included in the dramatic slice of life. Since the Social Darwinist ideology about the origins of species instilled the belief that human character is shaped by environment and heredity and people cannot be responsible for what had befallen them, Herne's critique takes such limited naturalism further in exposing that the injustices and wrongdoings starkly depicted on realistic drama stemmed from masculine anxieties of the age. In this vein, what happens to Margaret, her blindness to the truth, both figuratively and physically, originates from the waning nativist privilege categorizing women as passive angels in houses, whereas the public space was allocated to men to exercise pleasure, financial success, and political power. This was Herne's contribution to the growing feminist concerns at the time which was also part of the concern felt by the playwright in terms of understanding the place of the New Woman in the American context.

Herne's greatest contribution to modern American drama was his portraval of female characters with a strong desire for independence. Like Margaret Fleming, his subversive female heroines such as Dorothy Foxglove in *The Minute Men* (1886) presented a contrast to the established Victorian norms as Herne's female characters were attractive, confident, self-reliant, and resourceful when they rejected male authority by not tending to the house, caring for the children, and slaving for their husbands (Perry 73). Herne also criticized prescribed masculine codes that caused anxiety among American men as they struggled to live up to the ideals of such coding. Joe Fletcher is miserable because he gave into alcohol, which stemmed from emasculation caused by unemployment, immigrant background, and a hypermasculine wife. Joe suffers as he is not able to live up to the ideals of both the self-made man and salesman archetype which he desperately tries to cling on to ease his masculine wound. Philip's emasculation originated from the fact that the white male privilege that the nativists enjoyed was being challenged by immigrants and African American people who made the market unstable and competitive, coupled with the fact that the impositions on manhood by an entrapping hereditary protestant work ethic and the established notion that wealth causes feminization brought masculine anxiety. Herne's fusion of realism with social commentary on gender and class exposes that it was this privileged white superior attitude and class structure exemplified by Philip and Margaret's union that killed Lena as she was unable to have a proper, clean, and caring environment unlike the nativist privilege embodied through the Flemings.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The drinker both as an archetype and a countertype appears frequently in nineteenth century literature. He is either depicted as indifferent to his wife and children or as a working-class man judged by the middle class. His manhood is often questioned when he no longer possesses one, which stems from the fact that he is often treated as an animal, despised, and publicly shamed. See illustrations by Reinhold Callmander and the Swedish Temperance Society in David Tjeder's *The Power of Character: Middle-Class Masculinities, 1800–1900.* 

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