

# **AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS AND THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION**

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Original scientific paper  
DOI: 10.31902/fil.47.2024.1

**Abstract.** The paper<sup>1</sup> focuses on the representation of women in several short stories by American women writers with a special emphasis on the notion of symbolic power or the power of representation. The theoretical framework is based on the works of cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay and their explanation and development of the notions of symbolic power and representation practices understood as the expressions of the power of words. Furthermore, Edward Said's and Homi Bhabha's considerations of the relationship between power and representation are juxtaposed with the feminist critics' (Cixous, Irigaray, Gilbert and Gubar, Rivers, Gill) views on the importance of acquiring one's own voice in the process of (self-)representation and (self-)empowerment via written narratives. The corpus consists of three short stories by important American women writers – Kate Chopin, Mary Wilkins Freeman and Susan Glaspell – written and published towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The selected short stories are not only written by female authors but also feature main female characters and touch upon the issues of male/female power relations and the female voice and self-representation, i.e. the power of words in the female narrative of the self. The analysis of the proposed corpus reveals common themes and narrative strategies used by female authors to address the issues of symbolic power and (self-)empowerment in line with some of the contemporary feminist debates and concerns.

**Keywords:** American women writers, short story, symbolic power, representation, feminist criticism, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Susan Glaspell, Kate Chopin, postfeminism

## **1. Introduction**

The year 2020 was a centenary of the adoption of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which granted women's suffrage. The issue of political representation has always been a key issue in the process of women's struggle

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper was presented at the international conference *Language, Literature, Power*, organized by the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Nis, Serbia, in May, 2022.

for equality which still remains an ongoing battle as the U.S. Supreme Court Decision to overrule *Roe v. Wade* recently reminded us. However, the struggle for political representation goes hand in hand with cultural representation the importance of which cannot be overstated.

The focus of the paper is on the power of representation or symbolic power defined as the power of words, the power of creating narratives and stories from a particular perspective, the power of naming and ascribing someone's identity. It is a general consensus in social sciences and humanities that the one who controls the process of representation also holds power over those who are represented, as will be further discussed. In that sense, the issue of female authorship is of particular significance. As the paper deals with women writers, the theoretical framework relies on feminist critics' views on the importance of acquiring one's own voice in the process of (self-)representation and (self-)empowerment through written narratives. The concepts of individual self-actualization and self-realization are central in contemporary postfeminism and popular feminism (Eichhorn 140) as well as in the more traditional feminist criticism, which makes this topic relevant for the present moment. The chosen corpus consists of three short stories by American women writers Susan Glaspell, Kate Chopin and Mary Wilkins Freeman written and published towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was an important period in terms of women's struggle for their rights when many important changes occurred, which is reflected in the analyzed short stories. The selected stories are not only written by female authors but also feature main female characters and touch upon the issues of male/female power relations and the female voice and self-representation, i.e. the power of words in the female narrative of the self.

## **2. Symbolic Power**

In order to define the power of representation, we will use Stuart Hall's (259) definition of the notion of symbolic power exercised through representation practices: this is the power to represent someone in a certain way, to define someone, ascribe and prescribe their identity "within a certain 'regime of representation'", to mark them in a certain way and to reject or accept them based on those perceived and ascribed qualities. This means that the notion of power is also understood and exercised through culture – the perception of any phenomenon or person is construed through representational practices which include various discourses used to describe that phenomenon (Du Gay et al. 13-4). In other words, those who are represented in a certain discourse do not have the power to decide on the means and ways of their representation, i.e. they are the objects of representation, which means that someone else speaks on their behalf and about them (Pickering xiii).

The notion of symbolic power is particularly important in postcolonial studies. In his consideration of the connection between imperialism and culture, Edward Said (11) emphasizes the power of storytelling, i.e., creating one's own stories, representations, histories from one's own perspective. This is a way to control the dominant narrative and to suppress or ignore different perspectives. According to Said, any majority culture tends to dominate the representatives of an alien culture by taking over the role of the observer and the "name-giver" who assigns everyone's places in the cultural hierarchy and constructs knowledge about them (Goldberg 150). Those with the power of representation and the power of disseminating different images and representations thus exercise control over those who are the objects of representation. Another critic who equates representation with power is Homi Bhabha (Baba 19, 74) who emphasizes the notion of difference which is singled out and artificially created, constantly changing in order to dominate over those who are perceived and marked as different. According to him, one of the basic ways of exercising symbolic power is the power of naming, i.e. giving names to somebody, prescribing their identity to a certain degree and categorizing them according to the criteria posed by those in power (Baba 90-1). In other words, the power of naming can be an act of cultural but also political expression of power as it mainly depends on the patterns and rules set by the dominant group (Spencer 32).

### **2.1. Feminist Criticism and Female Authorship**

The previously mentioned notion of artificially created difference is very important in feminist criticism, particularly the definition of a woman in patriarchal culture as the Other. Hélène Cixous draws attention to the binary way of thinking and representation which entails a hierarchical relationship in which the so-called "female principles" and values are positioned hierarchically lower than the male ones (Woodward 36-37). In that type of representation, a woman is associated with the notion of passivity, whereas a man, due to "male privilege", is shown as the one who is active and has the power of representation and self-definition and definition itself (Cixous). This type of representational practices is translated onto family relations, philosophy, ontology, etc. where a woman remains degraded, silenced, excluded and passive because this is artificially imposed as the necessary precondition for the established system to function. What is more, this kind of system is falsely represented as the only viable one and the best one for everyone. Luce Irigaray (570-3) shares a similar attitude claiming that a woman is represented as a weakness, a negative image of the subject, an imitation within the existing dominant discourse, which effectively means that the male subject is defined as a positive, better and stronger member of the hierarchical opposition man/woman.

The notion of the hierarchical opposition male/female is reflected in the issue of male/female authorship as well. Gilbert and Gubar's (19) discussion of "the metaphor of literary paternity" directed attention to the link between a man as a progenitor and a male author as "an aesthetic patriarch." The power of the pen, traditionally placed in male hands and male perspective, also determines and represents subjectivity and autonomy of the author and is often conflated with the power to create imaginary worlds, perspectives and dichotomies, which, again, traditionally tend to place women in the positions of inferiority and Otherness (Gilbert and Gubar 19). Many other feminist critics also emphasized the power of creation as an important site of women's struggle "to recover the place of her exploitation by language" (Miller 343) by taking over the role of the author and the creator. According to Patricia Waugh (602), feminism is cultural politics with the power of symbolic representation as one of its key aspects. "Constructing identities and subjectivities" through art is also understood as a means of fighting inequality and an opportunity to create imagined worlds through multivocal literary expression which would include the voices of those who are perceived as underrepresented or misrepresented or silenced by the mainstream culture (Waugh 603). This insistence on the construction of subjectivity is also emphasized by Joan Didion (98-9), a renowned American writer, who insists that: "In many ways writing is the act of saying I, of imposing oneself upon other people, of saying listen to me, see it my way, change your mind. It's an aggressive, even a hostile act." In other words, through the very act of writing a female author asserts her identity and her voice.

The power of self-definition is an important concern of (black) feminist activism closely connected to breaking silence and a major step in the process of de-victimization and challenging, deconstructing, decoding and re-coding negative stereotypes (Collins 112). As Audre Lorde (45) points out, "It is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others — for their use and to our detriment." Lorde and many other (African) American female authors take upon themselves the role of those who define and redefine the female identity through their protagonists and the choices they make — a major step in the process of self-empowerment (Collins 97-8). Finding one's own voice is one of major concerns of feminism in general and black feminism in particular. As a renowned black feminist literary critic Barbara Christian (172) put it: "To be able to use the range of one's voice, to attempt to express the totality of self, is a recurring struggle in the tradition of [Black women] writers." hooks (43) denotes this process as ending silence and a struggle of a female author to move to the position of the speaking subject and abandon the position of the represented object. Writing or speaking oneself into freedom, i.e. being able to articulate one's identity is a narrative strategy often

used by (black) female authors and their protagonists (e.g. Celie in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* or Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*)." (Collins 119) The power of acquiring one's voice is often connected to the power of action. In other words, female protagonists become active doers who choose their own destinies, often in contrast to the expectations of the majority, and take responsibility for their lives and their choices (Collins 119).

Finding one's individual voice and ending silence are major concerns of contemporary forms of feminism as well, including, "networked feminism", sometimes called "hashtag feminism" or "digital feminism" (Eichhorn 140). Various movements and campaigns initiated on social media, e.g. #MeToo, #EverydaySexism, #WhyIStayed, have focused on individual female experiences drawing large numbers of followers and activists, often those who may have been overlooked in current feminist dialogues (Eichhorn 141-2), which shows major democratic and inclusive potential of networked feminism and its focus on empowering individual women everywhere. Contemporary discussions of feminism (e.g. Rivers, Gill, Plain&Sellers, Smith&Robinson, McRobbie, Gamble) emphasize the arrival of the so-called "fourth wave" feminism championed by celebrities, politicians and women and men of Gen Z which is often connected with the notion of postfeminism. It seems that the interest in feminist studies and politics has been revived but with a focus on (rich and famous) women's individual, personal achievements, and the notions of "choice", "empowerment" and "agency" (Rivers 24). The new feminists' agenda based on the "individualized, neoliberal and capitalist vision of 'success'" (Rivers 25) is inevitably dovetailed with the concept of postfeminism. Postfeminism as "a critical analytical term (...) refers to empirical regularities or patterns in contemporary cultural life, which include the emphasis on individualism, choice, and agency as dominant modes of accounting." (Gill 4). In other words, despite innumerable debates, tensions and generational gaps that seem to separate proponents of various feminist and postfeminist waves, the focus on women's agency remains a constant feminist concern. This is also reflected in the three short stories that will be analyzed further.

### **3. Three Short Stories by American Women Writers: the Context**

The previously analyzed concepts of female authorship, female voice and female empowerment will now be discussed using the examples of three short stories by American women writers. This is particularly important in light of the fact that some critics equate American literature and its development with male literature solely. Judith Fetterley (xii) even goes as far as saying that: "American literature is male, the experience of being American is equated with the experience of being male." However, women's voices and women authors represent important landmarks in the history of American literature. The

domain of American short story is particularly interesting in this sense because of its brevity and impact and because it is the genre American women writers have often resorted to. Some of the reasons for that may lie in the fact that the short story was understood as “an appropriate form for the exploration of female psychology,” because of its open-endedness and its authenticity (Showalter 273). The themes of freedom, silence, confinement, domesticity, along with the use of irony and the manipulation of perspective are the common literary devices and strategies female authors use to shed light on the issues of female voice and representation. Symbolic power is reflected, first of all, in the very act of writing by female authors, and then in the narrative strategies employed in the characterization process. The female protagonists are represented not as passive, inferior member of the binary hierarchy, but rather as active subjects with their own voice and their own perspective who actively take charge of their lives and “affront their destinies” as Henry James (18) put it when describing his iconic character of Isabel Archer in the *Portrait of a Lady*.

The three short stories which will be analyzed here are “New England Nun” (1891) by Mary Wilkins Freeman, “The Story of an Hour” (1894) by Kate Chopin and “A Jury of Her Peers” (1917) by Susan Glaspell. All three stories were published towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period when some major changes regarding women’s roles in the society occurred. During that period, many women’s associations were formed (e.g. The National American Women Suffrage Association, The Society of American Authors), universities and other educational institutions, political parties, sports teams, cultural institutions, etc. actively employed and included women, the words “feminist” and “home economics” were used for the first time, among other things (Davis and West 142-59). This is especially important to understand the context in which these authors worked and could be of relevance upon close reading of the stories in question.

All three stories are written in the third person from a perspective of a female protagonist and all of them focus on female protagonists actively making their choices. The setting is always the domestic space, their houses, their kitchens, their bedrooms, but “the twist” is that these characters are not merely confined to those spaces – they transform them, claim them, make them their own. The themes often revolve around marriage: the first story is about a (too) long betrothal, the second is about loneliness in marriage and the third one is about a murdered spouse. Even a glimpse of the plots reveals that the exploration of the notion of marriage in these stories goes beyond the surface and delves into female psychology. A very important dualism that all three stories touch upon is freedom/confinement and especially the idea of marriage as confinement. The verbal and non-verbal methods of communication that the protagonists use are also very significant: not only the language used but also

mannerisms, habits and gestures reveal deeper inner dramas and represent additional means of expression. Finally, all three stories end with an ironic twist; the root of irony is (usually) male misunderstanding and misinterpretation of female actions. This is another literary strategy that these American women writers use to emphasize the importance of female perspective and of feminine mind.

### **3.1. "A pleasant peace": Mary Wilkins Freeman's Louisa**

Louisa Ellis is the protagonist of the short story "New England Nun" written by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman in 1891. Louisa had been patiently waiting for her fiancé to come back from Australia for fourteen years during their fifteen-year-long engagement. In the meantime, she has grown fond of her solitude, her freedom, her hobbies, her pet and her space so she sees the arrival of her newly rich fiancé Joe as an intrusion. Neither of them wants to waiver from their duties although it is obvious that their feelings have changed. Finally, she decides to break off the engagement after she finds out Joe is in love with another girl.

The story begins late in the afternoon in a small New England village foreshadowing the later period in life of the protagonist: the light outside is waning and so is the light for Joe Dagget inside Louisa Ellis (Showalter 252). We learn that Louisa is defined by her neatness and cleanliness, her sewing – the sewing kit is described as "a very part of her personality" (Freeman), her pets – Ceasar the dog and the canary, her three aprons – each for a different occasion, her china which she uses every day despite her neighbors' disapproval, her meticulous vegetarian diet and her hobby of distilling essences from roses and peppermint. What is more, we learn that this is how Louisa defines herself: through her perspective, her life is described as "a pleasant peace" and "sweet serenity" and her life path as "so narrow that there was no room for any one at her side." (Freeman) From the very beginning, it is clear that the power of representation is in the perspective of a female protagonist: her views, her opinions, her attitudes and her perspectives take center stage. Having lost her mother and her beloved brother during the long wait for her fiancé to make fortune in Australia, Louisa has found contentment in her simple way of life, her solitude and her pets and is unwilling to change that but nonetheless feels duty towards Joe. The struggle inside her character reflects the struggle of a female individual between self-realization and the obligations imposed from the outside. Joe's arrival for a regular weekly visit to his fiancée is compared to a bull in a china shop: he disrupts her neat order of things, flusters her bird and knocks over her favorite sewing kit. The commotion he causes inside her home corresponds to the turmoil inside her mind when she thinks about the impending marriage that she views not as something desirable but "as the inevitable conclusion of things." (Freeman), confinement which would force her

to serve Joe's ill-willed mother and give up all her hobbies and habits. She is also worried about her dog Caesar whom she keeps confined (much like herself) in the backyard to prevent him from attacking her neighbors but whom Joe wants to release contrary to her wishes. Freeman analyzes the issue of marriage as understood in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a woman is expected to give up her desires, her hobbies, and in Louisa's case, her entire way of life – "It was the old homestead; the newly-married couple would live there, for Joe could not desert his mother, who refused to leave her old home. So Louisa *must* leave hers." (Freeman, emphasis added)

Freeman makes her protagonist an active doer after passively waiting for fifteen years: Louisa makes her choice and takes charge of her life also ascertaining her own subjectivity and her own voice. After years of being calm and patient, after listening to her mother's advice, after being faithful to her fiancé, she finally decides it is time to do something for herself. Freeman empowers her protagonist by making her an agent, the one who consciously makes the decision not to follow the convention and enter into marriage but rather to "paddle her own canoe", as Louisa Alcott once chose (qtd. in Showalter 218). Louisa breaks off the engagement thus forfeiting her female "prerogatives" to marry and bear children and bravely, consciously and intentionally chooses a life which defies social rules without breaking them. After making the fateful decision: "Louisa, all alone by herself that night, wept a little, she hardly knew why; but the next morning, on waking, she felt like a queen who, after fearing lest her domain be wrested from her, sees it firmly insured in her possession." Freeman's Louisa is metaphorically associated with a queen defending her dominion, although her dominion is not a public but a private one – she has acquired her voice and has empowered herself to choose her life and her destiny. Louisa's choice can also be connected with the postfeminist overtones of the assumption that "women can and arguably should have the right to choose anything – any style, anyway of being in the world, any path forward." (Eichhorn 138)

### **3.2. "Body and soul free!" – Kate Chopin's Mrs. Mallard**

The protagonist of Chopin's short story "The Story of an Hour" published in 1894 is Louisa Mallard who is one day informed that her husband was killed in a railroad accident. The news is carefully communicated to her by her sister and a family friend as we learn that Mrs. Mallard, her name suggestive of a malady, has a weak heart. Indeed, upon receiving the news, she cries and appears heartbroken as befits a grieving widow. She goes into solitude in her own room and starts pondering on her new situation. Through the window, she sees blue patches of the sky and is overwhelmed by a strange feeling which she identifies as freedom. She whispers: "Free! Body and soul free!" (Chopin) and for the first



time, the narrator tells us, feels joy over the prospect of a long life. However, after this moment of self-realization, she returns to her company and her husband appears at the door unharmed: the news turns out to be false as he was far away from the place of the accident. Mrs. Mallard dies instantaneously, which everyone present interprets as a shock of sudden joy.

The motif of marriage as confinement is present in this story as well. Chopin was known (and often criticized and even shunned by her contemporaries) for writing openly about female sexuality thus opposing the predominant social views of female propriety and women's unquestioning satisfaction with the roles of a wife and a mother (Showalter 299-300). The author empowers her protagonist first by giving her voice, albeit only a whisper in her private bedroom. The other characters, her sister, the doctors, her husband, do not realize her true motivation; even her death is misinterpreted. However, a privileged reader gets a glimpse into her perspective. We learn that although she had a loving and kind husband, Louisa Mallard feels a married life is not living for herself and in accordance with her wishes: "There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature." (Chopin) By making her wishes known, Chopin places the symbolic power in the hands of a female protagonist. For a brief moment, Louisa Mallard is allowed to feel free and have a sip of "a very elixir of life through that open window." (Chopin) More importantly, during those brief moments the protagonist spends in her bedroom, she is turned into an active agent who embraces her new perspective of life. She leaves her bedroom looking "like a goddess of Victory," (Chopin). Like Mary Wilkins Freeman, Kate Chopin also uses a powerful metaphor to characterize her protagonist and to mark her newly-acquired right to self-definition. Even her death at the end of the story can be interpreted as an active resistance to the confinement of married life. After tasting a hope of freedom. Chopin's protagonist seems to "choose" death as a preferable alternative to a marriage based on inequality and suppression of a woman's voice, potential, and desires. Chopin's famous novel *The Awakening* treats a similar topic and ends on a similar note: the death of the heroine as a response to the unbearable imposed norms and standards. A particularly important contribution to women's literature and the issue of female representation is Chopin's deep and nuanced psychological portrayal of her protagonist: by making her wishes, doubts and inner dilemmas known to the privileged readers, the author actively reshapes representation practices and creates "herstories". What is more, Chopin's focus on women's agency and choice links her works with the contemporary feminist concerns, as discussed in the section 2.1. of this paper.

### 3.3. “Do you suppose she was going to quilt it or just knot it?” – Susan Glaspell’s *Women*

Susan Glaspell’s short story “A Jury of Her Peers” (an iconic phrase from the title is also the title of an important collection of critical texts dedicated to American women authors referenced in this paper) from 1917 is an adaptation of her popular play *The Trifles*. Glaspell uses the third person narration as well, but the inner perspectives of the female characters are revealed through a dialogue. The main protagonist, Minnie Foster, now Mrs. Wright, is absent from the story and the story is told from the perspective of her former friend, now neighbor, Martha Hale. There is a sharp contrast between male and female characters and their representations, especially in terms of their duties and positions. Minnie Foster’s husband is found dead and although the wife is a primary suspect, nobody can determine what the motive was. The sheriff and his assistants have an active duty to find a motive for murder – they are the ones with important jobs and responsibilities. They bring their wives with them to the scene of the crime to pick up a few things to bring to their neighbor Minnie who is already in jail. Throughout the story, the feminine perspective is downplayed and underestimated by male characters; a woman’s domain is household, chores, knitting, patchwork; in other words, “trifles”. However, towards the end of the story, it turns out that the women are able to discern the motive for murder – an unhappy marriage, a cruel husband who killed Minnie’s pet canary. The women decide not to disclose that information to the sheriff in a final act of defiance of male authority and in support of female solidarity.

This story also touches upon the issue of marriage as confinement: through the memories of Martha Hale we learn of Minnie Foster as a happy girl who became sad and kept to herself when she got married and stuck in a loveless and childless marriage of twenty years. The setting of the story is also domestic space like in the previous two: the drama unfolds in Minnie’s kitchen, among her dishes, sewing utensils, preserves. We learn that the Wrights’ home was a cold and lonely place and the only company Minnie had while her husband was at work was a little canary bird. Just like in Freeman’s story, the pet turns out to be a decisive element of the plot: we learn that Minnie has committed murder after her husband cruelly killed her only company. Some critics draw attention to a potential link between Minnie’s married last name “Wright” and the words “right” and “write” claiming that Minnie regains “authorship of her life by murdering her husband.” (Makowski 53) In other words, Minnie’s act of murder ironically empowers her just like an act of writing can be empowering for women.

Female characters are represented as more active and more astute and better detectives than their male counterparts. It turns out that female faculties, such as attention to detail and focus on emotions will be crucial for solving the

mystery, the skills that their self-important husbands miss. Glaspell's stroke of genius was to use the metaphor of the quilt Minnie was piecing in the story as a counterpoint to the detective work of her female neighbors who piece together the puzzle of her husband's murder. The seemingly irrelevant details, women's "trifles", prove to be crucial for the entire plot. Furthermore, female characters are turned into active agents who ultimately decide on their own that they will not inform the sheriff of what they found. Through the characters of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, Glaspell promotes the idea of equality and empowerment as the focus is placed on the female perspective and contribution. They protect their friend understanding that the crime she had committed was motivated by the cruelty of her husband and her sad and solitary married life. The slow revelation of the motive for murder is accompanied by the ironic remarks of male characters who openly doubt female cognitive and detective skills only to be exposed to be lacking those faculties themselves. This small victory for the female characters is also a symbolic act of empowerment.

The female characters become complicit emphasizing female solidarity and preserving and re-claiming their domestic space: "We live close together, and we live far apart. We all go through the same things – it's all just a different kind of the same thing!" (Glaspell) Observing the sad fate of Minnie Foster, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters realize that they all have something in common in the world where their opinions and actions are considered inferior compared to the male ones. What is more, that joint experience enables them to voice and articulate this newly-found attitude: "It was as if something within her not herself had spoken, and it found in Mrs. Peters something she did not know as herself." (Glaspell) The relationship between female characters in this story can also be understood in the context of contemporary popular networked feminism which emphasizes female solidarity and sharing of mutual experiences as a means of women's empowering. The two female characters, represented as smarter, braver and more humane than their male counterparts, demonstrate the full power of female authorship and the importance of symbolic power in the act of representation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The three short stories by American women authors analyzed in this paper are all told from the perspectives of their female protagonists who make choices and decisions based on their wishes and thus oppose the established (male) norms. Telling a story from a female perspective so as to reveal the inner workings of female psychology and to complement the characterization process is a narrative strategy often used by women authors. This literary strategy can also be viewed within a broader frame of feminist cultural politics directed towards a struggle for equal representation. Taking over symbolic power,

women authors give voices to female characters who develop undergoing the process of empowerment and self-definition.

Some of the important themes these authors deal with are marriage, domesticity, freedom vs. confinement and male/female relations. In one way or the other, all three protagonists opt against marriage. Freeman's Louisa breaks off the engagement in order to live her solitary life in accordance with her preferences and her tastes. Chopin's Louisa prefers death to an unhappy and unfulfilling marriage and Glaspell's Minnie ends her cruel and loveless marriage by murdering her husband. In all three stories, male characters are represented as disruptive forces who disturb the inner and outer worlds of the protagonists. Furthermore, all three characters are developed by representing them as active agents making conscious and deliberate choices to express their dissatisfaction and take their lives into their own hands. This could be interpreted as a deconstruction of the hierarchical binary opposition, pointed out by many feminist critics, in which male is associated with something positive and active and female is perceived as its less desirable opposition. What these women writers achieve is to create a representation practice which would allow for equal representation and utilize the power of words to tell a "herstory" instead of a conventional history. It is also possible to discern a link between these stories written at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary 21<sup>st</sup>-century feminist concerns and movements focusing on individualism, choice, agency, and speaking out. This is an argument in favor of the claim that feminism is still relevant for contemporary literary and cultural contexts and that its multifaceted forms and incarnations represent valuable critical lenses in literary analysis.

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### **AMERIČKE KNJIŽEVNICE I MOĆ PREDSTAVLJANJA**

**Rezime.** Rad se bavi predstavama o ženama u kratkim pričama američkih književnica, posebno se fokusirajući na pojam simboličke moći, odnosno, moći predstavljanja. Teorijski okvir zasniva se na radu teoretičara kulture poput Stjuarta Hoola i Pola du Geja i njihovim objašnjenjima koncepta simboličke moći i praksi predstavljanja kojima se moć reči iskazuje. Takođe, uvidi Edvarda Saida i Homija Babe o odnosu između pojma moći i predstavljanja dopunjuju se uvidima feminističkih kritičarki (Siksu, Irigare, Gilbert i Gubar, Rivers, Gil) o značaju sopstvenog glasa i statusa subjekta u procesu (samo-)reprezentacije i (samo-)osnaživanja putem pisanih narativa. Odabrani korpus sastoji se od tri kratke priče čuvenih američkih autorki Kejt Šopen, Meri Vilkins Friman i Suzan Glaspel. Priče su napisane i objavljene krajem 19. i početkom 20. veka i imaju ženske protagonistkinje i dela su ženskih autora. Sve tri kratke priče bave se muško-ženskim odnosima moći, pitanjem ženskog subjektiviteta i samo-reprezentacije, odnosno, konceptom moći reči u ženskom narativu. Analizom predloženog korpusa istražuju se zajedničke teme i narativne strategije kojima se autorke služe da bi se bavile pitanjima simboličke moći i (samo-)osnaživanja u svojim delima i uspostavlja se veza između čitanja ovih priča i savremenih feminističkih debata i tema.

**Ključne reči:** američki ženski pisci, kratka priča, simbolička moć, predstavljanje, feministička kritika, Meri Vilkins Frimen, Suzan Glaspel, Kejt Šopen, postfeminizam