

**TWO OUT OF ONE:  
AN EXPLORATION OF GENDER IN SAME-SEX SCHOOLS  
WITHIN CLASSIC LITERATURE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Certain books pervade our collective consciousness; they are a part of our culture as English speakers and writers. These books have evolved into classics partly because of their widespread use in education. Almost anyone can reflect on the time she read – or was supposed to read – quintessential novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *The Catcher in the Rye*. Yet what do these books that supposedly lend themselves so well to the classroom setting share? Most of these high school classics parallel the students' lives in that the characters are students themselves. Inevitably, the "school story" has become an irrevocable part of schooling. Oftentimes, these stories take place not only in schools, but also in the popular setting of the same-sex school. Such is the case with many novels, with *Lord of the Flies*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *This Side of Paradise*, and *A Separate Peace* all being examples.

**INTRODUCTION**

Although schools are set up to be places of learning, their position as institutions of authority and conformity cannot be questioned. In discussing eighteenth century secondary schools, Michel Foucault, the undoubted master on the power of institutions, writes, "All who held a measure of authority were placed in a state of perpetual alert, which the fixtures, the precautions taken, the interplay of punishments and responsibilities, never ceased to reiterate" (28). Foucault is primarily interested here in the policing of sexuality in schools; nevertheless, his clarification of schools as places of punishment and authority can be extended to multiple areas besides just sexuality. Writers Thomas A. Atwood and Wade M. Lee agree with Foucault and specifically discuss same-sex schools in literature, arguing that "rather than nurturing independent thought and encouraging personal growth, schools enforce conformity and quash individual expression" (102). They continue by elaborating that in schools, "...tyrannies (or curses) of the past manifest as self-perpetuating hierarchies and power inequalities...in educational institutions. Typically, these are conservative forces such as racism, classism, and sexism" (103). Taking into consideration Foucault's discussion of the policing of sexuality and Atwood's and Lee's mention of sexism, it is productive to consider the subject of gender and how it is enforced in schools. Critic Eric L. Tribunella confirms this when he explains, "According to Beverly Lyon Clark, school stories are 'so marked by gender that it becomes vital to address questions of both the instability and potency of gender in the school story'11" ("Refusing" 81).

Yet what exactly is "enforced" about gender? At the center of the policing of gender is the idea that two concrete and fundamentally different genders exist. In her "Believing is Seeing: Biology as Ideology", Judith Lorber discusses how "Neither sex nor gender are pure categories" (569). She discusses how perceived biological differences in genitalia have resulted in a social tradition of subjugation when she writes:

Current Western thinking sees women and men as so different physically as to sometimes seem two species. The bodies, which have been mapped inside and out for hundreds of years, have not changed. What has changed are the justifications for gender inequality...When scientists began to question the divine basis of social order and replaced faith with empirical knowledge,

what they saw was that women were very different from men in that they had wombs and menstruated. Such anatomical differences destined them for an entirely different social life from men. (568-569)

This “difference” in life for women is, as Lorber previously mentioned, inequality. From her arguments we gather that the existence of two concrete genders, male and female, is in fact a social and medical construction, and that the group identified as “female” is subjugated.

Indeed, gender is not just a facet of our identities but an institution in itself, according to sociologist Patricia Yancey Martin (1250). Martin argues that institutions, among many other qualifications, “both constrain and facilitate behavior/actions by societal/group members” (1256). She also argues, “No institution is totally separate from others; each links to others, often extensively (Rosignio 2000). For example, gender and sexuality are intertwined...” (1258). Martin’s ideas here allow the exploration of several relationships: Foucault’s discussion of sexuality and schools and how these relate to gender and schools, gender itself as an institution that “constrains and facilitates” behaviors, and the discussion of gender and schools as two interdependent institutions that must be considered together rather than individually.

Considering these theories allows for the exploration of gender in same-sex schools in literature. Despite the presence of only one sex in these schools, oftentimes characters come to represent the ‘other’ gender; the presence of only male characters does not mean the female is not represented, and vice-versa. Regardless, although some characters may inevitably portray what is considered characteristics of the ‘other’ gender, the school and the other students consistently condemn this deviance. This leads to the upholding of the idea that only two genders exist; one cannot stray outside the box of one’s assigned gender based on biological sex without negative consequence. Indeed, there becomes a correct way to ‘do’ male or female. Out of this assumption evolves the punishment of femininity. As Lorber suggests, women are historically subjugated; however, they are further punished when they stray outside the rules of what is considered proper femininity. This double-bind suggests that although women will inevitably be subjugated, their straying from their assigned place of “female” will only result in more negative consequences. Furthermore, feminine behavior, when exhibited by men, is continually punished. William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, John Knowles’s *A Separate Peace*, and Muriel Sparks’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* are all literary examples of this construction and enforcing of two concrete gender roles and the ultimate punishment of femininity in same-sex schools.

### **BOYS, PIGS, AND MOTHERS IN LORD OF THE FLIES**

According to Eric L. Tribunella, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* is now, at least in the United States, so frequently encountered in the school setting that it is widely to be considered children’s literature” (“Kiddie Lit” 154). While high school students are hardly “children,” this school story does tell a children’s school tale, the story of young boys in what we can assume to be an all-boys school institution due to the complete absence of female children. The boys, aged at around six to twelve, are survivors of a plane crash on a tropical island; the children become increasingly violent and murderous toward each other until they are ultimately rescued by an adult naval officer. Critic Paula Alida Roy, who argues for the existence of the representation of the female in this all-male novel, writes, “...the very absence of girls or women underscores how *feminine* or *female* stands in sharp contrast to the *masculine* or *male* in Golding’s island work” (175).

Indeed, although all of the children in the story are boys, some characters come to represent the female; this is primarily achieved through Piggy. Piggy is clearly the most intellectual boy on the island, trying to represent order through the summoning power of the conch. Piggy is also without a doubt the character most littered with traditional feminine characteristics. He is physically weak, which he explains in the beginning in the novel, saying, “My auntie told me not to run...on account of my asthma” (Golding 5). His asthma prevents Piggy from performing numerous duties on the island such as gathering wood and searching for the supposed beast. His physical form itself is not masculine like Ralph’s “width and heaviness of shoulders” (7), but is “shorter than the fair boy (Ralph) and very fat” (4). His physical weakness reaches a peak before his death when, after Jack’s tribe strips him of his glasses, he clings

helplessly to Ralph, begging, "Ralph! Don't leave me!" (211). Piggy is also the singular character who mentions a specific female character, repeatedly spewing his "auntie's" advice. Roy details:

Of...all the boys, only Piggy makes constant reference to a maternal figure – his "auntie," the woman raising him. We hear no reference to Jack's mother and we learn that Ralph's mother went away when he was very young. Some of the littl'uns cry at night for their mothers, but in general, only Piggy makes repeated and specific reference to a mother figure as an influence on him.

As Golding sets up the influence of Piggy's "auntie," we see that it is a mixed message about women...Piggy's weakness and whining seem to be the result of the feminizing influence of his "auntie." (175-177)

Here, Roy illustrates that not only is Piggy undeserving of respect on the island because he is feminized, but even his aunt is made blamable by the islanders for exerting these feminine influences over her nephew.

Piggy is punished for these transgressions from masculinity in three ways; these punishments illustrate both the rigid adherence to the idea of two concrete genders and the general subjugation of femininity. First, he is stripped of power and voice on the island. Anything he says is met with a remark akin or identical to Jack's original "Shut up, Fatty" (Golding 20). Although he alone represents a return to the boys' "'civilized' British boarding school," his efforts toward returning to order are ignored (Roy 175). After he is stripped of his political power, Piggy begins to lose sovereignty over his own body. His glasses are repeatedly stolen from him in order to light the signal fire, leaving Piggy helplessly blind. Finally, and most obviously, Piggy is punished for his femininity by being killed. As Roy also points out, upon his death, "Piggy's arms and legs twitched a bit, like a pig's after it has been killed" (Golding 217).

Clearly, Piggy is eternally linked to the pigs on the island through both his name and his death; the pigs are also important to our discussion of femininity. The pig whose death is described in the novel is the only biologically female character on the island. She is not only a female, but a mother, described as "black and pink; and the great bladder of her belly...fringed with a row of piglets that slept or burrowed and squeaked" (Golding 160). The boys meet this display of ultimate femininity – motherhood – with murderous rage. Their hunting turns into a horrifying gang rape scene as "the sow collapsed under them and they were heavy and fulfilled upon her" (162). With delight, they discover they have sodomized her and repeatedly cry "Right up her ass!" (162). Indeed, before the boys encounter this sow, their war cry is already gendered. Their hunting is accompanied by the chant "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood" (78). The boys' reactions toward the sow and Piggy and their initial gendered battle cry indicate a clear disdain for femininity that results in violent punishment. Golding also expresses his own disdain for the feminine in his post mortem transformation of the sow from female to male. During her living role, the sow's only function is to showcase the boys' loss of innocence during her rape scene. After her death, Golding transforms her into the titular "Lord of the Flies." Yet a different transformation occurs as well – Golding writes, "in front of Simon the Lord of the Flies hung on his stick and grinned" (165). The sow's head on the stick speaking as the "Lord of the Flies" is the center of the horror in this novel. However, Golding transforms the sow into a male when he writes, "hung on his stick," indicating that the female body is too weak to inspire fear or horror in Simon or the readers. Roy agrees, writing, "Golding...concludes that the female is unsuccessful because she is too weak, flawed, flesh-bound to overcome the ingenuity, craftiness, and sheer brutality of male violence" (175-177). The killing of the sow and her transformation to male in order to be impressive and imposing signifies the perceived weakness of biological femininity.

The disdain for the feminine is shown in a few other more subtle ways on the island. Roy writes:

When he (Ralph) suggests they comb their hair "only it's too long," Piggy says, "we could find some stuff...and tie your hair back." Eric replies, "Like a girl!" (199). That single reference stands, along with the references to Piggy's auntie and the contrast set up by the absence of all other female figures, to identify the female with "civilization," ineffectual, far away, and dangerously weak. (175-177)

Clearly, any similarity to the female body is considered with scorn and contempt. As Roy mentions earlier, only the littl'uns cry for their mothers; this action signifies them as weak and worth less than their peers. This is confirmed when Jack suggests that they "use a littlun" to practice hunting on, "and everybody laughed" (Golding 137). Even the only human mother that we know of in the novel, Ralph's mother, is vilified. Minnie Singh writes,

Only once in Ralph's daydreams does she appear, and then she is associated with severe emotional loss: "Once . . . they had lived in a cottage on the edge of the moors. In the succession of houses that Ralph had known, this one stood out with particular clarity because after that house he had been sent away to school. Mummy had still been with them and Daddy had come home every day" (Golding, *Lord*, 112). (211)

Singh highlights here how the only flashback in the story centered on a female character is colored with pain and distress, further signifying the distrust and contempt toward femininity. Regarding these smaller mentions of women and the more glaring treatment of Piggy and the sow, it still becomes clear that the island is a hostile environment for anything female.

Indeed, although Golding's story does not take place in the literal school building that Foucault discusses, the transportation of the boys' single-sex school from a building to an island does not negate its legitimacy as an institution. In the absence of teachers, the boys set up their own rules; they are both the school's administrators and its students. The boys' story illustrates the rigid enforcement of gender construction: they punish Piggy when he steps outside the lines of masculinity, and they dismiss anything that could make them "like girls," or stray from their biological-determined gender. We also see the ultimate punishment of all forms of femininity – the boys originally target the female, as evidenced in their hunting chant, and they also choose to eliminate Piggy because he comes to represent "female" more than "male." The attempt at upholding social construction of genders (and its failure) and the punishment of femininity are both demonstrated in *Lord of the Flies*.

#### **SCHOOLBOYS AND WIVES IN JOHN KNOWLES'S *A SEPARATE PEACE***

Shifting to a more traditional school story, John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* shows the same illustration of gender as an institution and the punishment of femininity in same-sex schools. This boarding school story details the extreme friendship of Gene and Phineas, and the latter's fall from a tree and eventual death. Although much has been written about sexuality in the novel, suggesting a homoerotic relationship between the pair, few have commented on the role of gender in Knowles's book. Similar to *Lord of the Flies*, one character comes to represent femininity in the absence of females; this femininity is ultimately punished.

The absence of females in *A Separate Peace* is as glaring and obvious as in *Lord of the Flies*. Although the teachers live on the Devon campus, we only glimpse their wives two times. Once is at church:

In an apse of the church sat their wives and children, the objects during the tedious winter months of our ceaseless, ritual speculation (Why did he ever marry *her*? What in the world ever made her marry *him*? How could the two of them ever have produced *those* little monsters?). (Knowles 64-65)

In this brief appearance, the women of Devon do not even have any dialogue. They are wordless, and incredibly appropriately referred to as "objects." The only thoughts the students pay to them are in regards to biological reproduction – why they got married and the appearance of their offspring. Clearly, the women at Devon are so ignored or unimportant that our student narrator rarely acknowledges their presence. The only other mention of a female character is Mrs. Patch-Withers at her husband's house, where she has a grand total of three spoken lines, one of which is an incomplete sentence ("Isn't that the...our..."); furthermore, she "trembled at every cup tinkle" (18-20). This representation of biological females leaves something to be desired; much like in *Lord of the Flies*, it is to be

expected that as a result, some character will come to be equated with “female” since the author chooses not to include biologically female characters.

In this absence of the biological female, Phineas is the boy who comes to represent the feminine in several ways. Some of these are centered on his choice in attire; his infamous pink shirt is one of these ways. Gene exclaims to Finny, “It makes you look like a *fairy!*” (Knowles 17). The word “fairy” has a feminine connotation, and yet, Phineas does not reject this classification. He simply says, “Does it?...I wonder what would happen if I looked like a fairy to everyone” and continues the shirt’s relation to the feminine when he jokes, “Well, in case suitors begin clamoring at the door...” (17-18). Phineas is amused by the connection to femininity; he chooses to continue it. Later on, he “use[s] a tie for a belt” (20). Phineas takes a classically masculine piece of clothing and adorns it around his waist or hips, a more feminized part of the body. While he is the untouchable poster boy of the school, Phineas dabbles in feminine practice; his other masculine characteristics, such as his excellence in sports, make his stepping outside the male boundaries permissible. After his fall from the tree, however, Phineas becomes increasingly weaker and more feminized. His expected enlistment in the armed forces typical of every male his age is unable to be met due to his disability. Phineas can no longer play sports as he relies on crutches; his last badges of masculinity are removed. Suddenly, Phineas’s femininity becomes impermissible.

Much like Piggy in *Lord of the Flies*, Phineas is ultimately punished for his femininity with his death, but he also experiences punishment before his heart stops. Eric L. Tribunella, who argues for a homoerotic relationship between Gene and Phineas, writes that Gene jounces Phineas off the tree due to his “homosexual panic” incited when Phineas attempts to hold his hand (“Refusing” 86). While the boys’ homoerotic relationship is certainly a possibility, Gene’s action can also be read as simply a ‘gendered panic.’ Gene, as his roommate and best friend, is clearly the student most familiar with Phineas’s lapses into femininity. Gene sees the pink shirt and exclaims about it, and he is shocked when Finny wears the Devon school tie as a belt and goes unpunished. Gene’s impulsive desire to jounce Finny from the tree may be driven not by a homosexual panic but from a discomfort with Phineas’s increasing feminine characteristics. Tribunella acknowledges this possibility as well when he writes, “Gene’s homosexual panic might then be ascribed not only to the prohibition of homo-desire but also to the related fear of being feminine or feminized” (86). After the fall from the tree only further feminizes Phineas, the other students begin to react as well. Thomas A. Atwood and Wade M. Lee identify Phineas as a symbol of progression that must be eventually conquered by the domineering boarding school; this “progression” can be his experimenting with traditional gender roles. They argue that the whole school is involved in his demise when they write:

although it is ultimately through his betrayal by Gene that Phineas is brought down, the entire school is complicit in his downfall. This is foreshadowed in a snowball fight in which his classmates “ended the fight in the only way possible; all of us turned on Phineas” (145), and ultimately demonstrated in the student body’s participation in the trial that precipitates Phineas’s fatal accident. (110)

Indeed, Gene and Phineas’s “trial” at the climax of the novel can be read not only as an accusation of Gene, but as a prosecution of Finny’s femininity led by Brinker, the school’s chief masculine figure who is first to point out that Finny is “sidelined for the Duration” of the war and unable to enlist (Knowles 149). His ultimate death is a result of his classmates’ condemnation of him. Tribunella reaffirms that their actions are driven by a desire to regulate gender when he writes:

The threat posed by Finny becomes evident. His presence, in fact, his continued existence, defers indefinitely Gene’s “ascension” to a proper manhood. Finny must therefore die to prevent any further return and to allow Gene to claim finally his masculinity and complete the gendering process that is ongoing throughout *A Separate Peace*. (“Refusing” 87)

Indeed, as Tribunella’s arguments suggest, *A Separate Peace* shows not simply the policing of gender among individuals but its practice in the institution of the school. Immediately before the trial,

Gene notes that on the door of the school's church is the inscription "Here Boys Come to Be Made Men" (Knowles 157). This mission statement above all of the boys' heads is a clear indication that the school is primarily concerned with the students' 'correct' display of their biologically assigned gender. Just as in *Lord of the Flies*, the students are involved in the regulation of gender and the ultimate punishment of femininity when it appears.

### **THE DOUBLE-BIND IN MURIEL SPARKS'S *THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE***

Unlike the other two novels discussed, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* focuses on female students and showcases a clearer implication of school faculty. As the title suggests, this novel focuses on a Miss Jean Brodie's effect on her students. While the novel is often read as simply a portrait of a woman, the book is deserving of a deeper discussion. Writer Benilde Montgomery supports this when she writes, "most critics...become obsessed only with the character of Jean Brodie and thereby misread the novel as only a character sketch of her" (97). Although critics have not discussed the role of gender in this novel, the story is a complex representation of femininity that merits examination.

The very introduction to the novel serves to illustrate that it is a story of gender constriction. The first sentence of the novel is as follows: "The boys, as they talked to the girls from Marcia Blaine School, stood on the far side of their bicycles holding the handlebars, which established a protective fence of bicycle between the sexes, and the impression that at any moment the boys were likely to be away" (Sparks 9). Sparks introduces the novel showing that there will be a clear distinction between males and females in this novel; she establishes the "protective fence of bicycle between the sexes" as an indication of their fundamental separation. Sparks indicates that the boys have a freedom to leave the area, and they do, when Jean Brodie dismisses them from the scene. The girls are left with their teacher, who then echoes to them her mantra, "Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life" (16).

Indeed, Miss Brodie comes to own the girls' mindsets by instilling into them a construction of proper femininity. She demands that her surroundings and students embody her triad of perfection: "Goodness, Truth, and Beauty" (Sparks 17). Miss Brodie is clearly rigid with her standards for her girls, addressing even the manner of their sleeves when she reprimands, "I won't have to do with girls who roll up the sleeves of their blouses, however fine the weather. Roll them down at once, we are civilized beings" (20). Clearly, Miss Brodie is exact in policing her students' bodies. Yet what does she endorse? The first Brodie lesson we see in the novel is her story of her earlier love interest who had been killed in war efforts. With her first lesson, Miss Brodie indicates the primary rule of femininity in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*: loving a man. The corollary to this rule that Miss Brodie herself fails to follow is to not openly display one's sexuality.

As in *Lord of the Flies* and *A Separate Peace*, those who stray from the gender expectations are punished; in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, the women who stray from the 'correct' femininity are punished. One prime example of this is Mary. As critic Peter Robert Brown indicates, "Mary is characterized as stupid and lump-like from the outset"; this is already contrary to Miss Brodie's ideal "beauty" that she desires in all her students (237). Brown calls into attention how Mary is victimized; as an example, he notes that at one point, "Miss Brodie asks Mary a question, and Sandy whispers to Mary the wrong answer which Mary then utters aloud" (237). Miss Brodie and her fellow students constantly berate her for her appearances and stupidity. Aside from her role as a scapegoat, Mary possesses an additional characteristic that none of the other female characters have: she has no romantic or sexual relationship with a man. Besides Sandy, who becomes a nun, Mary is the only one of the "Brodie set" who does not eventually marry. As we find out early in the novel, Mary eventually dies in a hotel fire. Mary's death may seem less affected than Piggy's or Phineas since it is not obviously caused by the other characters, however, Brown argues of her death, "Since we know when and how she will die, Mary's life seems to be teleologically oriented towards this specific death" (239). Indeed, Mary's actions can be seen as causers of her death. Rather than not marrying due to her untimely death, Mary untimely dies as a result of her unmarried state due to the rules of femininity established in the novel. Mary is punished for not following the gender roles cut out for her by Marcia Blaine School for Girls.

Like Mary, Sandy Stranger never marries, but her straying from the rules of the female expression of sexuality lead to her punishment as well. Sandy has an affair with married Mr. Lloyd, Miss Brodie's love; it is important to note that Mr. Lloyd is also a teacher at Marcia Blaine School. This

dalliance begins when Sandy more explicitly discusses sexuality; she notes that all of his paintings resemble Miss Brodie, whom she knows Mr. Lloyd is attracted to. Mr. Lloyd reacts:

He laughed in a delighted way and looked at her more closely, as if for the first time. She looked back just as closely through her little eyes, with the near-blackmailing insolence of her knowledge. Whereupon he kissed her long and wetly. He said in his hoarse voice, "That'll teach you to look at an artist like that."

She started to run to the door, wiping her mouth dry with the back of her hand, but he caught her with his one arm and said: "There's no need to run away. You're just about the ugliest little thing I've ever seen in my life." He walked out and left her standing in the studio, and there was nothing for her to do but to follow him downstairs. (Sparks 150)

We can ascertain that Mr. Lloyd perceives something sexual in Sandy's "look" with his response of unexpectedly kissing her. While a kiss may not seem like a punishment, his following insult is intended to put Sandy 'back in her place'; his actions are demonstrating to her who holds power in the realm of sexuality. Frustratingly, Sandy becomes Mr. Lloyd's lover, and ultimately, she becomes a Catholic nun. Her internment as a nun is not simply a sign of her religious devotion, but a clear punishment. When receiving visitors as a nun, she is constantly "clutching the bars of the grille" (186). This phrase signifies her imprisonment rather than her religious enlightenment. Sandy is punished for her too-open sexuality.

Much like Sandy, Miss Brodie is also punished for her extramarital relationships, or straying from the expected femininity. Miss Brodie, a spinster, begins her frequent presence in Mr. Lowther's (another Marcia Blaine teacher) house under the guise of aggressive domesticity, forcing decadent meals on him. This act is permissible by the school's definition of femininity, but eventually, her nightdress is discovered on his bed; this discovery is orchestrated and discussed by the school's other staff: "...Miss Ellen Kerr was brought to the headmistress by Miss Gaunt to testify to having found Miss Brodie's nightdress under a pillow of the double bed on which Mr. Lowther took his sleep" (Sparks 137). This relationship interests the headmistress, who seeks to depose her of her teaching position due to her unconventional methods. Miss Brodie is ultimately forced to resign due to her fascist-leaning politics, but only after Sandy explains to the headmistress, "But you don't be able to pin her down on sex" (182). It is important to note that Mr. Lowther is not indicted in any way for their affair by the faculty. Even though the official reason for her loss of employment is politics, Miss Brodie is in actuality condemned for her sexual relationships, which stray outside the bounds of Marcia Blaine femininity.

While this novel may seem out of place among *Lord of the Flies* and *A Separate Peace* in its treatment of gender, the differences only exist because of the biological genders of the characters. In this novel, there is no female character who begins to represent masculinity. This is because unlike the other two books, the 'opposite' gender is represented in the novel; in fact, the whole plot eventually revolves around Miss Brodie's and the set's relationships with Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Lowther. The former two books punish males for femininity, but this novel punishes females for displaying incorrect femininity. The setting of the school is heavily important: Miss Brodie teaches her students the bounds of what is feminine and the others — teachers, administrators, and Sandy, a student — within the institution bring about her ultimate demise. The institutional forces of both schools and gender are clearly at work in this novel.

### **SCHOOLS OF TODAY**

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What makes the role of gender in same-sex schools in literature important? The primary reason is the function these classics play in schools today. These novels have been, are, and likely will continue to be read in high schools throughout the country. This strict adherence to the idea of two concrete genders and the ultimate punishment of femininity is damaging. Clearly, not every reading of a novel needs to be done under a feminist lens, but unfortunately, even the subject of gender construction or gender fluidity is rarely discussed in schools. The institutions discussed here — schools and gender — are very much at play today due to the persistent inclusions of these books with similar messages about gender in our education systems.

What could solve this problem is a shift toward less traditional books that challenge these norms, or at least do not so clearly subjugate females and femininity. Of course, the classics should not be ignored; however, their dominance of curriculums suggests disrespect toward writers of today that could result in their novels' ultimate disappearances from our canon. It should be noted that teachers are not to blame for this consistent message of feminine subjugation, for oftentimes when a teacher attempts to introduce a non-traditional novel into the classroom she is met with angry parents or even job insecurity. The persistent inclusion of these books in our schools indicates a macro-level problem of society's unwillingness to stray from the idea of gender as a concrete and unfluid facet of identity.

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