



"IT ENDS WITH DOMINATION": RUPTURES WITH PATRIARCHAL LAW'S HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE BASED ON THE ANALYSIS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INSERTED IN COLLEEN HOOVER'S WORK

"It ends with domination": rupturas com o discurso hegemônico patriarcal no direito com base na análise da violência doméstica na obra de Colleen Hoover

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the aspects of domestic violence as portrayed in the book “It ends with us”, by American Writer Colleen Hoover, under the feminist perspective of gender domination. The foundation of this paper lays in the understanding that not only the classics, but also the contemporary literature work, as cultural instruments, are able to bring to light the most diverse set of social patterns, such as gender domination. Its methodology was based on bibliographic studies regarding the setting of western gender comprehension, Pierre Bourdieu’s *symbolic domination* in his work “Masculine domination” and previous marriage representations in literature. It was also supported by the psychoanalytic implications of gender studies on kinship, *phallus* and parricide. Through those elements we seek to understand which moments of Hoover’s book counterpose the domination ruse throughout the main character’s development and, critically, analyze the possibility of any revealing type of corroboration towards the so called domination.

Keywords: Domestic violence; Colleen Hoover; Gender; Symbolic domination; Male possessiveness.

RESUMO

O presente artigo visa analisar as nuances da violência doméstica conforme retratada no livro “É assim que acaba”, da escritora norte-americana Colleen Hoover, sob a perspectiva feminista da dominação de gênero. É alicerce deste trabalho o entendimento de que não apenas os clássicos, mas também as obras literárias contemporâneas, enquanto instrumentos culturais, têm o condão de evidenciar padrões societários dos mais diversos, tal qual a supracitada dominação. A metodologia utilizada se pautou em estudos bibliográficos a respeito da construção ocidental de gênero, da dominação simbólica de Pierre Bourdieu em sua obra “A dominação masculina” e de anteriores representações literárias do casamento. Ainda, foi respaldada pelos estudos quanto às implicações psicanalíticas de parentesco, *phallus* e parricídio. Por meio destes elementos, busca-se compreender em quais momentos a obra de Hoover se contrapõe ao artifício da dominação ao desenvolver a história de sua protagonista e, de maneira crítica, analisar se existem pontos da trama que revelam qualquer tipo de corroboração para com tais dogmas patriarcais.

Palavras-chave: Violência Doméstica; Colleen Hoover; Gênero; Dominação Simbólica; Possessividade Masculina.

1 INTRODUCTION

When it comes to domestic violence, it is indispensable to have in mind that it is a complex theme, with multiple layers, going through sociological, psychological, economical and cultural aspects, just to name a few examples. It does not concern merely physical violence in its most primitive state, but the whole oppressive context of which women are subjects, even if unconsciously. That gender-based inequality is the reason why feminism emerged as a movement of denunciation and combat regarding the oppressions women endure.

According to Matos (2008, p. 338), in its initial stages, the feminist movement struggled for the "[...] fundamental and democratic condition of equality [...]", and, since it was a goal that would benefit all women, at least in theory, feminism was seen as a unity of wills and ideas. Back then, literature took an essential part on the rising of women's fight against inequality and on the achievement of basic human rights. Women still did not have the right to work or study, most of them could not even write, yet, due to the press, especially the publication of newspapers, feminism grew stronger (DUARTE, 2003). So literature was used as a tool to expose gender inequality and at the same time aware the female population and incite them to join the movement.

Literary classics such as Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" (2011) were also key factors for fighting patriarchy, as stated by Mota (2017) in her work "Culture's Sociology: social classes and gender in Jane Austen". Even though the novel was written in the 19th century, the author courageously created a female character that would not accept being limited by the rules of her classist and patriarchal society. Thereby, the work exhibits several social problems and makes no effort to retain its critical perspective, particularly regarding the institution of marriage, which had always privileged the male figure in prejudice of the female.

Proceeding with Matos' discourse (2008, p. 338), feminism have, in its most recent phases, started to concern about the differences of ideas inside the movement under the reason of the distinct needs each member had depending on their race, social class, ethnicity and many other elements. Beyond that, political divergences became more notorious, setting a multipolarization perspective among feminists. Despite the looks of segregation, this scenario made it possible that feminism reached out many other groups of people, spreading the word of the movement and its purpose.

In this context, we can infer that talking about domestic violence in a contemporary novel, as the author aims to induce a critical rationality in the readers, is only possible nowadays due to the expansion and progress of feminism. In other words, a book as uncomfortable to read as "It Ends with Us" (HOOVER, 2021), whose plot focuses in overcoming gender domination, and that, above all, was written by a woman, would not have succeeded without the feminist background of

the current western society. Otherwise, Hoover would have found the same obstacles Austen did when trying to write critically about male domination, even with two centuries parting both authors.

As of their works, marriage is a central element and it is portrayed in a raw perspective, without much flourishing. In “Pride and Prejudice” (2011), Austen addresses the social class issue to reveal the degrading reality of matrimony, while Hoover uses domestic violence itself to criticize the institution of marriage. That reasoning is build up through the whole book, not only with respect to Lily’s relationship with Ryle, but considering Lily’s parents’ marriage as well.

In the very first chapter, the main character’s conflicting feelings towards her father are shown to the reader as she confesses having loved him as a father, but hating him as a human being because of all the times he had assaulted her mother. Although he had never been directly aggressive towards the daughter, growing up in a violent home left scars in Lily, who became suspicious of the male figure and of engaging on relationships. As well as she saw herself forced into developing a scape valve, something that would lighten her daily life, and that valve was gardening, which ended up to be a real passion of hers.

The parents’ troubled marriage also brought out in Lily an intense feeling of guilt and responsibility, that persisted up to her adult life. In between Lily and Ryle’s first interaction, right after her father’s funeral, she admits a naked truth, the one that at some points of her childhood she actually looked forward for her parents’ fights, because they were followed by good moments in which Andrew would try to compensate both of them for the damage he had done. The confession is filled with shame, guilt and self-judgement, however, it enables the development of an extremely important social consciousness in the main character, the notion that doing nothing to stop the fights made her guilty too. From this perception, Lily believes she was the one responsible for ensuring her mother’s well-being and, because of that, she found herself obliged to stay in her hometown until Andrew Bloom got sick and did not represent a risk to Jenny Bloom’s life anymore. After that, their daughter finally felt free to leave and begin her own life in Boston.

The abusive home situation shook Lily’s relationship with her parents in different ways. In spite of having gone through decent father-daughter moments, and actually longing for more of those healthy interactions, their connection deteriorated exponentially till it reached the point that Lily had not a single good thing to say about Andrew at his funeral. As she grew up, the character sharpened her skills to analyze her father’s attitudes. He used to be the mayor of the small town they lived in, thus, he was a well-known and respected man. He would always hit his wife in strategic spots that could be easily hidden. Andrew would not let his daughter take friends to his house, neither would let her go to their houses. Later on Lily understood it was a scheme to cover

up the violence episodes and, at the same time, prevent her from realizing that those were not ordinary events in all families.

Thereby, the family's social context had a determinant role in the domestic violence perpetuation and also influenced the way Lily saw her mother. Regardless of not belonging to a high social class family, her husband's profession stopped Jenny from reporting the abuses countless times, since she feared jeopardizing his career. That fear triggered off throughout the years a strong resentment and even judgement from Lily, who could not understand why Jenny would protect Andrew. This judgement among mother and daughter will be further recaptured properly in the article.

Under this bias, the domestic violence subject does not integrate only the gender domination perspective, but the political, social and economic ones as well. Rubin (1993, p. 24), declares that a system's preservation might depend on holding a woman in a miserable marriage. Even though Rubin is referring to a cultural system other than the western capitalism, the above mentioned domination elements indicate how close that description matches the western pattern of oppression. That said, it is important to establish a deeper debate concerning the concept of gender, its connection to feminism and the symbolical mechanisms that sustain the gender domination in western relationships.

2 SYMBOLIC DOMINATION

As the feminist movement conquered its claims, it extended the debates to even more controversial themes, and that new set of topics ended up arousing a sexual revolution in the second half of the 20th century. From that moment on, subjects such as sexuality, female pleasure and abortion gained notoriety (DUARTE, 2003, p. 15), highlighting the discussion about gender and its oppression.

One should be cautious when discussing gender inequality, considering that it is build historical and socially. The very concept of gender depends on the cultural and political differences of each place. With that in mind, a precise delimitation of gender is essential to the understanding of what is gender domination and to be able to analyze the symbolical mechanisms that preserve it.

This article's object is defined after the western understanding of gender presented by Scott (1995, p. 86), as "social relations based in the perceived differences between sexes" and as a sort of power that operates through those differences. Pedro and Guedes' (2010, p. 03) argument that "the designated roles for men or women are not natural or biological attributions, but are constructed according to the socioeconomic needs of each society" is also a foundation of this work.



Beyond the conceptualization of gender, it is fundamental to understand what is the *symbolic violence* of which Pierre Bourdieu talks about in his work "Masculine Domination" (2001). In a few words, the *symbolic violence* would be a power artifice intrinsic to the naturalized domination relations and it would act

"[...] through the adherence that the dominated cannot fail to grant to the dominant (and therefore to the domination) when, to shape her thought of him, [...] she has only cognitive instruments that she shares with him and which, being no more than the embodied form of the relation of domination, cause that relation to appear as natural" (2001, p. 35).

Bourdieu's *symbolic violence*, here understood as a *symbolic dominance* due to the gender background, can be noticed through Hoover's entire book. However, we will first approach a specific aspect of that domination, the idealization of Ryle's character. We are presented to him right at the beginning of the story, when he appears to be an attractive, confident, educated and ambitious man. Although, alongside those qualities, the character revealed being against commitment and that is when the *symbolic domination* starts operating.

Before getting to that, it should be established that gender-imposed roles are the responsible devices for regulating an individual's social acting. It means that a certain type of performance is naturalized and becomes a pattern for people of the same gender, that is, a specific expectation towards someone's way of being or behaving is set based on their gender. This gender-based role determination ends up stating a solid behavioral contrast between male and female figures, as exemplifies Rubin (1993, p. 21):

"[...] when psychoanalysis demonstrates with equal facility that the ordinary components of feminine personality are masochism, self-hatred, and passivity [...] a double standard of interpretation is employed. Masochism is bad for men, essential to women. Adequate narcissism is necessary for men, impossible for women. Passivity is tragic in man, while the lack of passivity is tragic in a woman".

The male figure is granted with permissibility (a man can do whatever is on his mind), while females have to accept men's superiority and submit to oppressive relationships. That said, the fact that Ryle is portrayed as a desired man, but reluctant towards engaging in a commitment, exposes clearly how gender roles work in favor of men. When he admits feeling repulsed just by thinking of getting married, Ryle states his narcissism and, implicitly, denies any woman the power of making him vulnerable. In the meantime, the denial also makes Lily urge for being the-one-who-would-change-his-mind, demoting her to a submission status before they even started dating.

From this perspective, it is possible to notice that praising the male character results in the *symbolic domination* of the female character, because even though Lily tried not to nurture Ryle's ego, she does it unconsciously as she wishes to be his girlfriend. It is noteworthy to mention that the idealistic representation of the character is not only supported on his physical appearance, but also on account of his profession. The social class factor is not disregarded by the author, on the contrary, it can be analyzed in several fragments of the story.

Right in the beginning of the first chapter the readers are able to identify Lily's fascination when she learned Ryle was a neurosurgeon, she got dazzled over his social position, and it stressed the already existing gender domination among them. All this superiority gathered in Ryle's character evokes in Lily a satisfying feeling whenever he would "award" her with any petty concession, as it may be noticed in the following excerpt: "I like that he doesn't even know me, but for whatever reason, I'm not considered *most people* to him" (HOOVER, 2021, p. 16).

Still under this bias, it is important to point out that Ryle's character was deliberately created with those features as part of a narrative objective for captivating the readers and engage them into the couple's relationship, so that the following events of the story would have a larger impact on the readers' experiences. Hoover's strategy can be demonstrated by moments when the main character's consciousness come to light, warning her of the domination ruse she is under, as stated here: "I can't be upset that I'm not enough to make a guy want to remap all of his life goals" (HOOVER, 2021, p. 79).

Nonetheless, in spite of Hoover's intention, to those with sharp eyes it was possible to infer that Ryle's initial behaviors, the ones supposed to charm the audience, actually indicated the future psychological violence he would inflict on Lily. Among the aforementioned behaviors, the possessiveness towards the main character stood out. Only before addressing that matter, the topic on the domestication of the feminine figure needs to be analyzed.

We will consider the writings of Rubin in her work "The Traffic in Women" (1993, p. 02) where she attributes to certain social relations, especially marriage, the competence of turning a woman into a domestic. In her understanding of Lévi-Strauss' theories, Rubin perceives marriage as an exchange of gifts between men from different families, and in which women are the *gifts*, that is, the object to be traded. These exchanges take part on the kinship system which specifies

"[...] that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or their male kin. In this sense, the exchange of women is a profound perception of a system in which women do not have the full rights to themselves" (1993, p. 10).

Another intrinsic aspect of the female domestication concerns the psychoanalytic concept of *phallus*, a group of meanings regarding the masculine sexual organ. Psychoanalyst Lacan also assigned *phallus* a particular role in the women trade scheme, such as being a symbolic trade object, once it is transferred from man to man through women, who are trusted to fulfill their reproductive duty. That way,

“[...] the *phallus* is more than a feature which distinguishes the sexes: it is the embodiment of the male status, to which men accede, and in which certain rights inhere – among them, the right to a woman. It is an expression of the transmission of male dominance” (RUBIN, 1993, p. 17).

That said, we are able to infer that the female domestication is operated in a structural and even unconscious way. Although it is a theoretical category associated to the institution of marriage, one should not underestimate the domestication’s impact on other social interactions, once gender domination, as previously demonstrated, is intrinsic to the patriarchal society in which western capitalism was built upon.

Under this light, Ryle’s behavioral analysis can be reopened, so that his possessive trait is emphasized, considering the very first chapter of the book. There were a series of problematic attitudes settled by the character as he diverged from his “anti-commitment” discourse, such as the fact that he had a wall frame of Lily in his house, even though they had not engaged in a relationship yet. Furthermore, Ryle sent her flowers with a clearly provocative message, as well as he got annoyed by seeing her with another man at a party. All those events verify the masculine feeling of possession over females, even outside of marriage or when lacking any kind of real emotional bond between the couple.

Ryle’s possessiveness extends to a new dimension as soon as Atlas, Lily’s first love, comes back to her life unexpectedly. This tension can be explained by the implications of the *phallus*, once the conflict of both characters reinforce the idea of women being seen as mere transaction objects, conductors of the relation established among men (RUBIN, 1993, p. 09), in this case, a rivalry relation. The obsession Ryle grows towards the possibility of Atlas ruining his relationship escalates to the point where his possessiveness motivates the domestic violence episodes against Lily, which will be addressed further on.

Still, it cannot go unnoticed that Atlas and Ryle’s dispute counterposes one of Freud’s parricide implications, the equal-rights-among-brothers’ taboo. For the purpose of a logical reasoning, it is necessary to elucidate what is the primordial parricide Freud discourses in “Totem and Taboo” (2012). It is nothing more than an analogous narrative of the Greek gods’ mythological origin before a sexual and contractualist concept (ALMEIDA, 2015, p. 39).

Since the patriarch was the head of the primitive groups of people, he had the exclusive right to a woman, nevertheless, that stipulation triggered an intense dissatisfaction among his sons, who got together and killed the patriarch. Yet, after their father's death, the sons are taken by a feeling of guilt and admiration towards him, grounding in his honor three essential rules: (I) parricide forbiddance; (II) equal rights to the brothers; and (III) incest prohibition.

As Pateman states (1993, p. 163), the sexual patriarchal claim stops being held by a single male figure and, due to the prohibition of incest, is extended to all brothers (it can be read *men*) in an exogamic kinship chain based on the sexual contract. In other words, the male right of possessing a woman for sexual satisfaction is transmitted to all men, maintaining alive gender domination and disseminating a heterosexual relationship standard.

The rivalry between both male characters in Hoover's work (2021) is set as a consequence for violating the each-brother-gets-a-woman assumption, once it implies that a man should not lust after another man's woman. That rule was strategically thought to discourage any potential conflict among men, once after the patriarch's passing, it was verified that a fraternal unity would provide a deeper domination of male over female (FREUD, 2010 apud ALMEIDA, 2015, p. 39), but that is put at risk every time men turn against each other because of a woman.

Parricide can be even closer associated to the story when observed under the lens of the main character's history. As previously mentioned, Lily developed a huge resentment for her father throughout her youth and it triggered off a smoldering hate feeling towards him. However, after Andrew passed away, she was taken by guilt and decided to read again the journals she wrote as a teenager at an attempt to appease the anger she still felt for him.

As we go forward on reading, it becomes clearer how much Lily's life revolves around her father and the trauma he had caused her, be it due to the hatred, the resentment, the longing for having good moments with him, or the blame. When she goes through the first domestic violence event, the main character sees herself one more time surrounded by the presence of her father's phantom, but this time in the shape of denial. Lily refuses to believe she was going through the same adversity her mother had gone, mostly because she judged Jenny countless times for staying married to a man that would hit her¹. Lily also refuses to recognize any similarities between her

¹ Lily's judgement towards her mother exposes one of the main artifices of gender domination, the contribution of women themselves. When explaining symbolic violence and how it works, Bourdieu (2001, p. 40) establishes that without the concession of the dominated class, the dominants would not have such power to accomplish a structural domination as the symbolical one. That is why amid the violence Lily witnessed throughout the years, not only the hatred for her father stood out, but also the discontentment towards her mother, even in her condition of victim. For a long time, the daughter asked herself why would Jenny never divorce her father, and that lack of attitude made Lily consider her mother weak. This wrath Lily felt concerning Jenny's subjection, although she was the one

partner and her father, forcing herself to list all of Ryle's qualities and to trust that his regret would distinguish him from Andrew.

3 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The entire theoretical construction here designed had the purpose of elucidating Lily's life context, past traumas and emotional blockades, as well as understanding the nature of her relationship with Ryle. Those factors are fundamental for the domestic violence analysis pursued in this article, once it depends on the character's subjectivity formation, which means we had to cover much more aspects than physical violence alone. In other words, we seek to analyze deep into the whole oppressive scenario Lily was in.

Given the above, it is important to point out that the character's romance is apparently healthy in the first half of the book, at least according to the normality standard settled for heteronormative relationships. However, the unfolding of the plot reveals the veiled violence in Ryle's romanticized attitudes, as teasing and stalking the female character in spite of knowing both of them had different relationship goals. Although Ryle was not looking for a serious commitment, he gave up his standpoint because of his attraction to Lily, but he uses that committal as leverage over her, to nurture his narcissism and, at the same time, subjugate Lily to a psychological pressure and an emotional dependency.

Ryle's self-centered personality is, as a matter of fact, what triggers his first outburst with Lily. At the occasion, the couple was having a good time at Lily's apartment as she made dinner and they drank alcohol. They ended up forgetting a pan in the oven and, rushing to take it out of there, Ryle failed to notice he was not wearing a thermal glove, so he burned his hand. Under the influence of alcohol, Lily started laughing at the situation, completely oblivious of Ryle's despair. He had an important surgery ahead of him that week, so nothing bad could happen to his hands, and when his girlfriend laughed at his misfortune he got extremely annoyed and pushed her away, causing her to fall and hit her head on a cabinet.

As soon as he realizes what he had done, Ryle immediately tries to help her get up meanwhile saying multiple times how much he was sorry, but Lily was in shock and in a state of denial. Amid the mixed feelings and jeopardized rationality, she infers that Ryle's apparent regret is an evidence of how different he is from her father and that misleading hope is directly influenced by the previously exposed *symbolic domination's* mechanisms.

in a vulnerable place, addresses only the interests of the masculine class, once it undermines the dominated's cohesion, making it easier for the domination to keep going.



Because of that domination, Lily still looked for reasons to believe that all the situation was just an exceptional one. She also gave so much more credit to Ryle's demonstration of concern towards her than he actually deserved, especially given the circumstances and the fact that he only worried about her after checking on his hands. Thus, the victim sticks to the aggressor's tiny attitudes that show a little bit of affection or care and grant them more relevance than needed, as a way to underestimate the gravity of the aggression. That reasoning could find support in the psychoanalytic theory of femininity of which Rubin talks about (1993, p. 19), it states that "finding joy in pain is adaptive to the role of women in reproduction, since childbirth and defloration are 'painful'".

The couple's relationship goes through a new obstacle when Atlas and Lily meet again after years apart. He was in her life for a while over her adolescence and was the one person that knew about her family's issues. That is why, as he noticed her face and her boyfriend's hand were bandaged, Atlas got furious and, in private, questioned Lily about it, who claimed it had been an accident. At the end of their conversation, Ryle sees them interacting and, in a rage outbreak, confronts Atlas.

Although Lily gets out physically unharmed from the conflict, the male character takes advantage of the situation to attack her psychologically, reminding her that it was not on his plans to engage in a relationship, but he did it for her. It is evident how Ryle manipulates the narrative of the facts in his favor. He was the one who chased after her, who treated her like his possession ever since their first interaction and who, by free will, decided to give their chemistry a chance and date Lily. In not a single moment of the plot the main character coerced Ryle into getting involved with her, but he made it look like it happened just so that Lily would feel guilty for hurting him by talking to another man.

That way, Ryle misrepresents reality and reverses the roles, putting himself as the victim (STARK, 2019, p. 228). That inversion is a strategy of control and manipulation extremely common in abusive relationships. It goes by the name *gaslighting* (SWEET, 2019) in the academic field, and since it is a broad concept, it is usual to find papers written about it in the past century concerning diverse themes, from racial to professional or educational *gaslighting*. Yet, just in the last years the term became popular outside the research field because of its association to gender inequality's context, and, as states Stark (2019, p. 221):

"The literature on gaslighting has two strands. In one, gaslighting is characterized as a form of testimonial injustice. As such, it is a distinctively epistemic injustice that wrongs persons primarily as knowers.¹ Gaslighting occurs when someone denies, on the basis of another's social identity, her testimony about a harm or wrong done to her.² In the other strand, gaslighting is described as a form of wrongful manipulation and, indeed, a form of emotional abuse. This use follows

the use of “gaslighting” in therapeutic practice.³ On this account, the aim of gaslighting is to get another to see her own plausible perceptions, beliefs, or memories as groundless”.

According to Sweet (2019, p. 07), since it is a power-based concept, it depends on the uneven distribution of social, political and economic leverage to operate, otherwise there would be no vulnerabilities to be explored by the abusers. Some of its most used tactics are: flipping stories, confusing the partner on purpose, lying about details, blaming the victim and denying events (SWEET, 2019, p. 10)

Gaslighting is a widely used trick among domestic aggressors because by blaming the victims with trivial and groundless reasons they create a whole new fake reality that prevents women from analyzing rationally the situation. In other words, it keeps women from realizing they are the actual victims. That is the reason why, the day after the conflict, when Atlas went to Lily’s floriculture to check on her and give her his phone number for any potential emergency, she dismissed his help and reaffirmed what happened had been an uncommon situation that would never repeat itself. But still, she let him put the paper with his number inside her cellphone case, a sign that, even if unconsciously, Lily assumed the possibility of a new aggression occurring.

It is usual on domestic violence cases that after the tempestuous events, the later regret and the promises made to the victims, the relationship goes through a calm phase when everything seems to go back to normal. Lily and Ryle experienced that and it fortified the main character’s faith in her relationship so much that they got married. Nevertheless, Ryle’s already known possessiveness resurfaces when he finds Atlas’ phone number in his wife’s phone case. He confronts Lily about it, but does not wait for her to clarify the situation, he just aggressively throws her phone at the wall and then walks out the door. Meanwhile, Lily urges to explain him the misunderstanding, so she goes after him, but in his frenetic and angry state, Ryle pushes her again as she comes in his direction at the hallway, only that this time she ends up falling down the building’s stairway.

When she wakes up in her bed, with her husband taking care of her wounds, Lily finds him in a distinct mood compared to their first domestic incident, he did not seem distressed, neither was all over her begging for forgiveness. On the contrary, he seemed unsympathetic and expressionless, even when he noticed Lily looked afraid of him, Ryle simply alleged that she had fallen by herself, so there would be no reason for her to fear him. Therefore, he manipulates once again the perception of how things happened. Right after that, he calls Lily a liar, as if the responsibility for her current condition was up to her exclusively, another example of the *gaslighting* tactics.

That makes explicit the psychological violence inflicted upon the female character, who gets attacked in a moment of extreme vulnerability by her own husband, the actual responsible for the situation. In this regard, the author does not fail to exhibit both extremes of Lily's feelings. In one hand, the anger she felt for Ryle and how it disgusted her to imagine him touching her skin, but in the other hand, she missed him and what they used to have and she wishes that he would be there to calm her down in that difficult moment.

After those turbulent circumstances, the couple seemingly split up, but Ryle makes one last try to save his marriage. This point of the plot deserves to be observed more carefully once it approaches a controversial topic. The character tells his wife about an accident he had caused as a child. He was playing with his two siblings one day and ended up finding one of his parents' guns laying around. Ryle's older brother was shot in the head and passed away. The accident traumatized both Ryle and his younger sister, who watched the whole tragedy. It is important to state that it is not up to us, in this article, to debate about the particularities on the armaments' theme, but to discuss how the character's story influences the course of the plot.

It is visible for the readers that although focusing on the victim's perspective, the book does not demonize aggressors, refraining to stick with one end or the other. Thereby, the author tries to develop the discourse that any person (men, when dealing with a heteronormative relationship) is able to perpetrate domestic violence, regardless from their age, race, class and other social aspects. Aggressors are not full-on monsters, they are ordinary people, many times they are even admired by society, as was Lily's father, but their explosive temper results in catastrophic and destructive events.

It is not our intention to criticize the author's decision of bringing to her work the dualism of the subject, we merely seek to analyze the possible interpretations for Ryle's tragic narrative. In one hand, bringing up such a story from the aggressor's past can be perceived as a way to justify his attitudes and touch the readers' feelings, as it happened to the victim herself. This is a risky bias to embrace, once it stands close to the normalization or even the romanticization of violence.

On the other hand, the analysis of past traumas in marital aggressors' lives can constitute, when approached correctly, a valuable research object, as Lisboa and Stenzel (2017) demonstrate. The two of them headed a case study to observe how helplessness and violence (traumas) experienced during childhood had an impact on the psychic subjectivation of a man that, after 43 years of marriage, murdered his wife by gunshots at a southern city of Brazil. This psychoanalytic research certifies the complexity that surrounds the personal psychic formation and demonstrates the issue of measuring a situation only by taking in consideration its extremes. According to this

logic, Ryle's trauma could be seen as a simple persuasive resource used by the author to prove her point about the above mentioned dualism.

Keeping track on the plot's events, we see how moved Lily gets after hearing the story, she even claims to be more in pain for Ryle's trauma than for the violence he inflicted her. Under the circumstances, she decides to give her marriage another chance, yet sets a rule stating that whenever Ryle started getting angry or aggressive, he would have to get away from her for as long as it took him to recompose himself and stop being a threat to Lily's safety.

This new opportunity given by Lily is also induced by the previous idealization of Ryle's character and by the social value granted to marriage itself, after all, Ryle is everything you would expect from a husband in the eyes of society, how could you leave him without giving him another chance? Domination mechanisms like that suppress the victim's intuition every single time she asks herself if staying with the aggressor is the right decision, as declares Bourdieu (2001, p. 31):

“The men (and the women themselves) remain unaware that it is the logic of the relationship of domination which imposes on and inculcates in women not only the virtues that morality requires of them but also all the negative properties that the dominant view imputes to their nature, like cunning or, to take a more favourable feature, intuition”.

In front of this scenario, Lily even starts to face the “stairway incident” as a necessary event so that she could learn about her husband's past and they could overcome their traumas together.

For a short period of time, their marriage seemed to be working out, but not much time later it fell apart for good as the most violent episode between the couple occurs. It happens that Ryle finds out in the newspaper that the restaurant Atlas owned (BIB's – Better in Boston) was named after a special person from his past. Coincidentally, Lily has a magnet with the same sayings. Suspicious, Ryle reads the old journals Lily still kept to herself, in which she talks about her whole relationship with Atlas, explains the meaning of the sentence to both of them and admits that the heart-shaped tattoo she had on her collarbone was made in Atlas' honor.

When Lily gets home, Ryle is already drunk. He shows her the newspaper and asks her to read it out loud, intending to get her to confess being the special person mentioned. She does not fall for it and it makes the male character even more annoyed. He starts kissing her intensely, pulling her hair and biting her tattoo as a clear statement of possessiveness. At that moment, Lily realizes something is wrong and, as soon as she sees her journals spread around the bedroom, she is taken by fear. Resentful and jealous of the presence of another man in his wife's life, Ryle has a burst of aggressiveness and tries to rape Lily. She struggles against him in bed and repeatedly begs for him to let her go, but towards her resistance, Ryle hits Lily in the head, leaving her unconscious.

As Lily comes back to her senses, she is not able to see properly due to all the blood in her eyes. She feels Ryle cuddling her and whispering unstoppably that he loved her and felt sorry for what he did. With his apparent condition of numbness and the victim's apprehension of what could happen if he got angry again, she decides to tranquilize him, saying that everything was fine and that she knew he only acted that way because he was upset. As soon as Ryle falls asleep, Lily sneaks out of bed and, in a moment of realization, burst into tears. Not knowing what to do next or who to contact, the character decides to call Atlas, whose phone number she had memorized. That perception made her understand that the uncertainties around her mind back when she decided to forgive Ryle were not unjustified, and she immediately starts feeling angry at herself.

Atlas takes Lily directly to a hospital, but she makes sure he would not take her to the one Ryle worked, because even though he had destroyed her, Lily did not intend to ruin his successful career. Here it can be noted the pronounced connection between capitalism and patriarchy, that walk side by side, as captures Mota (2017, p. 06), they establish the symbolic male domination to the point where a victim of domestic violence would rather not go to the nearest hospital just so she would not harm her aggressor's image.

The main character's drama reaches another level as she discovers at the hospital that she was pregnant. This delicate circumstance is essential for Lily's self-development in the plot, since it is the most conflicting moment of her life. The whole scenario also retrieves the maternity subject and enables the maturing of Lily and her mother's relationship. In fact, it is in a dialogue of both characters that the author approaches a distressful but accurate reflection regarding domestic violence:

When I married your father, I knew exactly what my limit was. But slowly... with every incident... my limit was pushed a little more. And a little more. The first time your father hit me, he was immediately sorry. He swore it would never happen again. The second time he hit me, he was even more sorry. **The third time it happened, it was more than a hit. It was a beating. And every single time, I took him back.** But the fourth time, it was only a slap. And when that happened, I felt relieved. I remember thinking, 'At least he didn't beat me this time. This wasn't so bad.' [...] Eventually, you lose sight of your limit altogether, because you start to think, 'I've lasted five years now. What's five more?' (HOOVER, p. 328 – our emphasis)

3.1 Current considerations on domestic violence

Before the exposed analysis, one may infer that gender violence against women results from a *symbolic domination* process that is intrinsic to the western capitalism's patriarchy. When it comes to a structural domination, it affects all societal spheres, especially law itself. Every country's legal organization is a historical reflex of its moral, intellectual and even economic evolution. That way,



law keeps up with social advances in both national and international levels, as countries sign up to international treaties and conventions, and it can either perpetuate domination structures or transform them (BARBOSA; BORGES, 2015, p. 94)

In Brazil's case, gender violence started to be seen as a violation of human rights only in 2006 with the publication of a Brazilian Domestic Violence Law (such as Maria da Penha Regulation number 11.340/06). Beyond the late elaboration of a women protection law, there is also a fierce debate as to how efficient that regulation actually is. Despite the wording of the 11.340/06 regulation consider domestic violence as of its physical, psychological, moral, patrimonial and sexual aspects (PASINATO, 2015, p. 420), when observing its practical functionality, it can be noticed a difficulty in addressing the intangible violences, the ones that do not leave behind concrete traces. Thus, this legal instrument would act only at a superficial level, appeasing the more evident abuses but not being able to fight the underlying aspects of domestic violence.

Still in this matter, Barbosa & Borges (2015, p. 90) state that to assure a more reliable gender equality prospect, the development of public policies is essential, considering that

“[...] the declarations from which human rights' interpretations are taken, as the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution and the ratified international treaties, cannot be the only ones to be seen as expressions of the citizens' fundamental rights, once its texts' metaphysics will hardly be materially guaranteed and sanctioned without people's interference. The legal sphere cannot be the only, neither the main one, to guarantee human rights. Law can guarantee the validity, with deceptions and punctual conquests, but not its social efficiency” (our translation).

Some feminist strands point out that this superficiality would not be enough to terminate for good violence against women, it would only restrain it. Then, 11.340/06 regulation would be a mere social-political scapegoat for contenting feminists' requests and following international law guidelines, but without an actual elucidative pretension for the issue at hand. According to these strands, only a structural struggle against its oppressive mechanisms would be able to combat gender violence once and for all. It would imply not just a remodeling, but a revolution of the social and affective interactions that diffuse the said oppression (CAMPOS, 2011).

Although, theoretically, that is a valid argument, it is still far from most countries' realities, once it requires a whole integration structure from judiciary and public security, as well as it depends on public politics and social institutions' incentives (BARBOSA, BORGES, 2015). Besides that, it is important to keep in mind that domestic violence cases increased worldwide in the last two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The distress of not being able to leave their houses along with financial and political insecurity are only some of the many reasons for that increase, once those tensions generate a more hostile environment into a home (OLIVEIRA et al.,

2021, p. 07). Not to mention that it got even more difficult for the victims to get social assistance since they were obligated to spend each moment of the day in the presence of their abusive partners, making it harder to report the abuses to the authorities, as it is possible to notice below:

“During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been an increase on gender violence against women given the aggressor’s impunity and the social isolation, which constitutes a barrier for women to leave where the aggressions take place and to report them” (OLIVEIRA et al., 2021, p. 07 – our translation)

In an attempt to help women living in abusive homes, Brazil’s government sanctioned the regulation number 14.022/20, stating that those women should have prioritized services, so that the legal and healthcare procedures would promptly be at their disposal. At least that was the goal, but the reality was that the security and health systems could not keep up with the huge numbers of violence cases against women and also children, as Brazil’s Health Ministry stated (OLIVEIRA et al., 2021, p. 06).

So, as we could see, engaging public institutions in favor of a common purpose is not a simple task, mostly in such a tragic scenario. However, the radical restructuring exposed above would enable the gender violence issue to be addressed directly at its roots, so that the *symbolic domination* mechanisms would cease operating. In this sense, law would be capable of efficiently protecting women, even the ones in intangible violence situations, as moral and psychological abuses. That possibility would have a massive impact when trying to prevent the progression of an abusive relationship to a domestic violence case, as it occurred with Ryle and Lily.

Even with the several controversies concerning Maria da Penha’s regulation, it is considered by many a conquest in the gender inequality fight and demonstrates that, slowly, Brazil is moving towards a more equal society. The same can be said about other countries that, driven by international organizations’ diplomacy, embrace progressive and guarantees’ social politics as to advocate for minorities’ rights and to promote democracy’s basic principles.

4 CONCLUSION

When analyzing how Hoover (2021) develops the main characters’ relationship, it is quite evident she uses a narrative strategy to captivate the readers and get them to root for the couple, but also to set the ground for an impressive plot twist to happen. The contrast established between *seductive Ryle* and *aggressive Ryle* supports the idea that no one is entirely good or bad, which is an argument elaborated throughout the whole book. It also reflects on how Lily viewed her father,



considering that he had assaulted his wife for years, but had never been directly aggressive to his daughter.

The scars left by growing up in an abusive home, made Lily's life revolves around her father's figure. All the hatred she nurtured towards him and the guilt she feels for not having stopped him from hurting her mother are clarified by the Freudian concept of parricide (2012) and by Pateman's sexual contract (1993). Her father's power over her very existence even got Lily to compare him to Ryle multiple times as a way to reassure herself of how nothing alike the two of them were.

Lily holds on to those differences even more after she came to be a domestic violence victim. She uses Ryle's qualities and apparent regret to encourage her denial state towards the severity of the facts. The forgiveness the female character granted the partner in two occasions, was also influenced by *symbolic domination* mechanisms that permeate heteronormative relations, according to a Bourdian comprehension (2001). Among those mechanisms, we approached some as: Ryle's idealization and narcissistic personality that had Lily taken to a place of gender submission; the *gaslighting* artifice that kept Lily from noticing Ryle's problematic relationship performance; the Lacanian concept of *phallus* which intensified the domination upon Lily's character; and marriage's overestimation in western patriarchal society, which is responsible for keeping women in abusive marriages.

Even more remarkable in the plot than those subjects is Ryle's possessiveness towards the main character. This possessive feeling relative to the feminine figure's domestication process in a kinship reproductive system is the key factor to the two worst aggressive outbursts of the male character. It also takes Ryle to attack Lily psychologically in order to make her feel responsible for his mistakes.

That way, feminist movement stood against gender domination and its artifices. As a matter of fact, for a while now feminism has been altering social relations and securing women their fundamental rights as to fight gender inequality. Brazilian Domestic Violence Law's promulgation in 2006 (Maria da Penha Regulation) was one of the movement's marks, since it was Brazil's first legal device specialized in the gender affair.

It is important to highlight as well the substantial role of literature so that this social change could succeed. From the dissemination of feminism through newspapers to the publication of classical works such as Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" (2011), that confronted patriarchy by criticizing matrimonial domination, literary productions proved themselves to be increasingly attached to their time's political and social foundations.

Therefore, literature has the power of both replicating and modifying social structures. In “It Ends with Us” Colleen Hoover addresses an extremely sensitive topic in the midst of a contemporary novel. Although bringing up the aggressor’s childhood trauma might have been a controversial decision, the author succeeded at developing the domestic violence vicissitudes in a responsible way, focusing on the main character’s internal conflicts but not putting aside her moments of awareness regarding her victim position. Those are the excerpts in which Hoover adds implicitly to the plot the contribution of the current feminist discourse in order to deepen her approach to the theme and to provoke a libertarian insight in the readers. That said, “It Ends with Us” takes part as an opposition of gender domination mechanisms and establishes a connection between popular contemporary novels and the academic debate on gender.

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