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Femininity, Masculinity and their Bond in Floyd Dell's Village Plays

Dell's critique on socially constructed gender roles as represented in his plays *Sweet-and-Twenty*, *Legend* and *Enigma*

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"Feminism is going to make it possible for the first time for men to be free."

\- Floyd Dell, 1914

Introduction[1]

American Floyd Dell was known for his activist and radical left-wing work in the literary, dramatic and journalistic fields, most of which he produced during the first half of the 20th century. Described as a "notorious bohemian, proponent of free love, and champion of feminism, progressive education, socialism, and Freudianism" by Douglas Clayton in his biography of Dell titled *Floyd Dell: The Life and Times of an American Rebel* (1994), Dell had a complicated relationship with society and consequently with its social constructions, particularly those relating to gender roles. His one-act plays purportedly contain a strong feminist critique of these gendered constructions, as they tend to have a focus on the identity-related instability that expectations of femininity and masculinity can create. Despite his prescience regarding the need to revise women's role in society, most of Dell's work had paradoxically been forgotten by the time of his demise in 1969, a period which coincides with the beginning of second-wave feminism. Because of this, Dell, and thus specifically his theatrical work, has been left out of the academic debate. His ideas on issues such as gender-identity and gender roles have thus not received sufficient scholarly attention.

This dearth of scholarly analyses of Floyd's plays is particularly conspicuous given the significant role he played in the Chicago Literary Renaissance, and given that he was also one of the rebellious "Greenwich Village Left", which included other well-known first wave feminist activists such as Dorothy Day and Margaret Sanger, who played crucial parts in the woman's suffrage movement he actively supported (Clayton, 1994). Yet, Dell's own feminist claims and ideas thus appear to have a better fit within what is considered second-wave

[1] With permission granted by Dalarna University, this thesis follows the APA style sheet.

feminism, which included men's need for and part in the feminist movement, and which also focused on gendered social-constructions of masculinity and femininity. In 1963, Betty Friedan, front-line feminist of the second-wave, described how "When [a woman] stopped conforming to the conventional picture of femininity she finally began to enjoy being a woman" (1974, p.360). In the same work, she also claimed that "men weren't really the enemy — they were fellow victims suffering from an outmoded masculine mystique" (p.403), thus suggesting that feminism was a solution not only for women, but men as well. However, Dell had already made a similar claim fifty years prior. In his article "Feminism for Men" (1914), he argued that feminism was not only meant to give women a chance to live an individual life of their own, without the expectations of a feminine gender role; but also that as long as the masculine gender role expects a man to provide for a woman, a man could never be free and live for himself either. According to Dell, the feminist movement was "going to make it possible for the first time for men to be free", as feminism "is going to give them back their souls, so that they can risk them fearlessly in the adventure of life" (1914).

Dell thus considered feminism a solution to the limiting gender roles women, but also men, had been subjected to. Patriarchal expectations of masculinity and femininity, which he describes as an "artificial distinction" on which our "civilization" is built, destroy everyone's sense of personal identity, and particularly everyone's sense of individuality. This artificial distinction does so particularly within romantic relationships between two people, as it essentially necessitates a codependency that takes away any 'choice' for either of these parties. In his article, Dell claims that by abiding to gender roles, a relationship is "no longer a sharing of life together—it is a breaking of life apart. Half a life—cooking, clothes, and children; half a life—business, politics, and baseball" (1914), suggesting that the distinction of masculinity and femininity results in these two parties each being an incomplete person. He then continues his argument by stating that "it doesn't make much difference which is the

poorer half. Any half, when it comes to life, is very near to none at all." (1914). Dell ends this plea for feminism by suggesting that "in order to break down that distinction utterly, it will be necessary to break down all the codes and restrictions and prejudices that keep women out of the great world." (1914), a viewpoint which mirrors the second-wave feminist mindset of ending the patriarchal reign over our society, as inter alia discussed by feminist Judith Butler (1998; 1990)

However, as stated before, Dell's dramatic work has not yet been properly included in the scholarly debate. Even in Clayton's biography of Dell, which did include a few brief comments on Dell's plays and the events in Dell's own life that might have inspired them, Clayton does little more than mention, or at most briskly discuss, these plays. Clayton's biography is one that is extremely focused on Dell's overall life rather than his theatrical works, which means that Clayton has not included any thorough analyses of Dell's plays, nor has he made a direct connection between Dell's second-wave feminist mindset and the influence that this might have had on his plays. This is despite the fact that second-wave feminist theorisations such as that of Butler on gender performativity, as she discusses in *Performative acts and gender constitution* (1988), *Gender trouble* (1990) and *Undoing gender* (2004), all had been anticipated by Dell in a less theoretical manner. This is specifically due to Dell's views on masculine and feminine gender roles, and the issues that these create in terms of people's sense of individuality and identity. At the same time, Dell's views on masculinity and femininity and their roles within feminism accord with Raewyn Connell's theorisations and claims on hegemonic-masculinity and emphasized femininity, which she describes in *Gender and power* (1987), *Masculinities* (2005) and *Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept* (2005). Using Butler's and Connell's work as a theoretical background to analyse Dell's literary work will thus not only help to better understand Dell's prescient feminist mindset, it will also help create a more representational timeline on

men-inclusive feminist theory, by linking Dell's literary background to current feminist theorisations. This thesis will thus add to Dell's wider known practical feminist background, by adding a heretofore unexplored scholarly insight on what position Dell's plays hold within feminist polemics.

In his short plays, Dell thus tends to approach masculinity and femininity by focussing on the relationship between a man and a woman, and by directly and indirectly showing how gender roles negatively affect their relationship and them as individuals. Three of Dell's plays that show this in varying ways are *Sweet-and-Twenty*, *Legend* and *Enigma*, all of which were originally included in Dell's *King Arthur's Socks and Other Village Plays* (1918). This thesis will argue that Dell's plays *Sweet-and-Twenty*, *Legend* and *Enigma* suggest the need for the elimination of the socially constructed gender roles of masculinity and femininity for the benefit of the liberation of both men and women as human-beings, and that by doing so Dell presciently made claims that mainstream second-wave feminism would integrate more than fifty years later.

Gendered Performance of Femininity and Masculinity

Dell's feminist views could arguably be linked with theorisations of gender-performativity, emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity. Firstly, within our patriarchal Western society, the dominant social construction of gender is limited to a contradictory bifurcation. While men are expected to behave in a masculine and assertive fashion, and are considered the primary sex; women are expected to behave in a feminine and passive way, and are considered the subordinate sex. Aforementioned feminist theorist Judith Butler argues that the patriarchal concept of gender is therefore a social construct rather than innate, as gender is something we perform and see being performed (1990, p.528). Western society's construction of gender thus focuses on expectations of gender in which humans portray themselves within

the constructed bifurcation of masculinity and/or femininity. However, in her work entitled the “Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory” (1990), Butler argues that

> Gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,' whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act,' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority. [...] Genders, then, can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent. And yet, one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is stabilized, polarized, rendered discrete and intractable. In effect, gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control. Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all (p.528).

Thus, Butler suggests that the concept of gender on its own can and should not be constricted to patriarchy’s binary expectations, as “the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated.” (p.528), which suggests that gender roles are not necessary for one’s bare existence, only for an existence in our constructed society. According to Butler, these socially expected gender roles, and society’s concept of gender as a whole, can therefore be unnecessary and even obstructive to one’s self-identity and the construction thereof. Namely, she argues that by enforcing these socially-constructed gendered expectations upon individuals, this dominant patriarchal “culture [that] so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism” (p.528) creates a hostile social environment; one in which these individuals quite literally get

performance-anxiety depending on their ability to adhere to these expectations. Nevertheless, according to her work *Undoing gender*, while this patriarchal societal concept of gender might be "the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, [...] gender might [also] very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (2004, p. 42).

This Western gender-construction thus first and foremost expects men to behave according to the masculine role, while it expects women to act according to the feminine. Yet at the same time, these expectations are inseparably connected within yet another expectation. Being set up as a bifurcation of two extremes, the Western gender-construction also inadvertently expects these extremes to connect to each other, for one cannot exist without its purported opposite. In 'Sorties' (1986), postructuralist feminist Hélène Cixous suggests that, much like everything else in western culture, gender is set up to work "through dual, hierarchized oppositions" (p.578). After all, for the man to be masculine, and thus the active party, he needs a passive party to be active over, which is the feminine. Similarly, for a woman to be feminine, she needs an active party to rule over her passiveness, which is the masculine.

Nevertheless, this enforced bifurcation of roles has negative consequences both for the masculine and the feminine, both for their own sense of individuality and their interaction. A certain sense of performance of masculinity or femininity does not have to be completely problematic according to Butler, nor does some sense of connection between them have to be. However, the enforcement of possibly inorganic standards by the patriarchy on the specific execution of how these need to interact and thus perform, is problematic. A woman is not free as long as she can not find or follow her own ambitions freely, and as long as she is thus still subdued within the expectation of needing to be passively controlled by the masculine. This is what Raewyn Connell describes as 'emphasized femininity', which is

“defined around compliance with subordination [of women to men] and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (1987, p.184). In other words, the hegemonic masculine standard can thus be defined as the dominantly expected form, shape and performance of what society has deemed a ‘good’ woman.

At the same time, a man is never free as long as he can not provide and thus live just for himself, and as long as he is expected to behave in an ‘active’ way and to exert his manhood over the feminine. This is linked to what Connell has termed ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (1987). Hegemonic masculinity is different from ‘toxic masculinity’ (Kimmel, 1995), as toxic masculinity suggests that only certain masculine traits can be toxic and that these traits are to some extent inherent to the male species, rather than a socially-constructed choice (Salter, 2019). Rather, hegemonic masculinity does not deny men’s own role in keeping the patriarchal gender roles and the subordination of the feminine going. Unlike toxic masculinity, hegemonic masculinity also recognises that within the patriarchy, not every man holds the same power over this social construction, and that “the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity are [not] always the most powerful people” (Connell, 2005, p.77). It is also different from toxic masculinity in arguing that all masculine traits can be destructive, rather than just the ‘toxic’ ones, as stereotypical ‘masculine’ traits are all socially constructed rather than innate. Because of this, all masculine traits can have a negative impact on a man's individuality according to hegemonic masculinity, as it suggests that the patriarchy's expectations are obstructing the man from being his own individual. In other words, the hegemonic masculine standard can thus be defined as the dominantly expected form, shape and performance of what society has deemed a ‘true’ man.

Consequently, by expecting a certain connection and codependency between this bifurcation of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, the patriarchal expectations

also obstruct organic[2] relationships between women and men from taking place (Connell, 1987; 2005). This corresponds with Dell's claim in "Feminism for Men" that both men and women, particularly within a relationship, will only have "half a life" (1914), a claim he had thus made over seventy years earlier. According to this article, by making this specific type of relationship a socially expected necessity in the form of marriage, or in the form of a partnership in the modern era, the patriarchy ruins the chance of a relationship between the feminine and masculine as being one characterised by "companionship, for companionship is only possible in a democracy." (Dell, 1914). This is what sociologist Mervyn Cadwallader later described in 1966 as the "wretched institution" of marriage, and is linked to feminist's Emma Goldman's claims that marriage limits both the male and female in favour of the patriarchy's economic growth. In her essay "Love and Marriage" (1911), Goldman makes the claim that by getting married, the woman:

> Pays for it with her name, her privacy, her self-respect, her very life, "until death doth part." Moreover, the marriage insurance condemns her to life-long dependency, to parasitism, to complete uselessness, individual as well as social. Man, too, pays his toll, but as his sphere is wider, marriage does not limit him as much as woman. He feels his chains more in an economic sense.

With this, Goldman thus suggests that both males and females are limited by the social institution of marriage. However, while women's chance of individuality is restricted by social, economic, political and various other socially constructed 'chains', men's chances of achieving individuality is mostly restricted by economic 'chains' that come with the husband's role as the provider. The expected institution of marriage is thus based on an inorganic hierarchy, and the combination of emphasized femininity and hegemonic

[2] In this thesis, the term "organic" refers to love/companionship that is distinct from socially constructed elements and expectations of romantic relationships.

masculinity obstructs the democracy that allows the organic companionship between man and woman to take place. As such, a relationship between a man and a woman in marriage can no longer be “a sharing of life together.” (1914), as Dell suggested in “Feminism for Men”. Instead, it becomes “a breaking of life apart” (Dell, 1914), as a result it ruins the chance for either man or woman to properly become, be or stay their own ‘individual’.

The Ignoble Feminine

Dell addresses each of these aforementioned issues of patriarchally expected gender roles throughout his plays *Sweet-and-Twenty*, *Legend* and *Enigma*. The negative effects of patriarchal expectations of gender roles can thus be considered multi-layered, something which Dell has also grasped in his theatrical work. Firstly, by expecting the feminine/women to perform according to this specific patriarchally-constructed concept of femininity in which she is the passive to the active masculinity, these patriarchal expectations limit her chance of becoming her own independent individual.

For instance, this argument seems to be represented by Dell’s portrayal of SHE, or Violante, in his play *Legend*. Dell starts this play by presenting the protagonist Violante/SHE as a ‘proper’ passive woman who stays faithful to her husband, thus fitting Cixous’ hierarchical bifurcation (1986) and Connell’s description of the emphasized feminine (1987). Her relationship is thus described as the patriarchally expected marriage, yet she is not in love with her husband. The male protagonist Luciano also suggests that there is a lack of love in Violante’s marriage, which she eventually admits to herself at the end of the play as well (p.17). Luciano, who is presented as her true love, suggests her marriage and her expected behaviour make her have something so “ignobly feminine” (p.16) about her. He then claims that she is “incapable of action - almost incapable of speech” and that her “lips are shut tight against kisses, and when they open to speak, all that they say is “Don't.” (p.16). The play

suggests that by placing her within the patriarchally desired marriage, but with an undesirable man, Violante is behaving according to what is essentially Connell's description of the emphasized feminine mindset, as she is complying to "subordination [of women to men] and [she] is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (Connell, 1987, p.184), which in this case is her husband. Violante will not leave or betray him, as she then cannot "be a good woman any longer." (p.17), as she would then live for herself rather than adhere to the patriarchally expected subordinate role of a woman. Luciano, who intentionally appears to represent her chance to follow her own path/true love, urges her to pick love and to thus give up on her 'ignoble' femininity.

However, when Violante eventually admits that she desires to properly live as she claims she is not "Dead [...]. No. Not yet. For a moment--a little lifetime--I have life" (p.17), and shares this news with Luciano, his reaction changes,

> HE. I knew. It is no use. I will go.
>
> *[He turns to the door.]*
>
> SHE. Wait! *(He turns back incredulously.)* I have decided to go with you. *(He stands stock-still.)* Don't you understand? Take me. I am yours. Don't you believe it?
>
> HE. Violante!
>
> SHE. It is hard to believe, isn't it. I have been a child. Now I am a woman. And shall I tell you how I became a woman? *(She points to the box on the table.)* I looked in my mirror there. I saw that I was beautiful - and alive. Tell me, am I not beautiful - and alive?
>
> HE. There is something terrible about you at this moment. I am almost afraid of you.
>
> SHE. Kiss me, Luciano! (p.18)

When Violante exclaims that she is now actually “alive” (p.18) and thus “a woman” with her own agency and individuality, Luciano turns out to now be “almost afraid of” (p.18) her. Even if he was the one that was pushing her towards letting this ideal go, Luciano himself thus only desired Violante when she did in fact adhere to the patriarchal passive gender role of Connell’s description of the emphasized feminine, as then she still had the emphasized feminine “womanly virtues" of “compliance, nurturing and empathy” (Connell, 1987, p.189) that made him have power over her as a man. This lack of power over her has thus made Luciano fear her, rather than love her like he initially suggested. With this, together with Violante’s claim that she “is now [Luciano’s]” (p.18), Dell argues that for women to truly be able to forge their own path, they must pave the way themselves, without letting the hegemonic masculine (even ones that have remained hidden) be a deciding factor in this decision or letting this become an obstacle. For a woman to be more than “half a life” (1914), as Dell put it in “Feminism for Men”, she must thus first find a sense of a life for herself.

However, the expected role of the passive feminine does not solely create issues for the woman’s sense of identity. As it is, behaving according to the expected emphasized feminine does not only have a negative effect on the life of the woman herself, but on a man’s as well. Dell suggests this in his play *Enigma*, in which he portrays what appears to be the final argument between a man and a woman. In this play, both the woman’s (Helen/SHE) and the man's (Paul/HE) sense of self has been negatively affected by them performing according to their expected gender roles, but at the same time their lives have also been negatively affected by the other party performing according to theirs. Helen behaving according to the expected passive yet emotional emphasized feminine gender role is shown to have hurt her, albeit indirectly, as it has caused her to feel inferior to and dominated by Paul in their relationship,

> SHE. [...] It was a force too strong for me. It swept me into your arms. I prayed against it. I had to give myself to you, even though I knew you hardly cared. I had to--for my heart was no longer in my own breast. It was in your hands, to do what you liked with. You could have thrown it in the dust. [...]You put it in your pocket. But don't you realize what it is to feel that another person has absolute power over you? No, for you have never felt that way. You have never been utterly dependent on another person for happiness. I was utterly dependent on you. It humiliated me, angered me. I rebelled against it, but it was no use. You see, my dear, I was in love with you. And you were free, and your heart was your own, and nobody could hurt you. (p.34)

With this last sentence, Helen thus seems to claim that unlike Paul, her heart is no longer her own. Dell depicts this as being due to her having performed according to the emphasized feminine role, and technically also due to Paul having performed according to the hegemonic masculine role, during their relationship. Her performance as the emphasized feminine that takes the "subordinate" role to the man's power role (Connell, 1987), has thus made Helen feel as though she has lost control over her own heart, which is a direct metaphor for her identity and sense of self, as it is the heart that is considered the part that gives life to a human. Helen thus despises how "utterly dependent" it has made her on a dominant party. Her gendered performance thus feels unnatural to her, but still makes her experience Butler's suggested performance-anxiety (p.528, 1990), as she is afraid she is not performing like "a woman' well enough to save her relationship.

Furthermore, while Helen considers Paul to have been free during their relationship, Dell also paints the image that Helen's gendered performance has negatively impacted upon Paul's sense of self as well. As it is, Helen's cheating is shown to be the direct reason for Paul

wanting to break up. And yet, Paul appears to hesitate, as he does seem to actually love her. His true problem with her, however, seems to lie in her gender performance, rather than her cheating,

> HE. Pity! The pity is this--that we should sit here and haggle about our hatred. That's all there's left between us.
>
> SHE. *(standing up)* I won't haggle, Paul. If you think we should part, we shall this very night. But I don't want to part this way, Paul. I know I've hurt you. I want to be forgiven before I go.
>
> HE. *(standing up to face her)* Can't we finish without another sentimental lie? I'm in no mood to act out a pretty scene with you. (p.33)

Paul's statement that he is in "no mood to act out a pretty scene" with Helen suggests that the real issue is his interaction with the 'lying', 'sentimental' Helen. With this, Dell suggests that Helen may think Paul's heart is free, but the woman he does appear to have an organic bond with underneath their constructed selves, is acting in a fashion that makes her actual, not socially-constructed self nearly unreachable to him. His heart is thus not really free either, as an organic connection with a woman he loves and which might help his life feel more 'complete', has been obstructed by her performing according to the expected emphasized feminine gender role.

With his portrayal of Helen and Paul in *Enigma*, Dell thus appears to argue in favour of similar claims regarding socially expected gender-performance of the passive female as Butler has made in her work, particularly that this creates performance anxiety in the performer, and can lead to destructive tendencies in her and in the people around her (1990). At the same time Dell's portrayal fits Connell's claims that the emphasized feminine gender role thus not only negatively affects the woman's sense of self, but that of her (male) lover as well (1987; 2005). With this play, and with *Legend*, Dell thus argues in favour of the

abolition of the patriarchally expected emphasized feminine gender role, as he considers it an obstruction to the pursuit of her path to self-exploration and consequently her individuality.

The Impotent Masculine

Similarly to the prior section on the expected female gender role, by expecting the masculine/men to perform according to this specific patriarchally constructed concept of masculinity in which he has to stay within his active role, the patriarchy also obstructs his chance of freedom and finding his sense of self. Dell primarily portrays this in *Enigma*. In this play, Dell depicts Paul/HE as having adhered to the masculine gender role during his and Helen's relationship:

> SHE. Something I've never confessed to you. Yes. It is true that I was cruel to you--deliberately. I did want to hurt you. And do you know why? I wanted to shatter that Olympian serenity of yours. You were too strong, too self-confident. You had the air of a being that nothing could hurt. You were like a god.
>
> HE. That was a long time ago. Was I ever Olympian? I had forgotten it. You succeeded very well - you shattered it in me.
>
> SHE. You are still Olympian. And I still hate you for it. I wish I could make you suffer now. But I have lost my power to do that. (p.33-34)

Here Dell suggests that the reason for Helen's cheating is to finally break Paul's god-like 'Olympian serenity', which can be read as a metaphor for him having performed according to the active and stoic hegemonic masculine gender role during their relationship. It suggests that Paul behaved according to the "superiority of men to women" (Connell, 1987, p.86) inherent in the patriarchal hierarchical structure, which has caused their relationship to be "based on an unequal exchange (Connell, 1987, p.113)" between the hegemonic masculine

and the emphasized feminine. This unequal exchange is what caused their hatred for each other. Nevertheless, Helen did once love him, and is passively trying to make amends in the beginning of the play, asking if Paul thinks there really "is no possibility - of our finding some way?... We might be able - to find some way." (p.33). Paul, who represents the man's sense of identity within a relationship, thinks Helen's cheating has "shattered" him and his masculinity. However, with this dialogue in *Enigma,* Dell actually argues that it is in fact this performance of the socially expected hegemonic masculine stereotype itself that has shattered Paul's sense of self, which is similar to Butler's claims regarding the destructivity of gender-performance, as it's his socially-constructed performance anxiety that has made him doubt himself and his manhood (Butler, 1990).

At the same time, Paul's performance of hegemonic masculinity has negatively impacted on Helen's sense of self as well. As discussed in the previous section of "The Ignoble Feminine", Helen claimed to feel inorganically dominated by Paul, something which was partly to blame to her own performance of the emphasized feminine within their relationship. Nevertheless, Paul's performance of the hegemonic masculine played as much a part in this, as the expected passive feminine gender role within a relationship has been made inherently codependent on that of the active masculine counterpart by the patriarchy (Butler, 1990; Cixous, 1986;). Paul's dominating masculine performance over Helen is thus at least partly to blame for her feeling "humiliated" (p.34), "angered" (p.34), and most of all "dependent" (p.34). In other words, with this portrayal, Dell argues that Paul's performance of the expected hegemonic masculine role has played a part in making Helen lose control over her own life, and consequently her own identity. In *Enigma*, Dell thus implies that both Paul and Helen as individual human-beings have been negatively affected by the other's gendered performance.

Similar negative effects of the patriarchy's gendered expectations on masculine individuality are present in *Legend.* Luciano/HE, the male protagonist, is presented as a representation of the average man, who is trying to pursue his organic sense of love. This, however, has been obstructed by the patriarchal expectations, as the woman he loves (and who loves him in return) is staying true to the marriage she was pushed into by the patriarchy. Because of her fear of losing the sense of being a "good woman", Luciano as an average man has been hindered in his chance of experiencing what Dell referred to as proper "companionship" (1914) by the patriarchal expected gender role Violante is adhering to.

At the same time Dell also paints Luciano as being individually influenced by the patriarchy as a male individual. By showing Luciano's newly surfaced fear of Violante at the end of the play, at the moment when she feels like she has "now [become] a woman" (p.18) with her own agency and individuality, Dell suggests that Luciano has been negatively affected by the socially expected gender roles between men and women more than he initially may have expected. Luciano may claim that he hates the "something ignobly feminine about" (p.16) Violante when this is obstructing the pursuing of their love,

> HE. Always the same phrase that means nothing. Ah, Violante, lady of few words, you know how to baffle argument. If I could only make you speak! If I could only see what the thoughts are that darken your will!
>
> SHE. Don't.
>
> HE. By God! I wonder that I don't hate you instead of love you. There is something ignobly feminine about you. You are incapable of action - almost incapable of speech. Your lips are shut tight against kisses, and when they open to speak, all that they say is "Don't."
>
> SHE. What do you expect to gain by scolding me? (p.16)

However, as mentioned before in “The Ignoble Feminine”, the moment she let go of this “ignoble” femininity, it is Luciano himself who then claims that Violante has now become “terrible” (p.18) instead.

Violante’s change in femininity thus makes Luciano’s socially taught ‘hegemonic masculinity’ fear her, as she is now her own person who does not ‘need’ him anymore, but just ‘wants’ him. Luciano’s hegemonic masculinity thus negatively affects his sense of self, as the chance of an equal and organic companionship between him and the woman he loves, makes him experience a negative and inorganic sense of emasculation of his own individuality. He as a man has thus been defaulted to “want someone dependent on [him] more than [he] want[s] a comrade.”, fitting Dell's description in "Feminism for Men” (1914) of the patriarchally-influenced ‘average man’.

With his portrayal of Luciano in *Legend*, Dell thus suggests that Luciano, being one of those average men, has made his own sense of self destructively dependent on his dominating role over women. With this, Dell consequently argues that the patriarchal expectations have obstructed Luciano's chance of staying true to his organic self, his organic level of the masculine and his organical sense of love for a woman, as it has made him lose touch with what makes him an independent individual. With this play, and *Enigma,* Dell thus advocates for the abolition of the patriarchally expected hegemonic masculine gender role, as it limits a man’s chance of living an actual ‘free’ life as Dell himself had already suggested in “Feminism for Men” (1914).

The Wretched Bond

By not only expecting performance on these individual levels, but by then also expecting the masculine and the feminine to take on these aforementioned specific roles within the ‘wretched institution’ of marriage or partnership, the patriarchy not just limits the masculine

(often in the form of a man) and feminine (often in the form of a woman) into becoming at most one combined human-being, but it thus also hinders their chance of an enduring companionship, which Dell had also suggested in "Feminism for Men" (1914). Dell succinctly represents this in his play *Legend* by presenting the relationship and love between Violante/SHE and Luciano/HE as being limited by the patriarchally expected gender roles, which he argues is done in multiple ways.

Initially, by placing Violante in a loveless but socially expected marriage, Dell suggests that the construction of marriage directly limits the chance of love and thus of what he had earlier described as "democratic [...] companionship" (1914) between a man and a woman. This is done by limiting Violante's search for a life of her own, as the patriarchy has taught her that by defying this expected structure she can not be a "good woman" (p.17) anymore,

> *[[...] Her head droops for a moment or two, and then is slowly lifted. Her eyes sweep the room imploringly, and rest on the image of the Virgin. She goes over to it and kneels.]*
>
> SHE. [...] Mary, Mother of God, give me a sign. I do not know what to do. Help me. I must decide. Love has entered my heart, and it may be that I cannot be a good woman any longer [...]. (p.17)

Dell argues here that the construction of marriage has limited Violante's chance of love, but indirectly also that of Luciano. Dell represents the patriarchal expectation of marriage here by mentioning the picture of the Virgin Mary, as the Christian Church was one of the leading institutions of the patriarchal society of the United States in the 1920s, and also the main executor of marriages. By having Violante plead to Mary out of fear of not being "a good woman any longer" (p.17), Dell argues that the church/patriarchy has pushed Violante into an

undesired marriage out of fear of not being a proper woman otherwise, suggesting that it has thus pushed her into a life without organic love by doing so.

However, once Violante does dare to 'break free' from her loveless marriage, and becomes her own individual, this causes Luciano's dormant hegemonic masculinity to feel threatened. This suggests that men have been socially defaulted to fear a chance of more than what Dell himself referred to in his article as "half a life" (1914) by the gendered patriarchal expectations, and consequently a chance of true companionship with a woman. This corresponds with Goldman's suggestions, as she argues that the patriarchy desires a relationship between "the two sexes" to confirm to the active masculine role and the passive feminine role, which according to her creates "an environment so different from each other that man and woman must remain strangers". With his depiction of the patriarchally expected gender roles in *Legend,* Dell thus suggests that these ruin the chance of companionable love between men and women, as the socially-desired relationship between "the two sexes" lacks "the potentiality of developing knowledge of, and respect for, each other, without which every union is doomed to failure" (Goldman, 1910). Namely, it directly teaches women to adhere to their emphasized gender role if they want to be feminine enough to be loved, and men to fight or take flight from an individual woman with whom a lasting companionship could be built. The result hereof is that even a relationship that was built on love, will end up being at most two halves of life merging together into one 'wretched' being, which it does both during and before marriage.

Nonetheless, the destructive tendencies of the patriarchal system on the chances of a lasting companionship between the feminine and masculine are most directly portrayed in Dell's play *Sweet-and-Twenty*, where this issue is the main overarching theme, and which shows the fast-budding relationship between Helen/SHE and George/HE, as they meet viewing a house,

SHE. Please! You simply mustn't! It's disgraceful!

HE. What's disgraceful?

SHE. *(confused)* What you are going to say.

HE. *(simply)* Only that I love you. What is there disgraceful about that? It's beautiful!

SHE. It's wrong.

HE. It's inevitable. (p.19-20)

As shown in this dialogue, George, uninterested in convention, begins the claim of his love. He does this, however, under the illusion that Helen is already married, as is subsequently revealed (p.20). This goes against the patriarchal conventions on relationships where the man has to woo the woman without showing too much emotion, as this is considered a trait belonging to the sensitive feminine gender-role rather than the "unemotional, independent, nonnurturing, aggressive, and dispassionate" (Connell, 2005) masculine gender role. Concurrently it is also something Helen's emphasized femininity and ideas on marriage instintictly react to as being disgraceful in a possible masculine counterpart, as it does not confirm to the patriarchal "construction of a hypermasculine ideal of toughness and dominance" (Connell, 1987). The gendered patriarchal expectations, together with her own assumption that George himself is already taken, thus make Helen initially wary of a possible relationship that would include a non hegemonic masculine male, and these expectations are thus a direct risk for her chance of a companionship with a man like George who she organically desires.

At the same time, Helen is also depicted as being unconventional and anti-patriarchal in her ideas about love. Because of this, after some hesitation, she seems to choose love over the patriarchal institution of marriage, at least for a short while,

> HE. [...] I've never spoken to you before, and heaven knows I may never get a chance to speak to you again, but I'd never forgive myself if I didn't say this to you now. I love you! love you! love you! Now tell me I'm a fool. Tell me to go. Anything - I've said my say. . . . Why don't you speak?
>
> SHE. I - I've nothing to say- except - except that I - well - *(almost inaudibly)* I feel some of those symptoms myself.
>
> HE. *(triumphantly)* You love me!
>
> SHE. I - don't know. Yes. Perhaps. (p.20)

Nevertheless, as seen here, she does still continue to struggle between what she as a woman wants, and what the enforced emphasized woman within her tells her she should want. Having confessed her love to a married and emotionally open man keeps her hesitant in pursuing a chance of love and companionship with him, and the option of kissing him would once again take her a step farther away from the patriarchally desired relationship between the emphasized feminine and the hegemonic masculine,

> HE. Then kiss me!
>
> SHE. *(doubtfully)* No. . . .
>
> HE. Kiss me!
>
> SHE. *(tormentedly)* Oh, what's the use? (p.20)

By doubting its ‘use’, Helen indirectly questions if the pursuit of organic love and companionship is worth it, if this means going up against the patriarchal expectation, and the social issues that come with this. With this, Dell suggests that the patriarchal expectations are so stuck and internalised in our society, that the fear of not ‘fitting in’ weighs heavier than living life in a way one organically desires. This fits Butler’s claim that the patriarchally expected performance of gender functions in a way where “performing [...] gender wrong

initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all" (1988, p.528).

The first half of this play thus suggests that the inorganic patriarchal expectations of marriage and of adhering to the bifurcation of the passive feminine and active masculine is weightier in society than the organic human desires of love and companionship. Dell then continues to reinforce this claim by presenting marriage as one of the reasons that love "ceases to be companionship", as he argued in "Feminism for Men" (1914). When initially George and Helen find out neither is married and realise there is nothing in the way of them pursuing their connection, they have a short lived moment of happiness and consider getting married, but this happiness quickly changes when they start discussing what being married would actually entail, and in turn they start to question their connection,

> HE. Marriage is a serious matter. Now don't take offense! I only meant that-well--(He starts again.) We are in love with each other, and that's the important thing. But, as you said, we don't know each other. I've no doubt that when we get acquainted we will like each other better still. But we've got to get acquainted first.
>
> [...]
>
> SHE. *(impatiently)* Oh, all right! Go ahead and cross-examine me if you like. I'll tell you to begin with that I'm perfectly healthy, and that there's no T.B., insanity, or Socialism in my family. What else do you want to know?
>
> HE. *(hesitantly)* Why did you put in Socialism, along with insanity and T.B.?
>
> SHE. Oh, just for fun. You aren't a Socialist, are you?
>
> HE. Yes. *(Earnestly)* Do you know what Socialism is? (p.21)

This dialogue suggests that there is a direct connection between the sudden negative course that the relationship between Helen and George is taking, and social constructions that are related to the institution of marriage. The patriarchy has suggested that within a marriage, parties must have much 'in common' and should agree on the accepted social constructions, such as politics, but also the expected bifurcation of gender roles. However, Helen is shown to be a capitalist and George the undesired 'socialist', thus not fitting these patriarchal expectations. Moreover, the expectation that one does everything "together" (p.23) in a marriage, as The Agent suggests, is then proved to be further incompatible for Helen and George, as George does not like to, nor shares, her desire to dance, even though Helen's taught codependent emphasized feminine claims that he "must learn right away" (p.21) for their marriage to work.

The prospect of marriage has thus made Helen and George lose sight of their organic companionship and love, and made them switch their focus to the patriarchal expectations about what such a relationship should entail instead. Because of this, Helen and George come to the conclusion they can not get together out of fear of an "unhappy marriage" that consists solely of "quarrels" (p.22). Through George's dialogue, Dell describes the result of their envisioned marriage as a "month of happiness [...] and then--wretchedness." (p.22). Nevertheless, Dell also suggests that Helen and George do still love each other,

> *[They cling to each other, and are presently lost in a passionate embrace. He breaks loose and stamps away, then turns to her.]*
>
> HE. Damn it all, we do love each other!
>
> SHE: *(wiping her eyes)* What a pity that is the only taste we have in common!
>
> HE. Do you suppose that is enough?
>
> SHE. I wish it were! (p.22)

The issue that obstructs Helen and George's chance of love and companionship is thus the patriarchally expectation of their relationship, which is for them to get married. Their love and the institution of marriage are thus portrayed as polar opposites, even though the patriarchy claims marriage to be the ultimate institution of love (Goldman, 1910). This can be linked to the claim the feminist writer Goldman has made on companionship and marriage in her aforementioned essay "Marriage and Love" (1910), in which she suggests that:

> marriage and love have nothing in common; they are as far apart as the poles; are, in fact, antagonistic to each other. No doubt some marriages have been the result of love. Not, however, because love could assert itself only in marriage; much rather is it because few people can completely outgrow a convention. There are today large numbers of men and women to whom marriage is naught but a farce, but who submit to it for the sake of public opinion. At any rate, while it is true that some marriages are based on love, and while it is equally true that in some cases love continues in married life, I maintain that it does so regardless of marriage, and not because of it.

The first half of the play thus ends with the masculine and feminine deciding to go separate ways, as their love has been 'defeated' by the destructive patriarchal expectations. Dell then disrupts this with the introduction of a real estate agent, or 'The Agent', who represents the feminist mindset, and in some aspects, Dell himself. The Agent tells Helen and George that their family members have set them up to get married, something which they are now actively afraid of (p.22-23). The Agent reacts by beginning a long plea on the issues of the institution of marriage,

> THE AGENT. *(gravely)* [...] I've known marriage to go to smash on far less than that. When you come to think of it, a taste for dancing and a taste for municipal ownership stand at the two ends of the earth away from each other. They represent two different ways of taking life. And if two people who live in the same house can't agree on those two things, they'd disagree on a hundred things that came up every day. And what's the use for two different kinds of beings to try to live together? It doesn't work, no matter how much love there is between them. (p.23)

The agent appears to thus be a direct characterisation of the argument Dell makes on the patriarchally expected marriage/relationship between men and women in his plays, and particularly within this play *Sweet-and-Twenty*. With this plea, Dell argues that the patriarchal expectations of marriage, like living together, will not work together with love. This is because by expecting an inorganic merging of the lives of the Feminine (represented by Helen) and the Masculine (represented by George), the patriarchal institution of marriage will eventually kill the organic love that was once between them, as the Agent then explains in the continuation of his plea,

> THE AGENT. Marriage, my young friends, is an iniquitous arrangement devised by the Devil himself for driving all the love out of the hearts of lovers. They start out as much in love with each other as you two are today, and they end by being as sick of the sight of each other as you two will be five years hence if I don't find a way of saving you alive out of the Devil's own trap. It's not lack of love that's the trouble with marriage - it's marriage itself. And when I say marriage, I don't mean promising to love, honour, and obey, for richer, for poorer, in sickness

> and in health till death do you part--that's only human nature to wish and to attempt. And it might be done if it weren't for the iniquitous arrangement of marriage. (p.23-24)

Love, companionship and a relation between the masculine and the feminine are thus not the issue. Rather, it is the direct fault of the patriarchal institution of marriage, and consequently its expectations of femininity and masculinity, that a life-long love between men and women can not work out in our society, as it drives "all of the love out of lovers hearts" (p.23) with its inorganic expectations. This corresponds with another theorisation by Goldman, where she claims that if somehow "love continues in married life, [...] it does so regardless of marriage, and not because of it" (1910). Marriage is thus an inorganic threat to the organic companionship between men and women, rather than an ultimate institution of this love.

In the play, it is then claimed that the patriarchy (or our constructed 'civilization' as the Agent calls it) that expects this marriage, and that also expects the feminine and masculine role within is, is the killer of the organic love between men and women,

> AGENT. Marriage is the nest-building instinct, turned by the Devil himself into an institution to hold the human soul in chains. [...] Marriage is a nest so small that there is no room in it for disagreement. Now it may be all right for birds to agree, but human beings are not built that way.
>
> [...]
>
> THE AGENT. If you are wise, you will build yourselves a little nest secretly in the woods, away from civilization, and you will run away together to that nest whenever you are in the mood. A nest so small that it will hold only two beings and one thought--the thought of love. And then you will come back refreshed to civilization, where every soul is

> different from every other soul--you will let each other alone, forget each other, and do your own work in peace. Do you understand? (p.24)

For the Feminine (Helen) and Masculine (George) to retain their love, they must step away from the patriarchal expectations together and retreat to their own "little nest in the woods" (p.24), which represents a non-patriarchal society. This is painted as a society where the feminine and masculine do not have to 'perform' their gender in a certain fashion, nor do they need to 'perform' an inorganic relationship with each other. By making the Agent then finish his plea by telling Helen and George that "you should not stifle love with civilization, nor encumber civilization with love. What have they to do with each other?" (p.24), Dell essentially makes this plea carry the same claim as Butler did eighty years later, namely that the patriarchy is the direct cause of the identity-related and love-related issues that come from its expectations concerning gender-performance, and that for love between men and women to be restored, the patriarchy has to lose its power over it (Butler, 1990).

Dell then ends his argument by suggesting that the only way this change can happen, is if the men and women that are negatively affected by this patriarchal destruction of organic love, will take action themselves. He does this by revealing at the end of the play that the Agent is married to fourteen women, and that he has been locked up for being a bigomist who had gone "mad" after he finished reading feminist Bernard Shaw's work. However, it is revealed that The Agent and each of his fourteen wives are "happily married" (p.24), The Agent's only true crime can thus be said to be his unconventional love-life and his controversial opinions on love. Dell then reveals that the Agent is now living in an asylum because of his views on marriage. George and Helen see some truth in the Agent's claims, but decide to get married after all as he is "mad" (p.24). The play then ends with the first quarrel between the engaged on their future married life, which is suggested, is the first of many to come,

> GEORGE. Of course we'll get married. You have your work and I mine, and-
>
> HELEN. Well, if we do, then you can't have that sunny south room for a study. I want it for the nursery.
>
> GEORGE. The nursery!
>
> HELEN. Yes; babies, you know!
>
> GEORGE. Good heavens! (p.25)

With this ending of *Sweet-and-Twenty*, Dell thus argues that for the companionship-destroying patriarchal cycle to end, both the masculine and feminine need to break it. The reference of Bernard Shaw works, together with Dell's earlier claim in "Feminism for Men" that "Feminism is going to make it possible for the first time for men [and women] to be free." (2014), suggests that Dell thinks the feminist movement is the way to make this change happen.

Conclusion

Dell's plays *Sweet-and-Twenty, Legend* and *Enigma* thus suggest that the patriarchally expected gender roles of masculinity and femininity and the performance thereof create triad of obstructions. Primarily, Dell suggests that by expecting women to behave according to the emphasized feminine gender role of "a good woman" (p.17), and consequently by expecting them to be emotionally controlled by the hegemonic masculine, the patriarchy has institutionalised an inorganic, yet constant fear of social unacceptance in women. He argues that this fear rests upon these women no longer being able to perform according to these expectations of "a good woman" (p.17), which is for instance the case for the characters of Violante and *Enigma*'s Helen. By suggesting that "womanly virtues" are those of "compliance, nurturing and empathy" (Connell, 1987, p.189), and by expecting the feminine

to be subordinate to the masculine, Dell portrays the patriarchy's enforcement of this feminine construction and fear as preventing these women from becoming their own individuals, as it expects them to live their lives for their male counterparts instead of themselves. With his plays, Dell thus suggests that the patriarchy has normalised the idea that women's lives should be about fear and subordination, and inhibits their sense of individual agency over their womanhood, rather than advocating individuality and organic love.

Similarly, in these plays Dell argues that the patriarchy's gendered expectations also obstruct men's individuality, as it stops them from living their lives in freedom. Dell depicts the patriarchy as an institution that has taught men to perform according to the hegemonic masculine role, wherein they are expected to act stoically and in a controlling fashion towards the emphasized feminine (Connell, 1987). This is because society has claimed that this socially-constructed dominance is an essential element of manhood and male identity. Dell's portrayal of the male characters, however, suggests that independent women are in fact what men organically crave: "democratic [...] companionship" (1914) with individual women who aren't financially dependent on them, is what Dell himself described as being the main conditions for being "a free man" (1914).

Lastly, Dell also suggests that this patriarchy limits the chances of organic love lasting between these men and women, as it expects the hegemonic masculine and emphasized feminine to take on specific roles within a socially constructed partnership. This partnership, which appears either in the form of marriage or a socially confirming relationship, wherein both parties either do not love each other, as is the case for Violante and her husband, or at best become a combined human with "half a life" (Dell, 1914) as is the case for George and Helen. According to Dell, the expectations of marriage cause a relationship to lose "the fine excitement of democracy" (1914), which inevitably means it "ceases to be companionship" (1914). According to his portrayal of marriage in *Legend* and *Sweet-and-Twenty*, the

patriarchal expectation of marriage is thus not a proper foundation of love as claimed by conventional society. Instead, marriage either expects an inorganic performance of love in the form of socially-constructed relationship that “is naught but a farce" (Goldman, 2010) between two people created out of socio-economic interest, or it kills a priorly existing love with its inorganic expectations.

Consequently, with these three plays discussed in this thesis, Dell actively appeals for the elimination of these portrayed gendered social-constructions. In “Feminism for Men” (1914), he advocates actively in favour of this elimination for the liberation of both men and women as individuals, and also for increasing the chance of organic “companionship” (1914) and love between them. Contextualising this with the plea of the Agent in *Sweet-and-Twenty* where Dell calls marriage an “iniquitous arrangement devised by the Devil himself” (p.23), and the portrayal of the destructive tendencies of the bifurcated gender roles as depicted in the relationships in *Legend* and *Enigma*, Dell appears to argue that the patriarchy and its expected gendered constructions are directly to blame for the restriction of both men and women’s individuality. For men, women and their desire to “to be free” (1914), these patriarchal obstructions need to be discussed, analysed and largely eliminated.

By considering the claims Dell made in “Feminism for men” (1914) relating to men’s role in feminism, and by then regarding his allusion to Bernard Shaw in his play *Sweet-and-Twenty*, Dell thus seems to suggest that this is an aim that only the feminist movement with the inclusion of men can help achieve. It is only then that this particular theoretical school would be able to truly question and limit patriarchal and political constructions for the sake of both men and women alike. This is a suggestion that once again shows Dell’s prescient view of feminism's possibilities, and his essential but overlooked role in the history of feminism as a whole.

"It's not just women against men anymore.
And it is not feminism against the family.
We need a new political movement of
women and men toward a new society."

- Betty Friedan, 1992

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