

Anthony Safai

Professor Alec Fisher

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Marriage, the Indirect Act of Cultural Dominance

Amy Kaplan's essay titled "Manifest Democitcity" has a lot to say when it comes to correcting past scholars' arguments of labeling manifest destiny as this era of expansion. Amy Kaplan's argument critically redefines and labels the purpose of manifest destiny by essentially labeling it as a tool to fight an ongoing cultural war that had been going on in America during its days of mass expansion. By doing so, it attempts to forcefully establish gender roles (by defining each as separate spheres) as well as favoring specific racial groups over one another. It was more than just a simple doctrine or belief, it was a foundation put in place to justify cultural domination. In Amy Kaplan's essay, I will be focusing on one specific statement, as well as expressing my positive agreement with this statement using two specific examples from 19th-century literature. Here is the statement with the spotlight of my focus: "The ideology of separate spheres in antebellum America contributed to creating an American empire by imagining the nation as a home at a time when its geopolitical borders were expanding rapidly through violent confrontations with Indians, Mexicans, and European empires" (Kaplan 585). In this essay, I agree with Kaplan's statement, because if a culture strictly practices to categorically label specific genders to fields of labor (separate spheres), then there is already an establishment of cultural dominance, thus, contributing to cultural expansion. That said, I agree with Amy Kaplan's statement and will complement her concept of how separate spheres establish cultural dominance; by taking a look at how the concept of Marriage is a practice that contributes to the

concept of separate spheres, therefore contributing to the factors of America's cultural dominant expansion.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a story that follows the narrated in the perspective of a married woman who expresses the status of her marriage, describes her husband, and expresses her mental health where her husband labels her as having a "temporary nervous depression" (Perkins, p. 2). She later describes the home, and expresses her opinion on a specific yellow wallpaper in the bedroom, describing it as "almost revolving; a smouldering, unclean, yellow strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight" (Perkins, p. 4). With this summary in mind, and despite the intrapersonal struggle of the main character's domestic abuse within her marriage, I would like to focus on how the relationship between these two characters can be symbolized in a specific way: The husband represents America's cultural dominance of expansion, and the wife represents the victim of such dominance, and that this story is an example of such ongoing spheric war. First, the practice of gender roles is already established within the story, John (husband) leaves to go to work, and Mary (Wife) is forced to stay home. In terms of how it relates to contributing to factors of America's culturally dominant expansion, one must keep in mind the established symbolism, John uses his power as a physician to maintain dominance against Mary by diagnosing her mental struggles, and within the story, there is a specific line that reinforces John's awareness of this: "John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him" (Perkins p. 5). Automatically, John is in a position of power through his access to outside knowledge (being a doctor) thanks to the privilege of his position established by the separate spheres. This dominance is also complimented by marriage because if it weren't for their relationship, Mary would be having more freedom without her contracted position. Therefore, the practice of

marriage contributes to the expansion of cultural dominance. This is also a reason why I personally agree with Amy Kaplan's argument when she explained that the concept of categorizing gendered labor has the potential to contribute to the American empire; because marriage within itself is a soul-costing factor that dedicates itself to a system of expansion.

"I Gave Myself to Him" is a poem written by Emily Dickinson, it is a poem that is hard to grasp a full understanding of when taking all of the intended meanings into consideration. For the case of this essay, I will be regarding the concept of marriage and how it is described in the poem "I Gave Myself to Him" as it has the potential to describe specific aspects of marriage in terms of its cost of self, and the fixed cost it had to genders, specifically woman, during the strict establishment of the separate spheres. In this case, I will be regarding these few lines "I gave myself to Him. And took Himself, for pay, The solemn contract of a Life was ratified this way" (Dickinson, p. 1). Looking at these lines regarding marriage, it is fair to say that marriage is a "Solemn Contract of a Life," (Dickinson, p. 1) meaning one is paying their soul, or in the case of this essay, giving into separate spheres practice, thus, giving into the destiny of cultural expansion. Later in the poem, it states that "I gave myself to Him, and took Himself for Pay" which sounds like the woman in the relationship is paying her entire self, for the sake of only costing his love and affection, making it all sound like a very one sided act of dedication. Though this poem has other intended properties, it can be argued that the concept of gender roles contributed to the influence of this poem, especially when it comes to looking at the establishment of separate spheres. This only proves that marriage, and those who dedicate themselves to it, establishes the specific cultural practice. It also proves that marriage is a contribution to the cultural expansion agenda of manifest destiny.

To conclude, after looking at these 19th-century literary examples, it can be said that if one marries, then they are selling themselves, in the case of Emily Dickinson, it is the soul, and in the case of Charlotte Perkins, it is the lacking opportunity of will, furthermore, their freedom, and by selling one's freedom through marriage, then they are *indirectly* selling their vote to culturally expand upon America, like a dog marking its territory on a bush. This is why I agree so much with Amy Kaplan's concept, though she does not regard marriage within her statement, it will always be a factor when taking separate spheres into consideration, my argument is to simply complement her argument that the practice of separate spheres contributes to the growing cultural expansion.

Works Cited

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