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Femininity in Jose Saramago's *Blindness* and *Seeing*

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Abstract

This study analyzes the varieties of femininity represented in Jose Saramago's sequel, *Blindness* and *Seeing*. Femininity and its different types have been introduced by Richard Howson in his *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*. Howson believes there are three major types of femininity: emphasized femininity, ambivalent femininity and protest femininity. For Howson, emphasized femininity means a femininity that does what the hegemony of a society wants. A femininity that never says no to what is thrown its way by the masculine hegemony. Ambivalent femininity is neither with or against the power structure of the time, sometimes it does what it is told and sometimes not. However, protest femininity tries its best to stand in the face of the set hegemony, it resists, it subverts, it fights, hoping to be able to make some changes. In what follows these three models of femininity are being looked at closely to show that although Saramago's women grow to join the protest femininity in *Blindness*, nonetheless they get repressed by their contemporary hegemony in *Seeing*. A masculine hegemony does not bear to sit aside while a woman or a group of women try to subvert it. Rather it uses whatever tool it may find – from media to violence – to hush these women and put them in their place.

Key Words: hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity, ambivalent femininity, protest femininity, performative subversion

Introduction

It was in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the term patriarchy began to be used for a system of male power and women oppression (Connell 2009, 38). For Amy Lind and Stephanie Brzuzy, patriarchy is "a system of social organization in which males are dominant and control the society's resources through a variety of mechanisms ensuring that men will inherit and accumulate power while women will continue to be excluded from access to power" (Lind and Brzuzy 537-8). Patriarchy made sure that everything would be under the control and gaze of men. From how individuals should and should not act to language and how we must use it, everything was under the surveillance of patriarchy (Connell 2009, 84) because when patriarchy comes, it comes hand in hand with power and violence. Violence is the exercise of power over others; it is not only the means of domination but the outcome of it or in the words of Johan Galtung "cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look and even feel right – or at least not wrong." (Galtung 291) "A patriarchal society is one in which masculinist values have become general values" (Marshment 133) hence any disagreement would cause violence because violence is an essential instrument of patriarchy (Frith 104). Violence cannot be defined as what a group of ill-mannered men do at home when their wives reject their wants; rather it is a system of laws and practices that gives men, in general, the right to regard women as their own property (Hanmer and Maynard 73). Violence has many types such as sexual, verbal, physical, and visual and they all "indeed have their own socially or material rewards which include social control, normative approval and management of (masculine) identity." (Maynard & Winn 177)

In a patriarchal society, it is the man who defines women which means that the men give the women roles according to their sex type and require them to act accordingly. One of the sexes takes care of the "affective function" and the other of the "intellectual function" (Jackson and Scott 5). In a contemporary patriarchal society, women should be passive, self-sacrificing, expressive, gentle, submissive, helping, inferior, weak, serving, and caring (Francis 2).

To reach this aim, patriarchy asked for help, and who is better to get help from than the media? Publishers, editors, film directors, or television producers took it on themselves to present images that defined women (Marshment 127). Housewives taking care of babies, cooking, cleaning and such were shown in films or advertisements so much that it became internalised by the majority of women that that is the appropriate image in the society. These images encouraged a type of division of labour that favoured men and positioned women below them (Marshment 127). By having women as housewives, hegemony made sure that men would not have to compete with women

for a position at work and that women would always be dependent on their male partners.

A quick look around us shows just how much hegemony has us by the collar. Most women wear high-heels and nearly all put on makeup. This is not just because they want to be more attractive to men but because they have grown to feel more confident and beautiful by using such things. This is why "Germane Greer in her critique of the hero of romantic fiction *The Female Eunuch*, held women responsible for their own oppression." (Marshment 128) The hegemony has not aimed a gun at women to be what it wants them to be; rather women themselves have chosen to surrender because in the short term they benefit from what the patriarchy will make available to them.

This representation has created what Raewyn Connell calls the 'gender regime' or the pattern in gender arrangements (Connell 2009, 74). In our everyday life and in every organisation we care to look in, there is a great gap between women and men and what each group does. The outcome of this gender regime is the ultimate domination of women by men since men are the possessors of power and "what is deemed masculine is always and universally deemed also as superior" (Jackson & Scott 7)

It was because of this ongoing oppression that feminism emerged. It wanted to put an end to theories that "constituted women in lack, invisibility and silence" (Miller 7) The 'new-wave' feminism of the late 20th century tried to give awareness of the 'over determined' nature of women's oppression and to fight for the freedom of women (Pilcher & Whelehn XIII). Feminism then is a politics, "a recognition of the historical and cultural subordination of women – the only worldwide majority to be treated as minority" (Goodman X). In Connell's words "if the subordination of women is a result of role expectations [that men have established for them] then the obvious path forward is to change the expectations" (Connell 1987, 49) and that was precisely what feminism had on its agenda.

What follows deals with different types of femininity. In order to do ideas from Connell and Howson have been borrowed. Raewyn Connell has mostly considered and studied masculinity and its varieties. However, in her *Gender and Power*, she has briefly introduced one type of femininity, i.e. the emphasised femininity. Richard Howson, has taken Connell's idea and has propagated it by adding in other forms of femininity such as ambivalent femininity and protest femininity.

The focus of this research is on the mentioned types of femininity presented in *Blindness* and *Seeing* by Jose Saramago. Later on, how "performative subversion", a term coined by Judith Butler takes place in the two novels as shown to argue that no matter how much femininity subverts the established ideals of the hegemony it would

not succeed because so far, the majority of the individuals – both men and women – are the worshipers of a masculine hegemony.

I. Emphasised Femininity

Freud believed that "law and custom have much to give women that has been withheld from them, but the position of women will surely be what it is: in youth an adored darling and in mature years a loved wife" (Morales 159) and that is exactly what emphasised femininity is about.

Ideal women in hegemony's perspective are those who are one hundred percent compliant to the set norms by the society. Emphasized femininity is the most public type of femininity in many of the contemporary societies around the world, "even though its content is specifically grounded in the private realm of the house and the bedroom." (Howson 67) It does not only deal with the concept of beauty; rather it demands a passive and docile personality that expresses fragility, sociability, compliance with men's desires and acceptance of childcare and marriage (Howson 67).

Although this form of femininity is the most public one it cannot be said that it has the other forms of femininity under its wings. It does not dominate the other forms as in the case of hegemonic masculinity among other types of masculinity because of two main reasons: first, the power is concentrated in the hands of men and this does not leave a scope for a group of women to form a power relation over other women and second, there is "no pressure to subordinate and negate other forms of femininity in the way that hegemonic masculinity must negate" other gender types (Connell 1987, 187).

This kind of femininity is performed and performed especially to men; the media – from television to magazines – promotes in mass the idea of emphasised femininity. This promotion is financed and supervised by men (Connell 1987, 188) to make sure that by changing channels or leafing through a magazine, women would be subjected to the norms that construct an ideal woman. Femininity organised and supervised by men in order to emphasise compliance, empathy and nurturance is not in a state to form a hegemony over other kinds of femininity (Connell 1987, 188). Hegemony will make sure that other types of femininity would be prevented from gaining cultural articulation or in Sheila Rowbotham's phrase would be 'hidden from history' (Rowbotham IX).

A. Emphasised Femininity in *Blindness*

Blindness begins by presenting all women as emphasised femininity: Fragile, weak and caring. Connell believes that this kind of "femininity is constructed in a way that defines the work of caring for other members as womanly" (Connell 1987, 135) and it

might be because of that that the female characters are known to the reader by their spouse's professional, i.e. they do not have a name of their own.

The first woman who enters the novel is the first blind man's wife. She comes home and finds herself in a mess – broken vase, flowers on the floor and water everywhere – she starts nagging and saying "you might have cleaned up this mess yourself" (3) but when she sees the blood on her husband's hand "her vexation is gone in an instance." (3) She starts using kind words like "my sleepyhead" (3) to refer to her husband and when she realises he has gone blind she cries, weeps and clings to him. The reaction of the doctor's wife is not much different, she shows signs of distress and as the wife of the first blind man, she pulls herself together and becomes at the same time both the worried wife and the source of tranquility for her husband. Even the thief's wife lets him "weep his heart out" (10) in her arms but at the same time the women do whatever in their power to help their husbands.

The wife of the first blind man takes him to the doctor, while squeezing his hand and telling him "keep calm, I'm here." (5) The doctor's wife encourages her husband to call the ministry or the hospital. These two women become the eyes for their husbands, guiding them to the doctor's office or finding the phone numbers for them in the yellow book.

The girl with dark glasses is another example of emphasised femininity. "This woman could be classed as a prostitute" (9) and in the words of Connell "from heavy pornography and prostitution to soft-core advertising markets women's bodies as objects of consumption by men." (Connell 2009, 7) It is the hegemony which wants to see the raise of prostitution because prostitutes are completely compliant to male desires. Every single man and some married men in the novel want the girl with dark glasses; from the pharmacist assistance, to the thief, to the doctor, to the man with an eye patch and finally the rapists of the ward three on the left hand side of the asylum, they all want to spend a night with her. The important thing to pay attention to is that she has chosen to perform her gender like that. It is not by force that she has become a prostitute, she enjoys being one. She even uses dark glasses because she believes "that dark glasses give her an air of alluring mystery, capable of arousing the interest of men who were passing." (9) Her occupation not only satisfies male desires it satisfies "her material and other" needs: (9) "she lives as she pleases" (9).

By reaching the asylum the gender types change. The girl with dark glasses becomes a mother figure for the boy with the squint. Culture defines women "as caring, gentle, self-sacrificing and industrious, i.e. as good mothers" (Connell 2009, 3) and the girl with dark glasses becomes all of this in an instant. She takes "the food from her own mouth to give to [the boy]," (30) she places him in a bed next to her and gives the "safest place to him" (21) and when the hoodlums want money for food she says "think

of me as your mommy, I'll pay for us both" (52). She basically looks after him in every way possible from the very moment they step into the asylum.

However, it is not just her who plays a mother's role, the doctor's wife too looks after people. When the thief gets injured it is her who bandages the wound, and even though she "feels no real compassion" (21) she does not give up taking care of him (26).

In emphasised femininity cleaning and hygiene too, is the job for women. The wife of the first blind man cleans the mess her husband has caused, (3) the doctor's wife and the girl with the dark glasses "carry the cardboard containers into the yard, the empty flasks of milk, the paper cups, in a word, everything that could not be eaten" after people have finished eating, (39) the doctor's wife washes the woman with insomnia when she is dead and then washes her companions, (67) she has brought cosmetics "when she could never have imagined the condition in which she was now obliged to live," (52) later she finds a pair of scissors in her purse and she thinks immediately of trimming her husband's beard (52) and when they are freed from the asylum she again washes her group's clothes and shoes in a rainy day because "they were as dependent on her as little children on their mother" (81).

Emphasised femininity acts according to the set rules of the hegemony because compliance is its most important feature. After having taken all the jewellery and valuables of the wards the hoodlums send some of their men in search for the things that the blinds might have hidden from them. "No great fortune was discovered, but some watches and rings came to light, mostly belonging to men rather than women" (60) which shows that women have been more compliant and have done what they were asked to do.

It is the male power that defines what women should do and what not. Like any other group in the society women are objected to the decisions of others (men in this case), "these others are likely to produce definitions and decisions that serve their interests rather than [the women's]" (Marshment 125) and this is why when the hoodlums ask for women, a man proposes that "women volunteers should come forward for this service" because the men "are at risk of dying of hunger" (61). No man stands up for these women, after all it is not as if they have "asked for men" (61) and so women are obligated to do what their male ward-mates and the hegemony, i.e. the hoodlums, want them to do.

Before entering ward three and handing themselves to the hoodlums, the women spend time with their husbands or any other man they choose. It is as if "the men were desperately putting their mark on the women before they were taken off" (62) and the women were as cooperative as an emphasized woman should be. With the hoodlums too they become submissive and do what they are asked to do, they are like goods that

are handed over from one man to the next while they are referred to as "fillies" or "whores" (65).

B. Emphasized Femininity in *Seeing*

There are fewer women representing emphasized femininity in *Seeing*. The doctor's wife is emphasized when it comes to her husband but not for other men. When the superintendent enters her house to interrogate her she waits for her husband to come back from outside (112) and when the police comes to take her husband to the station she weeps and embraces him begging him to come home soon (160).

Another example of emphasized femininity can be the editor in chief's secretary of the newspaper the superintendent goes to visit. Connell believes that in a gender regime the gender patterns are established in a way that women are placed below men (Connell 2009, 72). While the editor and the director of the newspaper are both male, the lowest paid job goes to a female. It is this definition of gender regime that makes the superintendent yearn for a maid: on looking around his office, the superintendent wishes that the authority had "placed at the disposal of the agents who stay here a woman who would act as housekeeper, cook and chambermaid." (134) These norms have been so often advertised by different agencies like family, school and media that they have become internalized for nearly everyone that a woman is only good for cleaning, cooking and other low paid jobs.

II. Ambivalent Femininity

Ambivalent femininity can happen at any time, when for example a husband tells his wife to do something and she says no and does what she wants, she is not particularly rejecting the hegemony, or belittling the power of her husband, she is only being ambivalent. Any woman at any given time in history can enter or exit this type of femininity. With every disagreement with our male companions – father, brother, colleague, boss, husband, son and teacher – we enter this group and by surrendering to them we leave the group.

In more academic words, this type of femininity represents the mass of women that are neither accepting nor rejecting the dominative hegemonic principles. In ambivalent femininity, there is always the combination of compliance, resistance and cooperation. This leads to the freedom of women in particular regime such as the family but it does not "enable the development of an organic protest of directly challenging the dominative masculine hegemonic principles" (Howson 68-71).

A. Ambivalent Femininity in *Blindness*

Many times, during the course of the novel, the doctor's wife resists what the doctor asks her to do. When the doctor goes blind he orders her to leave him several times but she puts an end to their conversation by shouting "No" (12) and when in the asylum he

again asks her to leave she refuses so much that he gives up and says "I cannot force you" to which she replies "No, my love, you can't" (15).

When the hoodlums come to gather the women the first blind man says that he would not have his wife going because it is against his "manly pride" (61) but his wife replies "without a tremor in her voice, I'm no different from the others, I'll do whatever they do" (62) a woman who had until then been "so docile and respectful toward her husband" (62) gives an unexpected reply to her husband's desire and for the first time in the novel enters the ambivalent group.

B. Ambivalent Femininity in *Seeing*

Most of the women in *Seeing* are placed in the ambivalent group. From the presiding officer's wife to the doctor's wife, the women do not really try to subvert the hegemony rather they sometimes disagree with it and do what they see fit and sometimes cooperate with it and do what they are told.

When he sees no one is coming to vote, the presiding officer calls his wife to urge her to come but she says "she might go to the cinema" (7) rejecting what her husband has told her. Later in the day she comes to vote and when he speaks her name she feels in her heart "something that was perhaps the shadow of a former happiness" (9) however it was worth it to come just for that.

The doctor's wife or her fellow sisters in *Blindness* are no longer forming a protest group in *Seeing*. They have all turned to be ambivalent. When the superintendent knocks on the doctor's door and tells the doctor's wife he is there for an interrogation she does not go weak, instead she starts playing a game, answering each one of his questions with another question and when he asks if she wants he could wait outside until her husband comes home she sarcastically replies "nonsense, in what safer hands could anyone be than in those of the police" (110).

When the superintendent asks her about the fact that she did not go blind four years ago, the doctor comes to intervene but "his wife place[s] her hand on his arm" (112) and answers the question herself. She continuously rejects the accusation of being a criminal or a murderer, she believes she had done "an act of justice" and the person she had killed "wasn't a man [. . .] he was a bedbug." (112) She is so brave and bright that the superintendent congratulates the doctor on having a wife like her: "you have a remarkable wife sir" (113).

The questions about four years ago continue until out of nowhere the doctor's wife orders the superintendent to "stop beating about the bush and go straight down to what really interests the person who sent [him] here" (113) this blunt and to the point interpolation "disarms" the superintendent, he does not "have the courage to look at her" anymore so he gets up to leave (114).

The sergeant had the task to interrogate the wife of the first blind man. She too, like the doctor's wife, is quick with the questions, "she was no fool" (116). she finds it difficult to comprehend why in the time of the blank ballot crisis the police are investigating what happened four years ago. The way she answers the questions throws the sergeant completely off, not knowing what to say in response.

The inspector too is thrown away by the responses of the girl with dark glasses. When he brings up the question on the murder incident, the girl says that no one possibly knows more than her "since she herself was the murderer" (117). With these questions and answers, one can see the sisterhood of these women still intact. They are all still looking after each other.

With the situation becoming worse, the superintendent advises the doctor's wife to hide. He believes that the interior minister would publish the group picture and blame the doctor's wife for the conspiracy. The doctor's wife however remains calm. She still takes the dog of tears for a walk, she reads in solitude, and she looks as brave as ever (130) which makes the superintendent hope that the doctor "manages to persuade [her]" to leave (140). She does not leave her house though and one sees people gathering around her apartment shouting in her favour (153). She is such a headstrong woman that nothing and no one could persuade her to do what she does not want to do and that is precisely why there is no way to stop her than shooting her at the end (160).

III. Protest Femininity and Performative Subversion

Protest femininity challenges the foundation of gender relations which means both the relations among women (intra-relations) and relations between women and men (inter-relations) (Howson 71).

For Richard Howson protest femininity "represents gender knowledge and practice not specifically concerned with the *woman question* but social justice in gender." It has a characteristic that can elaborate the level of politics "to a new protest, critique and hegemony" (Howson 71).

However, one cannot talk about protest femininity and not think of performative subversion. Performative subversion is a term introduced by Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler believes that each individual performs a set of actions that constitute her or his gender. And s/he embodies that gender by repeating these actions over and over. Butler like Connell does not agree with the idea of norms washing over a person and making her/his gender. For her gender does not mean "received notions of masculinity and femininity" (Butler 1999, VII) rather she believes "a norm only persists as norm to the extent that is acted out in social practice" (Butler 2004, 48). One should perform the norms in one's daily social

rituals for the norms to reproduce and become idealised and every human being chooses what norms s/he wants to perform.

If we take what Butler proposes as granted then gender is not something internal or natural; rather it is a set of acts that are repeated continuously (Butler 1999, 178). This means that gender is a "challengeable and revisable reality. The hegemony sets out the rules, the media and other forms of gender agencies advertise it and each individual takes some of these rules and plays accordingly. This is why we have a huge variety of genders; however, some might reject these rules altogether and choose something else, something that is not 'intelligible' by the hegemony. "The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of identities cannot exist" because they simply do not follow the path that the hegemony has laid down (Butler 1999, 23-4). It is this oppressive law that distinguishes "the speakable from the unspeakable, the legitimate from the illegitimate" (Butler 1999, 84).

With the persistence of these 'unintelligible' gender types there would be an opportunity to subvert and rival the already accepted gender orders (Butler 1999, 24). Gender reversal is understood as any change, total or partial, "in social behaviour, work, clothing, mannerism, speech, self-designation or ideology which brings a person closer to another gender" (Petra Ramet 2; Bateson 198-203) A transgender for example will dress as drag, a woman like the woman with insomnia in *Blindness* would choose silence, and yet they are others who would take a pair of sharp scissors and stick them in the throat of the hegemony.

A. Protest Femininity in *Blindness*

"She is dead, and we are no longer the same women as when we left here," (66) it is with this sentence that protest femininity comes to being. However way before saying this sentence the women in *Blindness* have started to perform subversively. The doctor's wife says "No" and follows her husband around only to become his eyes, his guide and his provider.

When a new group enters the asylum, it is her who asks questions and orders the blind to answer "why don't the others speak up" (16) and when the thief dies it is her who advances alone and asks the soldiers at the gate to give her a spade. She insists and gets what she wants but that is not enough, she takes advantage of the opportunity and asks "what about our food." (29) When everyone is scared to go near the soldiers she not only advances them, she also questions them for different things and shows that she is a courageous woman, then "like a gravedigger" she slings the spade they have thrown her over her shoulder and goes back, a gesture that can only be attributed to men.

When it comes to burying the thief, she acts "as if she was guiding the men." (32) She is the one who becomes their leader. The blinds transform "her advice into maxim, a

dictum, into a doctrine, a rule of life" (43) and when she feels sad it is as if "there is no salvation for [them]" (35).

When the hoodlums steal their food, and set the rule "who wants to eat must pay" (51), it is the doctor's wife who again advances and asks question "how are we to pay, how are we going to proceed [. . .] where are we going to fetch the food, do we all go together or one at the time" (51) and when the hoodlum's leader threatens her by commenting "as for you [. . .] I won't forget your voice" she is brave enough to reply "nor I your face." (51) a reply that no man would have dared to give.

Like a detective, she spies on the group of hoodlums and makes up plans in her mind to destroy them, a feature that one does not expect from a woman who was only days ago in need of her husband explanation of a scientific term "within the grasp of a layman" (8). In David Frier's words "there is a particularly marked growth in the consciousness of [Saramago's] women who move from an initial position of willing submission to prevailing social structures [. . .] to a situation where by the end, they are seen as the symbol of hope" (Frier 48).

The girl with dark glasses, too, performs subversively. The thief uses any rude word he knows and it is her who protests and tells him "to watch [his] language" (18) and when touched inappropriately by the thief she kicks him in the thigh and injures him because "what sort of a woman does he think [she is]." (19) Later on, when the taxi driver makes fun of having an eye specialist among them by saying "just our luck to end up with the one doctor who can do nothing for us" it is her who answers sarcastically "we're also landed with a taxi-driver who can't take us anywhere." (23) She is always ready with a repartee, a feature that is not suitable for women to have.

In other wards too, there are the women who act more rationally than men. When the food containers fail to arrive, it is a feminine voice that says "then we have to ration the food that might arrive" (34) and when they are asked "who is giving the orders here" it is the same feminine voice that says "unless we organize ourselves in earnest, hunger and fear will take over." (34) Although it is believed that men "take care of the intellectual function" (Jackson and Scott 5) we see the women of *Blindness* being sharper than their male companions. And when the hoodlums order "bring us women" (60) among all the harsh arguments there is a woman who "passes the final judgement" and says "I'll go" (61).

Since "sisterhood is powerful and women together can make things happen" (Connell 1987, 273) women in *Blindness* form a sisterhood or what Adrienne Rich refers to as 'lesbian continuum' by which she means "a range of 'woman-identified' experience, including the sharing of rich inner life, bonding against male tyranny and practical support." (Rich 23) The seven women of the first ward on the right-hand side form a line with each one holding the shoulder of the one in front of her and leave the ward to go to the hoodlums. But on their way back we see that they have changed: "Deaf, blind,

silent, tottering on their feet, with barely enough will-power not to let go of the hand of the woman in front, the hand, not the shoulder, as when they had come," (66) they are no longer the same women rather they are "the only woman in the world with two eyes and six [bodies]" (101).

The "finely pointed scissors" (52) are no longer good for trimming someone's beard; they must be put to better use. It is right that the doctor's wife is "only a woman" (57) but the thought of killing the hoodlum's leader had "already been there before, somewhere or other, and only the words were missing" (56).

She kills the leader by a stab in his throat and frees the women from the third ward on the left-hand side "let's go, let's go, said the doctor's wife, pushing any blind woman whom she encountered ahead of her. She helped them to their feet, repeated, quickly, quickly" (69) and on her way out she threatens the rapists, saying "Remember what I said the other day, that I'd never forget his face, and from now on think about what I am telling you, for I won't forget your faces either" (69).

But the food remains with the hoodlums, if the rest of the asylum wants food they have to go and "collect the food with [their] own hands" (71). The doctor's wife has a better idea though "Not only the men will go, but also the women, we shall return to that place where they humiliated us so that none of that humiliation may remain, so that we might rid ourselves of it" (71). "Wherever you go, I shall go" is the response she gets from the women and they all stand up in the face of hegemony like sisters.

"In this place sex is of no account, therefore don't forget the women [. . .] women are born again in one another;" (74) this is why when their protest for food faces bullets and their companions get injured it is the job of yet another woman to put an end to all this. This time a woman from the second ward on the right-hand side brings a lighter which has a "tinny dragger of light as bright as the sharp point of a pair of scissors" (77) and sets the hoodlums and the entire asylum on fire and frees not just her sisters but all her male inmates while "her own body [feeds] the bonfire" (77).

The women of *Blindness* perform their roles larger than what is expected of a woman – or else what sex role theory expects of women. The fragile, weeping, dependent, uneducated women of the beginning of the novel become breadwinners, leaders, fighters, protectors, survivors, providers and saviours of the end of the novel. When no man dares to face the hegemony, there is a woman who by "using expressions that formed no part of her usual vocabulary" such as 'hell' (82) and by wearing men's jacket (86) and performing subversively becomes "the thread which links [the blind] to that human mankind" (110) until they regain their sights and she becomes free of "all her mental resistance" (117).

B. Protest Femininity in *Seeing*

Putting the major protest of the inhabitants of the nameless city in *Seeing* which was casting blank votes and going against their contemporary hegemony aside, we do not face much protest in this novel. Especially on the part of women there is no protest in the sense of subverting the hegemony, however there are two instances that women perform subversively to what hegemony has ordered them to do.

After the first election, the police force imprisons five hundred suspects and later attaches them to lie-detector machines to see if they have in fact cast blank votes. After repeating this procedure for "hundreds of times" there comes "a pretty young woman" (26) challenging the secret service agent by saying that it is not a lie that these machines show, rather all these people go nervous on just hearing the word blank and if you do not believe this attach yourself to the machine. The agent although shocked by this challenge accepts the offer and does what he is told. The girl takes a deep breath and then in a rush "utter[s] one word, Blank" (26). The pins of the machine start to work and draw lines on the paper, she then asks "tell me please, did you cast a blank vote" (26) the agent says no but the machine shows otherwise. When he blames the woman for the results and accuses her of making him nervous she points out that that is exactly what she wanted to demonstrate. She wanted to prove that if this way of interrogation continues the people will all continue to lie when they are telling the truth and tell the truth when they lie (27).

Later on, the hegemony orders the collectors to go on strike with the hope that the entire city would soon smell like rubbish. It is at this moment that "from every house in the city there emerged women armed with brooms" (49) who swept their own patch and the street because they "were not just looking after their own interests, but after the interest of the community as well." (49) The action of these women causes the collectors to come back to work and the minister to border this act on "criminal complicity" (50) what they have done is against the desires of the hegemony.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to analyse the different types of femininity in Jose Saramago's sequel. As in any other type of gender, one can move through and among the femininity types. In *Blindness* for example, Saramago manages to show the doctor's wife movement in and out of all the analysed femininities. She starts the story by being emphasised and complicit, later on she moves to the ambivalent group by not doing what her husband asks her to do so she can prepare a protesting group of females at the end of the story.

Judith Butler proposes the term "performative subversion" and defines it as the set of actions that an individual chooses to perform in order to subvert the already established norms in a society. With a quick look at the story we see that the doctor's wife's performance of her gender changes over time. While we consider her at first to be an ordinary woman: dependent, caring, fragile, and polite we are led to see her

transformation and to find her at the end as a headstrong, courageous, brave and subversive woman in men's clothes, speaking in their manner and who has become the ultimate hope, and the saviour of the blind.

It is because of her different performance that she gets killed in *Seeing*. If she had played the gender game by its rules and had listened to her husband when he asked her not to tell everyone she could see, none of this would have happened because no one would have known that she is different. The contemporary masculine hegemony does not need a different woman. What it needs is an emphasised one: the more the merrier.

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