



# The Sad Man in the Attic: Gendered Grieving in Contemporary American Novels

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## ABSTRACT

*The representation of grieving mothers and fathers in American literature is shaped by gendered perceptions of how women and men should mourn the loss of their children in different ways. In what could be described as the surveillance of the modes of mourning maternal characters were granted more space to display emotions publicly while paternal characters were not. The scrutiny of public display of emotions by men due to perceptions of masculinity was challenged in two texts published in the 1990s. Although Jacquelyn Mitchard's *The Deep End of the Ocean* (1996) and John Irving's *A Widow for One Year* (1998) adhere at times to the representation of traditional norms of gendered grieving, both novels challenge the association of excessive emotionality to women and rewrite the narrative into what can be described as the sad man in the attic who shows his emotions in some instances in the narrative. Like the mad woman who lives in the attic in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) who sneaks into Jane's room, the grieving father displays his emotions publicly in some parts of the novels then hides them in an attic of masculine conventions and expectations. The two texts, along with an earlier American text, question perceptions of masculine modes of grieving that is shaped by the norms of gendered grieving. The texts challenge these perceptions by shifting male grieving, making it a public display of emotions and associating it with hysteria and feminized modes of sentimentality.*

**KEYWORDS:** *motherhood-contemporary American fiction- grief- masculinity-hysteria-sentimentality*

## INTRODUCTION

The process of grieving as an emotional response for losing a loved one has been represented in various literary forms in American literature. These representations however can be shaped by gendered norms in which society monitor show women grief differently from men and that mothers grieve differently from fathers. In this discursive gendering of grieving, mothers are represented to be extremely emotional about motherhood while male characters are not represented with the same degree of sentimentality. The effect of perceptions of masculinity shapes men's modes of grieving because of social surveillance that maintains gender difference. Like *Jane Eyre's* mad woman in the attic, the emotions of these men are hidden in an attic of a social code of conduct designated for men's emotions. The sad man hides his emotions and grief to distance himself from a feminized mode of grieving like the mothers in the novels. What I propose in this paper is that the texts published in the latter half of the Twentieth century suggest other nuances to the gendering of grief. These representations challenge gendered grieving and subvert the discourse about the emotional woman who publicly willows in her grief and the man who hides his grief.

Instead, these representations suggest that men can show emotions publicly like women when it comes to grieving. Like the mad woman in *Jane Eyre* (1847), his emotions can be glimpsed in several instances (Brontë, 1988, p.193). It appears suddenly and defies all restraints only to be hidden again in the attic of masculine manifestations of grief.

The surveillance on gender difference when it comes to mourning a child is activated through monitoring the experience of public grieving by showing emotions and sentiments for women or by hiding grief in the private realms of experience away from the watchful eye of society. The novels discussed in this paper represent maternal characters that publicly experience grief after losing a child. Grieving maternal characters in the representative novels resist performing maternal ideals of devoted love and care. They even may resort to abandonment of their other children. The image of the grieving, rejecting mother highlights an organic element in patriarchal discourse which is the idea of feminine emotionality and women's tendencies towards hysteria. This juxtaposition of the grieving, rejecting mother who mourns a dead child and rejects the living one/s also is combined with the image of the grieving male character



that displays signs of what is considered to be feminized forms of sentimentality and even hysteria. Repressed forms of masculine emotionality become conflated with feminine forms of feminine sentimentality to create fresh perspectives on gendered displays of emotion that abandon any socially assigned forms of mourning in the representative novels.

The focus of my analysis will mainly be on two texts that represent the rejection of motherhood after child loss. One of which is John Irving's *A Widow for One Year* (1998). The novel tells the story of a woman who loses two sons in a car accident. She, then, decides to have a third child. Consumed with grief and struggling with feelings of rejection towards her daughter, Marion Cole abandons her daughter. She leaves to Canada to start a career as a novelist. Jacquelyn Mitchard's *The Deep End of the Ocean* (1996) is a narrative about a mother whose son gets kidnapped. Devastated, Beth Cappadora struggles with her relationships with her other son and daughter while she tries to find her lost son. While the character finds her son towards the end of the novel, she gives him up to his adoptive father, the husband of the woman who kidnapped him. Both texts represent images of the bereaved mother who struggles with her subjectivity as a mother as a result of losing a child

## **GENDERED BEREAVEMENT**

The gendering of grieving in the novels in one way distinguishes feminine from masculine forms of grief to emphasize the social surveillance that monitors adhering to specific norms in the performance of these modes of grief. Both narratives draw a pattern of trauma that culminates to a state of emotional paralysis when it comes to grieving mothers. For instance, Marion's love for her sons feeds into rejecting her daughter because of the trauma of child loss. Compared to her husband's, Marion's grief is portrayed to be more powerful. Marion "almost hated Ted for absorbing his grief better than she could absorb hers. What Marion could only guess was that Ted might have hated her for the superiority of her sadness" (Irving, 1998, p.47-8). Juxtaposing the grieving maternal character with the grieving paternal one, the mother is portrayed to be celebrating her sentiments, describing them as *superior*. The ideal of maternal love as a superior sentiment is reproduced as another patriarchal construct which is the concept of feminine excess of emotion. Describing her grief as *superior* highlights the irony within this particular maternal ideal. When maternal love is maintained through memory it becomes an affliction that makes Marion envy how Ted processes his emotions in a different way. The narrator in describing how the father's grief appears to be processed 'better' than the mother's grief creates a biased narrative of gendered grieving.

The gendered approach to representing grief can be traced to the social perspective on grieving. Jenny Hockey labels the tendency towards the gendering of grieving as an "AN EMOTIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR" (1997 p. 91). Hockey points out:

A gendered approach to the ways in which death, dying and disposal are viewed in that it highlights the masculinist bias within the process of representation. It provides us with a way of thinking about the representation of the aftermath of death, its grievous losses, through images and accounts of women in mourning and in grief...in a society where grief is often experienced in private and signalled in public, such representations play a core role in illuminating that which, for many members of society, is a threatening yet hidden aspect of life. (Hockey,92-3)

Gendering grief is another level of othering of an already *othered* process of death. Threatening and mysterious, grieving is assigned to women in representation as part of a discourse of othering that removes associations of death from the masculine sphere. Hockey also suggests that grief is experienced privately but signalled publicly implying a process of social surveillance of grief according to gender norms. The notion that grief is signalled publicly is an affirmation of this surveillance on both men and women. But the experience of grief privately implies that it belongs to the private realm, where women are located. Marion is assigned a role in a gendered division of grieving because of the portrayal of her superiority of sadness.

To highlight society's control of how women should act, an excessively emotional response to experiencing grief is portrayed by maternal characters in the novels. The relation between women and a specific mode of grieving is structured by a discourse of excessive feminine sentimentality. This discursive representation of women in American culture is analysed by Lauren Berlant in "The Female Woman" (1992). She discusses the writings of Fanny Fern and Harriet Jacobs as part of an embracing of feminine sentimentality or what she calls a "sentimental domestic culture [where] the most explicit expression of this elastic 'feminine' form is the 'complaint'" (Berlant, 1992, p. 268). Berlant's reading of the discourse of a feminine mode of sentimentality displayed through the *complaint* is taken further when she writes:

The female complaint is thus an aesthetic "witnessing" of injury [...] the complaint often relies on the bribe of its sentimental reflex, representing masculinist practices in a feminist way, but accepting as semi-fixed and even describable the domestic axes of patriarchal culture in memories of the mother and dreams of marital bliss. (Berlant 268-9)

Witnessing the injury and its sentimental reaction takes sentimentality from the private to the public realm. The discourse of feminine sentimentality encompasses issues of feminine emotionality and a gendered "sentimental reflex". It is dedicated to a patriarchal conception of the feminine ideal of the wife and mother. The portrayal of gendered bereavement and excessive emotionality of the mothers in the novels analysed in this paper is a part of forming the discourse about the sentimental reflex. Sentimentality is

established in the core of patriarchal discourse as an integral part of the feminine ideal.

This specific discursive association within American culture is reviewed again by Berlant in *The Female Complaint* (2008) where she suggests that women have been associated and identified with sentimentality even in the public sphere. According to Berlant:

‘women’s culture’ is distinguished by a view that the people marked by femininity already have something in common and are in need of a conversation that feels intimate, revelatory and a relief even when it is mediated by commodity, even when it is written by strangers who might not be women. (Berlant, 2008, p. viii-ix).

Whether it is formed by or about women, this commodified discourse about emotional women creates a cultural norm that is supposed to stabilize how women perceive themselves, as being connected through their emotions. The excessive emotionality of the bereaved maternal characters in the novels is part of this discourse. The delineation of women who suffer and publicly share an experience of suffering, reacting in similar ways, and their ambivalence about mothering as a result of trauma, contributes to these associations of women with sentimentality. Gendering bereavement in these novels is a reiteration of the discourse of feminine sentimentality.

Emotional responsibility is associated with women as part of the socially assigned role of maintaining family life. Casting women in the role of the *emotional* gender in patriarchal discourse further binds them with emotional labour. According to this labour division:

[w]omen are not only expected to be compassionate and understanding, but to act both as teachers of compassion and surrogates for other’s refusals or incapacities to feel appropriately and intelligently (Berlant, 2008, p. 171).

Normalizing the image of the emotional woman feeds into society’s standards of the maternal ideal. It structures both the patriarchal tropes of the feminine/emotional mother as well as the masculine/logical father.

The gender-based approach to the maternal ideal and grieving can be read in *The Deep End of the Ocean*. Beth’s husband berates her for her sadness. He claims that she has “made a career out of being unhappy...You were always waiting for an excuse to be miserable” (Mitchard, 1999, p. 455). Her character adopts this same discourse when Beth states that “Pat grieved for Ben as a normal person would grieve” (4-5). Although the characters’ statements do not associate grief with gender, both characters adopt a social standard of normalcy of grief that is associated with men. This perceived *normal* level of grief is juxtaposed with the othering of her own grief. It redefines her grief as an excess that surpasses the normal in the eyes of society. Defining her sentiments as a ‘career’ suggests her devotion to her sadness. It implies that women’s devotion to their sentimentality and

emotions involves a state of eager anticipation to share these emotions with the world.

Grieving as a public performance of women being witnessed by society and subjected to its scrutiny runs throughout *The Deep End of the Ocean*. It is marked publicly because the maternal characters’ grief disconnects them from their surroundings. For instance, years after her son’s kidnapping, Beth describes how she felt upon arriving at the hotel where her child was kidnapped. She “felt the thump and shift of the avalanche, heard its creak” (Mitchard 237). Her sadness reaches a physical domain. She hears it and lives it again through her memory. It is a reflection of her separation from her surroundings because she is consumed by her grief. Although she is accompanied by a friend, Beth only hears her grief as loudly as an avalanche that threatens to pull her down into a deeper into more sadness and suffering. The *avalanche* as a recurring motif in this representation marks a drastic change in the landscape of motherhood as it restructures the maternal ideal of the loving mother when she grieves.

The effect of a consuming mode of grief which causes depression and separates the mother from her surroundings is also portrayed in Irving’s novel. When Marion Cole is asked by her lover about the accident that killed her children, she is paralysed by that memory. The intensity of her emotions is drawn in the text as a death-like state when:

it seemed to Eddie that Marion’s heart had stopped... her spine was straight, her back rigid, her shoulders square...her eyes, which were open but distant: her lips, which when she slept were full and parted were thin and closed.

‘I’m sorry,’ Eddie whispered. ‘I’ll never ask you again.’ But Marion remained as she was – her face a mask, her body a stone. (Irving, 1998, p. 111).

Petrified by her sadness, the maternal character is reduced to a living dead state which is reiterated in several instances the novel. Eddie describes her as a “zombie” (Irving 58). She is isolated from the people around her by the scale and intensity of her sadness. Her emotion is welded onto her body. The representation suggests that she stepped into a living-death frame of mind as if she is thrusting the experience upon herself and punishing herself with her love for her dead sons. Engulfed by her emotions, the character is drawn in a way that makes her produce a heightened emotional reaction to losing a child informed by a discourse of female sentimentality.

When women who resist the maternal ideal are cast as hysterics, this reflects negative side of the patriarchal discourse about feminine sentimentality. A paradox of a feminine sentimentality that turns love into hate in case of bereavement pathologizes the grieving mothers as abnormal hysterics. Associating female characters with hysteria, specifically the diagnosis relating sexual insatiability to



hysteria, is introduced through a Freudian approach that that existed prior to 1990s. References to hysteria are structured through a gendered discourse because the word hysteria 'derives from the Greek term for the womb'(Ussher 18).In the analysis of the case of Frau Emmy Von N., Freud associate's tendencies towards hysteria with femininity as well as sexual repression, which suggest a similar pattern to what is represented in Irving's novel. Freud's patient analysed in *Studies on Hysteria*(1895)is a forty-year-old widow who suffered from "depression and insomnia" as started her treatment with Freud in 1889 (Breuer and Freud, 1974, p. 105).Freud writes that this patient" has been living a year in sexual abstinence. Such circumstances are among the most frequent causes of tendency to anxiety" (148).Although she was not a grieving mother, the gender of Freud's patient, her grief and sexual abstinence are all notions that feed into the discourse about women's tendency towards hysteria.

This association seeped into twentieth century American representation of maternal characters. In a *Widow for One Year* Ruth "recognizes that measure of melancholy and continued hysteria which was often detectable in her mother's voice" (Irving 17). Marion's grief is associated with hysteria even in the perception of a four-year-old character. The association of a grieving woman with a mode of hysteria that affects her behaviour as well as her tone of voice goes further in the text to associate the maternal character with sexual insatiability. Both grieving maternal characters, Marion and Beth, resort to having affairs while they were grieving which highlights the pattern in the texts that relates sexuality, grieving and hysteria. Marion sexual instability id portrayed when she has an affair with a teenager who makes love to her twice a day for six weeks.

Although allusions to hysteria and grieving in the representative narratives rely on out dated perspectives on femininity that were introduced in the nineteenth century or even as far as Ancient Greek philosophy, Jane M. Ussher in *The Madness of Women*(2001)cites more recent evidence of associations between femininity and hysteria:

An gold and colleagues claimed in 1999:

In later life (after age 55), the female excess of depressions diminishes; mostly because of falling rates in women at a time when their oestrogen levels are again low. (Ussher, 2001, p.20)

Perspectives gendering feminine sentimentality are embedded in patriarchal discourse that continues to survive and seep into more recent texts. A discourse about the female body's impact on a woman's mind and psychological state is riddled with suggestions of hysterical tendencies that are manifested during puberty of menopause. This deterministic medical discourse assigns a tendency towards an excess of sentimentality to women.

The association between femininity and hysteria discussed by Ussher in *The Madness of Women* was also addressed

by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Mad Woman in the Attic*(1979). The authors discuss writings by women in the nineteenth century and question the stereotypical representations of woman as either the angel or the witch. Nineteenth century representations of women's hysteria and the tendency towards mental illness are manifested as a cultural" infection" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 52).This infection is caused by the tendency towards perceiving women as hysterics:

Nineteenth century culture seems to have actually admonished women to *be* ill. In other words, the "female disease" from which Victorian woman suffered were not always a by-product of their training in femininity; they were the goals of such training. (54)

Indeed, what the authors describe as an infection of patriarchal perception of hysterical women in the nineteenth century literature has survived in more recent representation of the women in Irving and Mitchard's texts. This infectious representation finds its way into the literature of the twentieth century to shape the representation of grieving maternal characters in the narratives into becoming part of a culture of "female invalidism" (Gilbert and Gubar 54).

### THE SAD MAN IN THE ATTIC

Grieving as an event displayed publicly for society to observe and decide its normalcy has produced representations of grief that are shaped with gender-biased discourse. This representational approach, however, is revised in parts of Irving's novel. The revision is specifically suggested through a reversal of the emotional division of labour when it comes to grieving. While both novels are published in the 1990s, the redefinition of the emotional division of labour can be a reaction to the public view of masculinity in the United States in the 1980s. Susan Faludi writes in *Backlash: The Undeclared war against American Women* (1991) that in "the '80s, male nerves rebelled once more as "a decline in American manhood" became the obsession of male clergy, writers, politician, and scholars all along the political spectrum" (Faludi 78). The focus on the recovery of a lost masculinity in the 1980s due to feminism shaped society's views and created an urgency to reverse what was perceived as the emasculation of American men by re-establishing traditional gender norms. By the influence of this class of men on media the reaction intensified in the 1990s. John Beynon writes in *Masculinities and Culture*(2002):

in the 1990s it has become far more masculinist, seeking to articulate men's concerns and reverse what hey perceive as the continued emasculation of men. (The 700,000 'Promise Keeper' who descended on Washington DC in 1997 as part of a crusade to re-establish patriarchal 'godly masculinity' bore witness to the very strong feelings held in various quarters in this matter.) (Beynon, 2002, p. 142)

Beynon also refers to Robert Bly and his Sibling Society (1997) that “calls for “the recovery of some of the old male certainties and bemoans the lack of masculine presence in what he terms the United States” (Beynon 142). This atmosphere of fever to maintain gender standards that guard against what is perceived as the emasculation of men through the feminist movement and its role in redefining the social regulation of physical as well as emotional labour is when the narratives were produced. The representation of grieving as a public spectacle that follows social accepted norms in both novels is shaped within this atmosphere of surveillance of threats to American masculinity.

The representation of the paternal character in *The Deep End of the Ocean* is what can be read as a stereotype of the Italian-American breadwinner who shields himself with a façade of hyper-masculinity that makes him less susceptible to the overt sentimentality of grief required by women in his society. The image of the masculine father in Mitchard’s narrative contrasts with a less emphasized masculinity of Ted Cole’s character in *A Widow for One Year*. Irving’s novel deploys a more typically feminine mode of sentimentality in the father’s character suggesting that he takes part in the emotional labour that is culturally associated with mothers and women. Aside from the association between Marion and child abandonment, the paternal character displays an emotional attentiveness that alludes to the feminized relationship between mother and child. An example of this is when Ted Cole shows his daughter the photos of her dead brothers and he patiently relates a story to each photo and father and daughter have a conversation about death. “They had a conversation of this kind almost every day. With her mother, Ruth had similar conversations -only shorter” (Irving 36). The emotional attentiveness displayed by the father towards his child reverses the socially assigned role of the mother and associates it with the figure of the father.

The excessive emotionality attributed to Marion’s character when she is in a petrified, zombie-like state due to her grief, is transferred to the character of the father as well. In one instance, Ted Cole describes his reaction to his wife’s attempt to retrieve her son’s shoe from the car wreck immediately after the crash that took her sons’ lives. His wife is not aware that the shoe is still attached to her son’s severed leg. When Marion goes to retrieve her son’s shoe, Ted “wanted to stop her, but - talk about ‘turned to stone’- he felt at that moment absolutely paralyzed. He could not move, he could not even speak. And so he allowed his wife to discover that her son’s shoe was still attached to a leg” (Irving 206). His reaction as a sign of his shock is similar to Marion’s, who is also described in the novel as turned to “stone” (111). His ability to move and speak crumbles in the face of emotions and grief. Talking about a “leg” is a rupture in Ted’s memory when the leg is no longer his son’s leg but is only a fragment of a body that has become detached from his paternal experience.

An earlier representation of the gendered grieving process

that suggests a similar pattern of reversed stereotypes associated with grieving can be found in Judith Guest’s *Ordinary People* (1976). The text features a conflicting relationship between a mother and her son after her first-born son is killed in a boating accident. Calvin, the father in the novel is caught in the middle of the conflict between mother and son. The relationship between the son and his parents after the death of his brother suggests a reversal of the role of the emotionally attentive parent that is more typically associated with mothers. The conflicts between the mother and her son end when the mother leaves her family and travels to Europe without declaring the date of her return. The reversal of the emotional roles of the father and mother in this particular narrative offers what can be read as a feminist perspective that revises the association of excessive emotionality with the image of the mother in patriarchal discourse.

The father’s emotional attentiveness to his son after his suicide attempt suggests that the emotional care aspect of parenting in *Ordinary People* went through a process of reversal of gender roles. The plot is introduced with Calvin being engulfed by anxiety due his son’s mental health. Calvin, the father, contemplates his role in his son’s life by taking the:

[r]esponsibility. That is fatherhood. You cannot afford to miss any signs because that is how it happens; somebody holding too much inside, somebody else missing signs...

Now that he is home again, things are different. The responsibilities seem enormous. Staggering. His job alone, nobody else’s. Motherhood is different somehow...  
*Your mother wants me to tell you, you have a closetful of decent clothes.* (Guest, 1976, p. 8-9).

Comparing his status in the family to a mother’s role, Calvin in this extract relates emotional responsibility with fatherhood as suggested by his guilt over failing to notice signs of his son’s suicide. He is attentive to his son’s struggles because he thinks his son holds too much pain inside. The father is willing to take more responsibility for his son’s health to prevent him from another suicide attempt. The mother’s wish that he should dress better suggests a distant mother who is not connected to her son on an emotional level as much as the father. All she cares about is his appearance more than his mental wellbeing. When the paternal character reports this wish as the mother’s wish, this indicates the father’s aversion to taking responsibility for the material aspect of parenting and rather focusing on the emotional aspect of it. Although taking care of the material aspect of parenting like making sure the children wear clean clothes is perceived traditionally as a feminine role, the father’s dedication as the emotional patriarch of the family is a revision of a role retained for women as emotional carers.

The paternal character’s emotional attentiveness to the son is proposed again when the psychiatrist asks:

"So who's worrying about you?"

"My father, mostly. This is his idea."

"How about your mother? Isn't she worried?"

"No."

"How come?"

"She's- I don't know, she's not a worrier". (Guest 39)

The son's perspective on how his parents react to his problems is another delineation of the emotionally attentive father as opposed to the distant passive mother. What I can call as the emotional emancipation of paternal characters and the role reversal is alluded to in Guest's novel when the mother berates her husband for his excessive attention to their son's feelings. She tells him "[h]e's not your little boy," she says. "He'll be eighteen years old next month. For some reason, you want to think he needs your constant concern and protection. You worry over his every reaction. He smiles and you smile. He frowns and you baby him-" (Guest 119). The father's attention suggests a reversal of the gendered roles of parenting because the father has an emotional and caring connection that is culturally expected from mothers. The emotional attentiveness shown through attention to details like a smile and a frown suggest the extent of the paternal character's responsiveness juxtaposed with the mother's distance, if not callousness. What makes the mother's speech ironic is that she wants her son to *man up* and wear what John Beynon calls a "neuro-muscular armour" (Beynon 15). This draws gendered roles that are associated with specific modes of emotionality in an ironic way. The mother in this representation appears to be harbouring a wish to be wearing that armour because of her emotional unresponsiveness to her son.

Guest's narrative deploys emotionality as an approach of structuring masculinity. This is implied by allusions to the son's hysteria. His excessive sentimentality as a reaction to his brother's death and his subsequent suicide attempt highlight this aspect of his character. While the mother's character is represented as a hysteric "to the point of madness" due to her obsession with cleanliness and order rather than grief and bereavement, her son is also aligned with the narrative of hysteria which revises traditional gender associations in the novel (Guest, 1976, p. 83). The impact of grief is incorporated as a narrative about male characters like the brother, as well as the father, rather than the mother. Conrad asks:

So, how does a Christian deal with grief? There is no dealing; he knows that much. There is simply the stubborn, mindless hanging on until it is over. Until you are through it. But something has happened in the process. The old definition, the neat, knowing pigeonholes have disappeared. Or else they no longer apply. (Guest 48)

Aligning male characters with hysteria in this passage is suggested when he describes his grief as being mindless. It also refers to his mental health being affected by trauma. It also suggests how trauma can fragment memory when 'pigeonholes' that contain memory no longer exist or function.

Published in the 1970s and shaped by feminist politics Guest's text attempts to change social perspective on son masculinity. Beynon comments on the movement toward "changing views on masculinity" during the time of the novel's publication. He writes:

It is not only feminists who have attacked masculinity since the 1960s. In the 1970s some men themselves began to call into question, particularly within the so-called men's movement in North America, with their call for male liberation (to parallel 'women's lib'). Traditional masculinity began to be regarded as a 'neuro-muscular armour' that forced them to suppress tenderness, emotion and any signs of vulnerability. (Beynon, 2002, p. 15)

Moving towards stressing the importance of masculine emotionality rather than suppressing it might have been one of the factors that influenced the representation of emotional men in *Ordinary People*. The representational shift marks the generational shift for post-Baby Boomers. What used to be perceived as the counterculture actually emerged to replace traditional social perceptions.

These representations that reverse the gendered roles of grieving highlight what can be perceived as *the sad man in the attic* rather than the mad woman in the attic. The mad hysteric woman hidden in the attic who shows herself to Jane Eyre is in a way the emotions of these grieving men. Although their emotions are not associated with hysterics or pathology, these emotions are considered a taboo that needs to be hidden. Their sadness is equivalent to the woman's madness in the way of being an excess of emotions that needs to be tucked away from society's watchful gaze.

This masculine emotionality oftentimes suppressed and hidden from society's surveillance is uncovered by these representations. Ted Cole's turning to stone after his son's death, and Calvin Jarret's emotional attentiveness to his suicidal son after his other son dies, in some ways reclaim and emphasize the emotional side of fatherhood. While the texts still reiterate narratives that emphasize women's sentimentality, they also revise these narratives by suggesting that men can show an excess of emotions or even hysteria. This excess although hidden from society is exposed through grief and finds its way into the public eye. The emotional division of labour goes through a process that exceeds cultural limitations and goes beyond what is expected of the grieving American father.

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