

## Editorial

## MEDIATING VIOLENCE: ENTANGLEMENTS OF FICTION AND FACT

The present theme issue delivers a selection of articles presented at the *Mediating Violence: Popular Culture and Contemporary Adaptations* Conference, held on 5 and 6 June 2025, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, as a part of the *Violence in Contemporary Adaptations and Popular Culture* research project (2024–2025). United in their explorations of violence in contemporary media and popular culture, the articles collected here offer a range of views on different representations of violence and point to the effects it has on individual's (protagonists') lives. The articles jointly show how contemporary artefacts oscillate between the said forms of violence, revealing their deep social, political, and ideological foundations.

According to Peter Fifield, violence—in both its physical and psychological form—has always been a driving force in creative imagination (116). From the classic pagan and Christian texts, the “creative ways in which to inflict and suffer pain” have long inspired authors, yet they have become “particularly interesting” in the modern age (Fifield 116). Spanning across numerous genres and encompassing many available media, contemporary adaptations and popular culture often depict violence, terrifying events, or, in the case of videogames, encourage players to participate in violent acts.

The ubiquitousness of violence and the proliferation of its representations in literature and media are explored through a broad range of theoretical approaches and perspectives, mainly relying on Michel Foucault's concepts of biopolitics, docile bodies, the Panopticon, and administered sexuality, but also Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, Giorgio Agamben's concept of the living dead, Kristeva's theory of the abject, and feminist theory, among others. While Foucault's theory of biopolitics may have been criticised by many, including Agamben, Jürgen Habermas, and Slavoj Žižek, these articles point to its continuous relevance, since violence is no longer merely repressive but also productive: it is “working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces

under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 136). The main concern of the articles are the ways in which systemic violence operates in modern society and media; it does not only appear explicitly but also insidiously, through numerous internalized, subtle forms of its own normalization, inciting self-harm and even suicide under the prospect of ideas of self-improvement, empowerment, and the right (or demand) to lead a healthy, beautiful life.

The gendered dimension of violence presents itself as a recurring concern, especially in articles dealing with domestic violence and abuse. Feminists have long emphasized that violence against women is deeply rooted within pervasive patriarchal structures that instill and perpetuate it through a plethora of insidious practices. In both interpersonal relationships and a wider position of women in society, the social pressure to form romantic attachments and conform to ideals of youth and beauty—perpetuated by media and the male gaze—enables many harmful practices to take place. These forms of self-inflicted violence complicate traditional distinctions between victim and perpetrator, since individuals become agents of their own discipline under the influence of pervasive cultural norms.

More specifically, in his review article, titled “Domestic Violence and Abuse in Stephen King’s *Dolores Claiborne*,” Vedran Domjanović delves into domestic violence and abuse by engaging with Cathy Caruth’s theory of trauma and the socially condoned male violence against female/child victims. Domjanović reviews the four most common types of abuse—physical, emotional, sexual, and economic—as perpetrated by the female protagonist’s husband and suffered by her as well as her two children, an underage son and daughter. The article expands the existing literature on the novel, one of King’s many works that exhibit domestic violence and abuse perpetrated and suffered by his characters, by focusing not only on the titular character and the trauma she suffers at the hands of her husband, but also her children’s suffering. Most notably, next to exhibiting the profound and long-lasting effects of abuse and trauma on women, the article highlights the trauma experienced by the protagonist and the abuser’s son, thematizing the issue of systemic neglect and minimization of male victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Exploring intertextuality in the genres of dystopia, YA dystopia, and several canonical texts, including the Bible, Csaba Maczelka’s article “Young Adult Dys-

topia, Intertextuality, and Biblical Hope in Sandra Newman's *Julia*" uses violence as a common lens for the analysis. Highlighting Sandra Newman's reliance on the conventions of YA dystopia, a contemporary genre that is as violent as it is popular, in her feminist adaptation of Orwell's canonical novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the article discusses gendered forms of violence disregarded by Orwell. Tying Newman's two female protagonists to women in canonical texts, such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *Ulysses*, Maczelka highlights the need for an ongoing inspection of female characters authored by men, and the forms of violence they suffer.

Further refracting biopolitical surveillance and abuse through a gendered lens, Valentina Markasović's article "Fairest of Them All": Exploitation in *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) and *Snow White* (2025)" explores the biopolitical violence in two recent film adaptations of the popular fairy tale. Building on Foucault's theory of docile bodies, which encompasses both overt violence and discursive domination, the article shows how the evil queens in both films exploit their subjects. While the queen in the former film relies on literal torture and murder, the queen in the latter wields power through discourse, using it to dominate her subjects. Moreover, the practices that allow the two rulers to commodify and exploit people as resources is revealed to be in close conjunction with patriarchy.

In the article "Alteration until Annihilation: Biopolitical Aspects of Beautification in *The Substance*," Ljubica Matek discusses the detriments of the biopolitical and patriarchal imperatives over female bodies and their insistence on youth and beauty. Thematizing the male gaze as portrayed in Coralie Fargeat's highly satirical feminist body horror film, the article explores how media and showbusiness allow for the physical and psychological abuse of women. Permeating every aspect of culture and perpetrated by (popular) media, the controlling culture instills in women the need to retain their youth and beauty by resorting to unsafe substances and cosmetic surgery. Relying on Alvaro E. Jarín's use of biopolitics specifically when it comes to beauty and beautification practices, Matek shows how modern society and media promote many forms of self-inflicted violence, and even death, in the service of beauty.

Another article that explores domestic violence, highlighting the rise of such content even within commercial fiction, including the romance genre, is Biljana Oklopčić's "Does It End with Us?: Interpersonal Violence in Colleen Hoover's

*It Ends with Us.*” By listing forms of physical and psychological violence which the female protagonist and her mother suffer at the hands of their romantic partners, the article argues that Hoover’s novel should serve as an empowering “manual” to recognize and act against various forms of interpersonal violence. Specifically, by delineating the repetitive cycles of abuse, risk factors leading to violent outbursts, and effects on female victims and children as well as forms of school bullying, the article underlines the key issues that women, children, and young adults experience within both private and public spheres.

Returning to film, Jelena Pataki Šumiga’s article “Love in the Time of Dystopia: Yorgos Lanthimos’s *The Lobster* (2015)” analyses the biopolitical mechanisms that force individuals to form and maintain romantic partnerships in Lanthimos’ highly satirical dystopia. By comparing the film and its treatment of love and personal relations to canonical utopias and dystopia, which reject and punish deep emotional and sexual connections, the article views mainstream society in *The Lobster* as a dystopian regime. Engaging Foucault’s theory of biopolitics as a network of power forces that subjugate and control as well as Catherine Roach’s “romantic imperative” in modern Western society, the article compares the highly restrictive practices in the film to modern society and its valuing of coupledness over pronounced individuality. Specifically, by focusing on Foucault’s theory of administrated sexuality, the article discusses modern society’s insistence on fixed dichotomies, such as heteronormativity, which eliminates individuality and represents the most prominent element of a dystopian society.

Finally, in her article “Biopolitical Spectacle of Violence in *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*,” Jasna Poljak Rehlicki explores Ben Fountain’s criticism of the United States’ politics and culture during the War on Terror. Drawing on Foucault’s theories of biopower and biopolitics as well as Mbembe’s necropolitics and Agamben’s concept on the living dead, the article discloses the insidious systemic ways in which biopolitical violence operates within modern (American) society. In commodifying soldiers’ bodies and their trauma, and presenting them to the public as entertainment material for financial gain, Fountain’s novel reveals the biopolitical mechanisms that govern the media and everyday life, pointing to the notions of false patriotism and pervasive control of both living and dead bodies of individuals.

GUEST EDITORS:

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