Religious divides have been the source of many a bloody conflict. Even today, across the world, atrocities are committed, among others, by Hindus over Christians, Buddhists over Muslims, Jews over Muslims, Hindus over Muslims, Muslims over Hindus, Muslims over Christians, Christians over Muslims, Sunni Muslims over Shia Muslims and, in a tiny corner of Europe, Protestant Christians over Catholic ones and *vice versa*.[1] Who benefits from all such division and tragedy? Who gains from the attendant ruthless violation of human rights, sometimes on an egregious scale?*

Assuming here, for sheer argument's sake, that the traditional Marxist answer to that question is correct, then there is one 'classic' class *cui bono* accrue all such division and tragedy: the bourgeoisie. Who are they? This term is a bit *passé* today, I must admit. "The 1%", "the corporate elite", "the job creators", or just "the rich" would be more popular expressions in contemporary parlance. Had he been more articulate, even the Dude would have used the old b-word, to Lenin's and many classicists' plausible surprise.

The concept is not *passé*, however. The idea that the ruling class preserves its power by keeping the ruled ones internally divided by means of, *inter alia*, ideological decoys and distracting identities, is as old as Philip II of Macedon (382–336 BC), who lived long before Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Marxism, and is said by ancient tradition to have uttered the momentous phrase: "διαίρει καὶ βασίλευε" ("divide and rule"). Awareness of social hierarchy, the ensuing concentration of power and the political-cultural techniques for their preservation did not wait for Engels' and Garibaldi's century to emerge. Fooling and frying people at will, by pitting them against one another, have been practised for millennia.

In light of today's levels of skewed market power, *de facto* regressive taxation, immense wealth disparity reminiscent of the *Belle Époque*, fantastic unearned incomes by way of financial rent, mass unemployment, workers' precariousness, widespread de-unionisation, technological replacement of the workforce, growing underemployment of vainly trained young minds, discriminatory substantive inequality before the law, and the concomitant absence of large-scale socio-political dissent, there seems to be no reason to believe that such a well-tested means of social control should not be at work in contemporary societies.

Therein, the class of billionaires and their various corporate manifestations have been thriving unchecked, as proven repeatedly—and at the very least—by a plethora of

unpunished financial and fiscal scandals of truly global proportions: Worldcom, Enron, Forex, Libor, Panama Papers, Paradise Papers, etc. Not to mention the credit lifelines and special bail-outs granted to gargantuan banks and their wealthy owners after the self-inflicted international collapse of 2008, while common people were crushed by austerity packages across continents in order to pay for such generous rescue missions.[2] When money talks, human rights walk… off a cliff. What is more, the very same billionaires have often taken direct control of the political game *qua* party leaders, government officials, cabinet ministers and populist trailblazers. Not even Marx would have expected the super-rich to become so shameless in their command of political institutions.

At the same time, Marx's ghost, the ghost of communism *per* his 1848 *Manifesto*, not to mention the now-mythical chimeras of internationalism and mass revolution, have all been eerily vacant from the world's stage, despite Marx's *Capital* being picked up from under a shuggly desk by a French data-cruncher and adapted for the 21st century, in which even the most polite and prudent British media acknowledge the resurgent affirmation of nothing less than fascism.

When religion cannot do good enough a job at keeping people internally divided, viable alternatives exist: race, nationality; region-, party-, or even football-based affiliation can be as effective. The New York City draft riots of 1863, pitting poor Irish immigrants against poor blacks, while well-off Americans could avoid being sent to battle by paying a set fee, are just one historical example among many. (These days, that draft may lead people to the cinemas, rather than to the streets.)

Again and again, poor people that would be better off by joining numbers, forces, and concerted efforts against the tiny minority exploiting them, waste instead their best energies and, at times, their livelihood and life, by fighting among themselves—and against designated 'others'. Frequently, trouble is taken by the truly troubled in order to suppress the much-maligned "troublemakers", who are in fact the only ones trying to find a solution to their woes, e.g. 'anachronistic' trade unionists and 'pie-in-the-sky' left-wing intellectuals. Turkeys do love their Christmas holidays.

About twenty years before *The Communist Manifesto*, the liberal and Catholic novelist Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) had described most vividly the long-lived logic and

common practice of *divide et impera*—Caesar having learnt King Philip's lesson—in a rustic allegory of his. The novelist depicts Renzo, the poor, rural, male protagonist of Manzoni's most famous book, *I promessi sposi*, holding several bickering capons by their legs. That's the beginning; let me explain.

Renzo is carrying these poor capons as his only means of payment to a well-off city lawyer, whom Renzo intends to hire in the attempt to redress the wrongs that he and his betrothed—the poor, rural, and female Lucia—have been suffering from a local nobleman that, to the young couple's great misfortune, fancies Lucia well beyond the boundaries of common decency and aristocratic gentlemanship. Manzoni notes that, had the capons been a little more intelligent, they would have started picking the hand that kept them captive, therefore regaining their freedom. Instead, the capons fought among themselves and ended up being delivered with great ease to their recipient. The lawyer enjoyed a few good meals out of these silly animals, but also failed to help Renzo in his human, far-too-human plight.

Rather than Christmas turkeys, Renzo's capons, or "*i capponi di Renzo*", have become a proverbial admonition in Italian culture, though little followed its inherent wisdom may be in the country's daily habits. Despite Manzoni's hefty novel being a mandatory reading in the nation's secondary schools, millions of Italians can still be kept internally divided in all sorts of ways, such as: Northerners *versus* Southerners, natives *versus* immigrants, Catholic *versus* secular, progressive *versus* conservative, private-sector *versus* public-sector, and old *versus* young.

As concerns most contemporary Western nations, gender is being used in the same manner, especially within middle-class environments—even inside academic circles. Men and women spend endless time and effort squabbling about the so-called "male privilege" and an alleged set of attendant disparities, rather than combining their efforts in order to pursue traditional left-wing aims: better wages for all, better working conditions for everyone, sensible monetary and fiscal policies by State authorities, true economic security and autonomy, a life-saving stop to the all-embracing profit-motive that is destroying the planet, and emancipatory self-ownership *cum* democratic self-stewardship. Such squabbles split regularly the front of the exploited many into two warring fronts: men *versus* women, women *versus* men or, in the shouting matches that frequently result thereof, "radicals" *versus* "right-thinking" persons, or "feminists" *versus* "male chauvinists" (aka "sexists",

"patriarchs", "pigs", etc.), depending on the side one is on.

Sophisticated intellects and fair-minded individuals might plausibly avoid being tossed into these camps or reduced to either of them, but only with great effort and with no hope of broader success. First of all, even well-paid academics can utter absurdities such as "fucking is entirely a male act designed to affirm the reality and power of the phallus, of masculinity".[3] Secondly, whatever veritable genius the elect may occasionally possess, the same elect have very little effect on the daily shouting matches within public and private bodies. As Socrates, Hypatia and Thomas More knew dangerously well, unmerciful isolation is the price to be paid for uncommon ingenuity.

Shall we mention the now-ubiquitous mass media, where the most vocal and publicised shouting matches occur? There, "male privilege" or, for that matter, "patriarchy", are not carefully dissected analytical tools, but massive clubs to swing around and smash men's (and a few allegedly 'brainwashed' women's) heads with, whichever diverse and sophisticated sets of beliefs may be held inside those heads. Having a prick makes you a dick, or *vice versa*. There is no escape. There is no alternative. It sounds like Maggie Thatcher, but it claims to be 'progressive'.

Quick and effective communication cannot operate too many distinctions, not even basic ones such as the one separating individuals responsible for certain misdeeds and the gender to which they belong. "Men do this…", "men are like that", "men…"; and, if young, "boys". Black Americans, Southern Italians, German Jews and Hungarian Roma know far too well how systemically hurtful all such fallacious yet very catchy sweeping generalisations can be. Women should do too, as a sad matter of historical fact such as reduction to one big 'lump'. Even clever individuals may fall into such sweeping prejudices, which social opinion praises already. Everyday parlance welcomes cognitive dissonance.

Under this respect, the mass media's behaviourally instigated emulation becomes far too easily the social norm, including the ever-present social media, unlike the academically elect's painstaking theologies, theodicies and theogonies. Snapchat is much more impactful than Spinoza's *Ethics*, not even when the latter is simplified. Go to any party meeting, political rally, activist gathering or well-meaning workshop on gender relations, if you don't believe me. Or listen to the telly, to undergraduate students, to your neighbours and taxi

drivers. Or go to the movies, read your old schoolmates' Twitter pearls of wisdom or the most popular memes on Facebook, and explore the real world of apparent common sense.

Quite simply, oversimplification is overly simple for social-media algorithmic simpletons to sample… As a sage from Savona had once observed, flesh-and-blood people make excellent straw-men, sadly enough. Or straw-women, for that matter. The same people make good harlequins too. Splitting hairy dogma and deep-thinking are the job of few, fastidious, profound Biblicists. Apart from them, most people go by a handful of simple formulas. Dogma is harsh but handy. Life's harshness gives them little room for little else. Under such far-too-human conditions, erudite subtleties get drowned into the greater sea of common slogans and, eventually, disappear from view.

Out in the open, things are even more straightforward: erudite subtleties do not count. Rhetoric, instead, matters; and it matters more than anything, for rhetoric can truly make and re-make the laws, whether written or unwritten. That is why, inside and around political parties and governments, there are more PR professionals and spin doctors than there are disciplinary experts and concerned academics. The situation is analogous to the superficial but immensely powerful liberal vernacular pervading the economic and business understanding, and decision-making, of contemporary societies at all levels, from the small entrepreneur's self-perception to the mantras of well-dressed European commissioners. (I use "liberal" in the European sense, not the American one.) Let me explain this one too.

Bookworms and Adam Smith (1723–1790) scholars know perfectly well how critical the founder of modern economics was of corporations, the greed of business-people, their nefarious influence over law-making, or their blindness to the need for banking regulation. Nevertheless, most self-declared liberals today are ready to utter Smith's name like the revered and wondrous name of a prophet of old, without having read a single page penned by him, and they will defend today's *de facto* corporate oligopolies in the name of unfettered "free trade". All this, it should be noted, while believing with earnest sincerity in the providential blessings of the "invisible hand". Armed with few, well-tested commonplaces, these unthinking liberals will launch into trite pro-market-*versus*-pro-State tirades, or right-*versus*-left political arguments. More often than not, given the acquired matter-of-fact character of the commonplaces at issue, they will win the day… Plus the scary night that follows. One well-written catechism by a committed preacher is more powerful than a

million great articles by the most honest scholars. Rhetoric, like love, conquers all.

In the men-*versus*-women analogue, the chauvinist camp includes even some women that, apparently, don't realise that they have been duped by patriarchy and are actually not free, though they do think that they are free and act without visible restraint, committing crimes against their gender such as wearing high heels, becoming Catholic nuns, showing a cleavage on a Facebook photograph, or buying copies of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. (All these cases being peculiar anecdotes that I can recall from my years in Canada and Iceland.) Even a well-educated and ambitious woman becoming a judge on the US Supreme Court can be so duped, it would seem, were we to listen to certain shouts.

Be as it may that the little sisters consent, the big ones resent; hence the former ought to repent, and nobody is content. The overall meaning is simple. Some women are more equal than others, and the former can tell the latter what is actually good for them to think, do, and be—like older sisters to younger ones, or patriarchs of old. As to those articulate, unrepentant women that complain about this peculiar state of affairs, such as Ellen Willis (1941–2006), Christina Sommers (b. 1950), Wendy McElroy (b. 1951), Janice Fiamengo (b. 1946) or Camille Paglia (b. 1947) in today's academia, they risk ending up being reviled as "Nazi", akin to Rush Limbaugh (b. 1951) and, inexorably, as "patriarchal". Even Erin Pizzey (b. 1939) can find no refuge today, while Phyllis Chesler (b. 1940) is attacked cruelly by her elder sisters for admitting that women can be just as cruel as men, though in a voice of their own.

Ironically, in the midst of all this "you're a Nazi" bantering, a duly reworded chapter from Hitler's *Mein Kampf* got published in a proudly feminist, peer-reviewed, academic journal. A little later, the leading lesbian activist of the Gallic nation, Alice Coffin, happened to argue that male artists ought to be boycotted because, well… they are male. This is quite an eerie reminder of the hostile discrimination–albeit, luckily, not yet of the swift elimination–experienced by left-wing and Jewish artists, both male and female, in 1940s France. Just think about it. Why boycott anyone who happens to have a penis? Hasn't discrimination because of crooked noses, skin pigmentation and red flags been enough of a cautionary lesson? Evidently not in today's France. Alas, it ain't Switzerland. All the while, Gallic women's shadow projections are sold as shining progress. Maybe that's why even noted psychotherapists have been worrying about the seething violence of some older

sisters. And the fights go on…

The global lesson to be learnt from all this shouting aloud, and about, is fairly basic, and it is too far from new. Pluralism and free speech are liked by many self-styled "progressives" only insofar as, and for as long as, other people agree with them. (In line with the analogy regarding the economic sphere, try running a country without McDonald's or private ownership, and then check whether the 'liberal' countries of the world leave you alone or not.) Christianity may be a thing of the past. God Himself (Herself?) dead. Narrow-mindedness and intolerance, though, can still prosper unabated. Dogmas come veritably from all sides, in all colours, shapes, sizes, and flavours. Perhaps, it is a matter of old urges finding new channels and outer shapes to keep expressing themselves. Who knows? (Yet admitting ignorance is precisely one of the rarest attitudes to be found in these fights.)

Not that patriarchs, male prejudice and male privilege may have not existed at some point in history, or may not exist somewhere on Earth today. Saudi Arabia has remained to the very present a hellish place for women, and so do several other oil-rich countries in the Middle East that have glorious business relations with the 'liberal' West. (Again, when money talks, human rights walk off a cliff.) Across the globe, there are indeed some nations where women are regularly beaten, have little access to healthcare, are not allowed to pursue any education worthy of any note, and cannot walk in the streets without male chaperones for fear of being assaulted. Nasty patriarchs and their stunted children are still around. There is no denying.

If I look at today's developed world, however, I see no comparably glaring male privilege in, say, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Iceland, France, or Canada. (Please note that I do not include here my native country, Italy, where women are still being fired for such an outrageous misdemeanour as getting pregnant.) It is not a matter of there being no inequality at any level. Some inequality does exist but, if we look closely enough, it cuts both ways, not just one way. And the cuts can be sore ones. Let me be very clear on this point.

As it is deployed or implied in daily life, the much-shouted-at "male privilege" is a matter of there being—or not being—*blanket* better conditions for persons who were born male, similarly to the way in which a person would enjoy blanket better conditions by being born into an aristocratic family in 17th-century France, or in a 1% family today. Anyone who was

born in the aristocracy back then, or who is born in plutocratic families today, enjoyed and enjoys better food, longer lives, legal and muscled protection from physical harm, access to enterprising credit, top-level education, conspicuous leisure, better healthcare, and a thousand more life-enabling resources that are regularly denied to others. The well-born person's benefits, aka "advantages", over the rest of society are notable and blatant. That's "privilege," in a nutshell. And that is what ordinary men and women take it to be, quite reasonably. Think, for example, of the (in)famous poisoner Marie-Madeleine Marguerite D'Aubray (1630–1676) in the *ancien régime*, or of the noted businesswoman Ivanka Trump (b. 1981) today. These are neither straw-men nor straw-women: they are, or were, real persons of real substance.

Logic can be of some help here. One of the standard forms of reasoning, identified since ancient times, is the so-called "*modus tollens*", according to which if, from a certain condition *A* follows inescapably another condition *B*, and condition *B* is not the case, then it has to be concluded that *A* is not the case either. Formally, *A -> B*, *–B*, *ergo –A*. If I drink the hemlock like Socrates, then I feel ill and die shortly thereafter; I am alive and well; therefore, I have not drunk the hemlock. This much logic is not phallic. Contradicting it is, however, fallacious. If there is "male privilege", then there must be conspicuous benefit or blatant advantage for men. If such a conspicuous benefit or blatant advantage does not occur, then "male privilege" doesn't occur either, even if the phrase keeps being repeated *ad nauseam*.

In today's advanced societies, if someone is born male, he is more likely to die younger, to suffer from mental illness leading to suicide, to die in combat, to die on the workplace, to be the victim of violent crime, to be the perpetrator of violent crime, to serve time in prison and, in prison, to suffer rape. (Go and check your national statistics.) Living nastier, brutish and shorter lives is no conspicuous benefit or blatant advantage, whatever creatively postmodern way or cunning *ceteris-paribus* conditions we may choose to look at it. There could be still *some* advantages at some level, but they would be neither notable nor blatant, and even less assuredly blanket, insofar as men's longevity, physical integrity, mental health and law-abidingness signal losses compared to women's.

Let me be redundant. There may well be benefits that originate from being born a man. They can be small things, such as the likelihood of being allowed to play contact sports

when children or swear publicly with impunity. They can be bigger ones, such as increased chances of becoming a top businessperson or politician, smashing the c/g-lass ceiling, and belonging to the 1%—if that can be considered a good thing. (Though certainly a mainstream aspiration, I wonder what Marx would say about it.) Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013), Cristina Kirchner (b. 1953), Carly Fiorina (b. 1954), Theresa May (b. 1956), Christine Lagarde (b. 1956) and, for a while, Rita Crundwell (b. 1953), got up there, though being merely part of a growing minority.

Yet, even if we reached a 50/50 point of equilibrium in the upper echelons, there would be still male benefits *as well as* female benefits, for being born female would nonetheless increase one's chances of wearing skirts as well as trousers, or of being addressed politely by strangers as a child—not to mention living the longer, healthier and more law-abiding lives that were just mentioned. Gender roles, as debatable and mutable as we may wish them to be in our societies, imply in concrete reality different gains, not just different losses, for *both* sexes. As the most important issues are rarely black-and-white matters, so is social advantage far more nuanced than the unrelenting yet simplistic male-*versus*-female opposition entails. When essential dimensions of human well-being are considered, such as physical, mental and moral integrity, Western women are on the winning side.

There is another way to look at this fact and appreciate its historical roots. We are no more patrician Rome or Puritanical Virginia, nor today's Afghanistan, by any stretch whatsoever of the imagination. And *that* is fantastic! In many developed nations, the suffragettes, the witches-that-returned, and the brave activists that fought for women's health and education in times of actual female segregation have finally won, big time. We should acknowledge and celebrate their achievements, for they occurred against all kinds of odds and enmities. However, their feisty descendants, as well-meaning as they may be today, repeat slogans and employ concepts that are factually anachronistic in wealthy Western nations like, say, Iceland, Holland, Canada or Norway. (How right was Veblen in claiming that today's common sense is yesterday's facts!) "Patriarchy", as far as such blessed countries are concerned, belongs to history's dustbin, like "Donatism" or the divine right of kings. There may be "vestigial patriarchal elements" that "are being weeded out", as Laura Kipnis wrote not too long ago, but "women have power aplenty". The war was won!

Meanwhile, the Luddites, Owenites, Marxists, revisionists, Trotskyists and middle-way

Swedish social-democrats have seen their battles end up in humiliating defeats, to the point that, in today's North America, no politician dares to speak of the "working class" in public debates, lest they are accused of nothing less than frightening "socialism". Only the "middle class" is allowed to exist, verbally, in the country that Donald Trump promised to make great again. In Europe, these dangerous two words are still audible, though a *non-working class* is actually the chief problem, because Europe's working class has been emigrating to China since the 1980s, under the banner of "globalisation". Even among self-declared "left-wing radicals", when a picture or a video of a corporate board of directors is shown, the rallying cry is no longer "capitalists!", "bourgeois!", "fat cats!", but "men!"–or, in a seemingly more nuanced yet equally misfiring way, "white men!" That most "men" and "white men" still make up a good chunk of the "proletariat" has evidently been forgotten. Conveniently, while rage is vented at every and any man or white man, the concentrated elite of actual exploiters still gets away scot free with their exploitation.

Classic concepts can become classified items. Despite its relevance *vis-à-vis* today's gross inequality, the very Marxian notion of *class* has been largely silenced, while "gender" enjoys much more popularity and media attention. Race, nationality and religious creed were very popular too, in previous times. And it is not difficult to understand why, at least for Marx or for the Dude, who would ask, if he had ever read Seneca: *cui prodest*? Since the cruel, neglectful parents are away skiing on the Alps, or sipping Martinis in the Caribbean, then the understandably upset big sister can kick her younger brothers in the groin to vent her rage. I mean, her wee brothers have a Johnson, just like her dad, who keeps enjoying himself and forgetting about his children. That silly dangling bit of flesh must be really bad… Who do you think benefits from this sorry state of affairs: the brothers?

Though commonplace in shouting matches, most of the enduring Western talk of "male privilege" is, at heart, a remnant of a by-gone past and a misrepresentation of a much more toxic reality, where the one and only true callous and outrageous privilege is that of a few rich family networks directing everyone else's life in order to maximise these networks' take to a massive extent, irrespective of gender. If life is a valley of tears, then both men and women are crying aplenty. About the 99% of the entire society, we could say, while occupying Wall Street.

Who, for example, can lead his or her life without spending much, if not most of it, working

for someone else, who has the power to hire, fire, disenfranchise and impoverish them? (Back in the 19th century, Abraham Lincoln and Leo Tolstoy had no qualms in equating this condition with that of slavery itself). Who, whether a man or a woman, can afford to be indifferent to the boom-bust hot-money cycles that financial moguls and their wealthy clients, whether men or women, have been unleashing onto the world's nations since the end of the Bretton-Woods system? Who, after the crash of 2008, can say in good conscience to have been left untouched and undamaged by the gigantic waves of transnational speculation engulfing the global economy? Who, in constitutionally free and independent countries, has not heard the governments justify their austere, belt-tightening policies by reference to genderless cruel deities such as "the markets", "the creditors", "foreign direct investment", or "international competition"?

The notion of "male privilege" flies in the face of much theoretical and experimental literature, in which the negative consequences *for men* of traditional gender roles have been identified, again and again. This is something that ordinary people have no great difficulty to grasp. Stunted emotional development, personal unhappiness, limited self-expression, lack of empathy, *karoshi* and additional "maladies of the soul", as Julia Kristeva (b. 1941) would dub them, have been studied and catalogued in the accounts of what exactly standard assumptions and stereotypes about men do *to men themselves,* from their early childhood to their deathbed, or deathdesk, whether such assumptions and stereotypes are held by women or by other men.[4]

If you have read my satirical piece to this point, then you must have realised that I am a moaning man. *Ipso facto*, if not *ipso dicto*, I am not consistent with my gender stereotypes. Real men don't whine. Only wimps do that. But I don't care. Quite the opposite, I believe wholeheartedly that standard, if not even archetypal, masculinity can be toxic. Nevertheless, I cannot but reason as well that, if standard gender roles are toxic to men, if not to both sexes, then they cannot be advantageous, at the same time, to men at large. Either option has to be dropped. Self-poisoning precludes self-engrossing privilege, and *vice versa*.

Rhetorically, speaking of "male privilege" and, for that matter, calling the bourgeois a "patriarch", obscure, culpably, the fundamental *class* element at play in our societies. *This* is the element that is etiologically crucial to understand the suffering pervading our

societies. In parallel, the same linguistic-conceptual practices overemphasise the gender element, casting undue suspicion upon men *qua* men, and therefore splitting the oppressed camp into mutually opposed men and women. In keeping with the business analogue, usages of "patriarchy" as oppressive of *both* men and women are as rhetorically flawed as the orthodox economists' insistence on using "goods", "efficiency" and "optimality" as value-neutral terms. Long ago, Jeremy Bentham argued that both dyslogistic and eulogistic words are springs of action. Pick a different term, please, and reduce equivocation. Rhetoric. as I said, matters a lot in the real world.

Allow me to repeat one thing. Logically, to state the negative character of traditional gender roles for men themselves, and insist at the same time on the existence of "male privilege", is a contradiction. Worse than fallacious reasoning, however, is the persistence of traditional male gender roles, which are enforced by women too, and the combination of these roles with the growing hypocrisy and the double standards that the much-desired empowerment of women has made possible. As the ethicist John Kekes (b. 1936) has often remarked in his works, granting more freedom to more people—empowered women included—means granting more opportunity for the evils of cruelty or, as Luce Irigaray (b. 1930) would poetically word them, the evils of ''possession", "appropriation" and "domination''.[5] Truly, there is no such thing as a free lunch.

It all starts from an early age, by the way, as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) had rightfully lamented long ago. This time, though, it works in reverse, at least as far as genders are concerned. The list is endless. Let me indulge in it a little. It is somewhat amusing—albeit maybe not for the young men who grow up under such confusing premises, or the older men who get trapped by their paradoxes, especially in the Nordic countries that I have come to know in the last twenty years. Hopefully, my long and strange list will get someone thinking about the sadly neglected male teardrops drenching life's valley, where they join the well-researched female ones. So, here comes the list, then… Well, no, not right away. First, I must digress a little. (After all, I like very much Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.) Fun must be earned. There is still one serious issue that we have to consider. Specifically, what's the cure to our boys' alleged avoidance of crying? Crying?

Boys do cry; but more often than not they do it in hiding, behind doors. Doing so openly would cause them to be derided and dismissed by women—not just by men—as unmanly

moaners, in yet another crippling instance of traditional gender roles and expectations, according to which boys don't cry unless they are sissies. Virility does not parade vulnerability. And yet boys and men are people too. They can be vulnerable. They can be victims. Crying. More crying.

Think of the levels of pain involved: failing at school, unemployed, underemployed, prone to crime or substance abuse, and likely candidates to suicide, these male *human beings* are *losers* in the competitive game of society, which is then said to be skewed in their favour. Hence, they are losers *twice,* for they managed to lose despite being unfairly favoured *ab initio*. Moreover, these twice-losers may not show openly their pain, for "real men" having any chance of impressing any self-respecting female are expected to be stoical. If men cry, which they do, then they must do it privately, and quietly, so that the rest of society, women *in primis*, may pretend that men are actually not crying. I mean, really, it is enough for a man to get the flu and complain about it, for this man to be scorned mercilessly, especially by women. And so *thrice* it goes. Losers, losers, losers.

Again, some sophisticated intellects and fair-minded individuals might avoid being so callous to suffering men. Male tears may not be dismissed indifferently by all members of the 'fair sex' as insufferable, privileged people's whining. Perhaps, behind those tears and the label "man", there are actual living persons who genuinely suffer. Thus, occasionally, some deeply intelligent women do realise it and show genuine compassion, including some highly perceptive female sexologists in France. Many other women, who claim to be committed feminists, have openly stated that they would be happy to sip on them instead. Screw the losers! Their suffering is immaterial. What matters is that they are 'men'. As such, they cannot but be the enemy. Conflicts don't call for compassion. They call for aggression.

Let us be honest with ourselves. Weakness is not a selling point for men. Compassion kills passion. Every day, around the world, pained men learn this painful truth by way of additional doses of pain. Even frankly smart gals prefer fairly stereotypical guys, if you are brave enough to read the Gul's numbers on the subject, *inter alia*. Statistics possess a cold kind of cruelty. Yet, they do nothing but photograph that which is already well known. As amply shown by men's lived experiences and by mainstream media, weak men make a poor catch and catch poorly themselves. They are not simply rejected, but resented, for such men

cannot be 'relied upon', as the old gender stereotype prescribes. And that is something that women keep expecting and demanding of their male partners. The grip of the old gender stereotype, on men's *and* women's minds, is as powerful as the ideal 'man' that it continues to depict.

But let us look at a longer list; the one that I had promised. Digressions end, eventually. (Even Sterne's own bizarre novel has an end.) Here it comes:

- Girls with trousers are normal; boys wearing a skirt are laughed at, told better, or advised a sex change.
- Tomboys are cool; effeminate boys the butt of the joke.
- Boisterous girls are future adventurers in the making; boisterous boys an ill-educated nuisance.
- A girl squad is worth celebrating in pop songs; a group of teenage boys can't even be allowed into a shopping mall playing Muzak.
- Man-eating dancing queens and pussycat dolls can tease at will, break hearts with spears, lose them in the game, and do it again; boys are expected to endure it all and be thankful, reminiscent of male mantises and male spiders.
- Crass humour about women is sexist; crass humour about men is universal.
- Young girls, often drunk, vomiting innuendos, or worse, at men in the middle of a busy street on a Saturday night, are having a bit of fun; boys doing the same are intolerable pigs.
- The same goes for hiring male strippers on a hen night *versus* hiring female strippers on a stag night: stags are actually pigs, and pigs should not pursue such vile objectifications; hens are excused.
- An intolerable pig is also a man sleeping around, while a woman doing the same is exploring her sexuality or asserting her independence. While the former is routinely attacked as an emblem of 'patriarchy', casting doubt on the latter is 'slut-shaming'.
- Women making a pass are seen as a glorious sign of liberation; men making a pass as a threatening step towards harassment.
- Even alone, a man who masturbates is nothing but a variation on the loser theme: a wanker; a woman who masturbates, instead, is a proud feminist challenging "societal taboos".
- Not to mention a lonely man with a sex doll, who cannot but come across as a creepy

pig that is better avoided; on the contrary, a lonely woman with a dildo is a liberated person who does not need men for her self-realisation.

- Women who enjoy porn are emancipated, like the heroines of *Sex and the City*; men who do the same are, again, pigs.
- Whatever and however heterosexual men look at people or things, the "male gaze" is always taken to be bad. No such negative assumption is made when talking about female looking or the "queer eye".
- Something similar applies to genitalia. Whereas "vagina" is to be celebrated, even by means of monologues, the "phallus" is always bad, especially when combined with language or logic.
- Male masturbation is a standard comic feature in movies, a truly mechanical affair *à la* Bergson, or even an insult—neither "wanker" nor "tosser" is ever used *qua* term of endearment. Female masturbation, no: it's yet another token of emancipation.
- A woman constantly putting her hands on a muscular man sitting beside her gets no rebuke. The touched man's doing the same, as that muscular man has actually observed, would be called "groping".
- Women's menopausal crises deserve warmth and compassion; men's midlife crises are the fodder for TV comedies.
- A wilful man taking the initiative stifles female self-expression and reinforces implicitly gender stereotypes; a man waiting to be asked is an ill-mannered arsehole.
- With luck, the man who does take the initiative to aid may occasionally be thanked as helpful; without luck, he is guilty of "mansplaining", at the very least.
- Women can talk freely for both sexes—or more, given the alleged fluidity and plurality of genders of the human race; men, on their part, can never understand what it is like to be a woman, for they are not women.
- Women's unwarranted claims are female intuitions, displays of emotional intelligence, oracular truths cast in a different voice, deep insights; men's unwarranted claims are prejudices.
- On the job, a man seeking sexual favours in exchange for professional advantages is deemed to be harassing another—'me-too' thinks that. A woman offering sexual favours in exchange for professional advantages, though, is still deemed to be the victim of harassment, given the enduring "patriarchy" or the "rape culture" of our age, the inherent "vulnerability" of women, and the "predatory" nature of men.
- An older woman parading a much younger lover is cheered on: "Go Cathrine!", says

the British historian Lucy Worsley (b. 1973) in her TV documentary, *The Empire of the Tsars*. No TV personality would dare to utter so publicly "Go Donald!" or "Go Silvio!" on the same grounds.

- On a similar wavelength, young adult women are (rightfully) given the right to vote, join a trade union, launch a 'disruptive' start-up, buy an assault rifle (in parts of the US), decide whether to have an abortion, and found a political party. If they happen to have sex with an older and/or well-established man, however, then they become all of a sudden mentally immature persons who cannot make wise choices and can only be the passive victims of seedy sexual intents. Responsible agency has vanished. Young adult men who end up in bed with the emulators (emulatresses?) of Catherine the Great are hardly ever mentioned, and never discussed.
- Oppression may be unseen, but eyes matter: men can create a "hostile environment" by merely looking at a woman. The older and more ungainly the man is, the easier this feat of perlocutionary gazing becomes.
- Words matter too: "cunt" and "bitch" are condemned as sexist, while "dork" and "dickhead" are used with liberality and much gusto.
- Women who work and see to domestic chores suffer from a double burden; men who do the same are emancipated, almost Swedish.
- Whether in Sweden or elsewhere, many men may be constantly deferring to capable and/or domineering mothers, elder sisters, grandmothers, aunts, girlfriends, fiancées and wives. These men's bosses may be women, and so may also be their local MPs, ministers of reference, PMs, presidents and mayors. And yet, almost magically, these men are regularly said to be reaping the benefits of power-hungry "patriarchy". Could it ever be the case that matriarchs project their appetite?
- Men telling women what to do are said to enjoy the privilege of command; women telling men what to do are said to experience the "emotional stress" of organisation.
- A woman slapping a man in public leads to amused or perplexed curiosity; a man slapping a woman in public leads to cops being called onto the scene.
- A woman working as a childminder is the image of motherly love; a man doing the same is a potential paedophile whose identity and penal record must be triple-checked—these days, many men are quite simply terrified of talking to children.
- Female bisexuality is experimental and accepted as part of growing up; male bisexuality is unsettling and rejected as screwing up: the sure path to a woman's rejection. Only female sexuality is truly allowed to be fluid.

- Genders are said to be many and pliable; yet “men” are spotted with uncanny ease and blamed for the root of all evils: patriarchy.
- The mysteries and intricacies of the human psyche don’t exist. Forget about Seneca, Dante, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky and Jung. The myriad motives of romance and erotic life are nowhere to be seen. Our hearts are open books. And very short ones to boot. ‘Men’ are power-hungry, sex-crazed pigs. ‘Women’ aren’t. That’s all there is to be known. (Only liberal economists have been able to produce an even more inane philosophical anthropology: *Homo oeconomicus*. And perhaps, quite ironically, only the most adamant patriarchal Puritans or Wahabis have ever shown as remarkable a propensity to stern moralism, judgmental self-righteousness, Manichean inflexibility and unforgiving dogmatism.)
- A penniless woman hooked on antidepressants calls rightly for universal pity; a penniless man hooked on alcohol calls sinisterly for the epithet of “loser”.
- A woman who kills a baby is the embodied tragedy of depression; a man who does the same is a monster to be locked away forever, or fried to a crisp.
- A woman who commits a crime deserves the attention of teams of psychologists and social workers; a man who is found guilty of the same crime can simply be locked away and forgotten—though his prison rapists may notice him.
- Male-only priesthood in the Roman Church is condemned as sexist by unbelieving feminists, who celebrate the creed of Finland’s SuperShe island for excluding men.
- Tearooms packed with women are an oasis of independence; bars packed with men are a gateway to hell. (The Spirits of Prohibition keep nurturing women’s higher ground, even as they occupy traditional male grounds now.)
- Women who are afraid of men have good reasons; men who are afraid of women have bad problems.
- Women’s access to the cohort of corporate multi-millionaires is a profound matter of equality to be fought for by all; the plight of poor mine workers, lorry drivers and bin-men is something that is habitually forgotten by the most vocal female activists. Corporate-executive glass ceilings trump common drone-work cellars.

One does not need to be the much-reviled psychologist Jordan Peterson (b. 1962) to abhor these more-and-more commonplace forms of misandry. (Yes, this word can make sense.) It is enough to be an old-fashioned egalitarian, a compassionate human being, or merely a concerned parent of boys.

New ideas are often old ones resurfacing in new schools and new guises. Evidently, men still await their emancipation from gender roles that, unlike women's, have changed little, and are now being endorsed by empowered females that keep assuming that they are still the weaker sex. This mixture makes indeed for a toxic potion, which should be cast away. Whether then to err on the side of conservative prudence and uptight censorship, or on that of liberal freedom and loose pluralism, it is not something that I can settle here. The reader is free to err as s/he wills. Who is infallible, after all?

The inequality, however, is settled. Someone is certainly benefitting immensely from the *status quo*, but it is not men at large, whose human rights get merrily trampled on by the 1% while, at the same time, men keep being loathed in common discourse *qua* men for their supposed default privilege. It would all be quite funny, were it not so tragic too.

Notes

* *I thank Dr Lydia Amir, founding member of the International Society for Humor Studies, Dr Natalie Ellen Evans of the University of Guelph, Canada, and Dr Ileana Szymanski, kindred philosopher and Ignatian soul, for their feedback on early drafts of this text. Sadly, Dr Szymanski (1975-2019) did not live to see this piece published. It is therefore to her memory that my satire is dedicated: to the memory of a dear friend, first of all, but also that of a deep-reaching and witty scholar, who was ever in love with Aristotle and her own teaching vocation.*

[1] The present text is based on the last chapter of my book, *Thinking and Talking* (Gatineau: Northwest Passage Books, 2019, pp.281–90), and is part of a set of examples of "talking rhetoric" that are included therein, i.e., "shorter works of mine penned with the aim of edifying, engaging or entertaining the reader, to an extent that is uncommon and/or unneeded in regular academic writing" (x). The chief models for my satirical writings are Carlo Cipolla and, above all, Flavio Baroncelli, to whom a previous issue of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* is dedicated. Readers looking for standard, stately academic prose, or little prone to tongue-in-cheek reflexive acrobatics, should simply steer clear of the present text, which is unworthy of them and their attention. Part of the rationale for its revision and re-

issuing is the transformation of the NSU study circle for which it is intended, since this study circle is going to merge with another and launch a novel NSU study cycle about contemporary elites, or "the 1%".

[2] The case of 21st-century Greece is particularly telling of these troubling trends and striking contradictions (cf. Yannis Varoufakis, *Adults in the Room. My Battle with Europe's Deep Establishment*, London: Bodley Head, 2017). Also, the readers of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* are familiar with the case of Iceland's 2008 crash, which has been covered in many contributions to the journal.

[3] Andrea Dworkin, "Feminism, Art, and My Mother Sylvia", *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics*, New York: Harper & Row, 1976, p.108. In his 1996 book, *Il razzismo è una gaffe* (Rome: Donzelli, p.37), Flavio Baroncelli offers a charitable interpretation of Dworkin's denial of the possibility "for a man and a woman to just make love". He does so by adding an important premise, which Dworkin had failed to state: there are lots of "young men", both on- and off "campus", who "act like bullies (that is, they try to come across as 'normal' in one another's eyes) and express *precisely* that conception of the other half of the human race that Dworkin attributes to men in general." At the same time, in a humorous "Dialogue between Andrea Dworkin and Nelson Mandela" (*Mi manda Platone*, Genoa: il melangolo, 2009, pp.136-37; the dialogue is said to replicate in fiction the real exchanges occurred between Baroncelli and Dworkin, who were both notably overweight and aging when they met in the US), the Italian humorist-philosopher depicts the titular characters coming to a secretive agreement on power and inequality. Specifically, in order to "combat their handicap" and keep "appealing to young women", elderly heterosexual men like Mandela and obese middle-aged lesbians like Dworkin must go on relying upon "myths" such as "the wisdom and experience" of old age, or the outlandish radical theses of controversial academic "books showing that Plato… justified and strengthened male power" (ibid.). As the fictional Dworkin timidly admits in the fictional dialogue: "I realise that in a truly egalitarian world, without differences in wealth, prestige, intellectual charm, in short, power, beautiful people would go with beautiful people… old people into the dung-heap… the fat ones…" (p.137).

[4] Julia Kristeva, *Les nouvelles maladies de l'âme*, Paris: Fayard, 1993. Cf. also my review of *The Portable Kristeva* in *Symposium* 5(1)/2001: 120–3.

[5] Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World,* London: Continuum, 2000, 134–5. Cf. also my reviews of Irigaray's *Key Writings* (*The European Legacy* 13(7)/2008: 879–81) and *Sharing the World* (*The European Legacy* 16(5)/2011: 668–9).