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## Kinky Criticism: BDSM Principles Applied to Literature

Maria J. Dominguez

University of New Orleans, New Orleans, [maria.josefina.dominguez@gmail.com](mailto:maria.josefina.dominguez@gmail.com)

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Kinky Criticism: BDSM Principles Applied to Literature

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of  
the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
English  
American Literature

By

Maria Dominguez

B.A. Queens University of Charlotte, 2014.

May 2016

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Donovan Emmanuel Presley, without whom it may never have been written. Thank you, Donovan, for the encouragement you gave me during your life. I am forever indebted for the love and support I feel from you even after your death. I would not have made it here without the certainty of your pride in me, and the inextinguishable desire to continue making you proud. I love you, my sky. Forever and always, you are the voice inside my head.

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## Abstract

This thesis proposes a new school of literary analysis: Kinky Criticism. This critical theory examines the literary presence of themes related to BDSM (bondage/discipline, domination/submission, and sadism/masochism). My purpose in examining BDSM themes in literature is threefold. Firstly, I aim to reveal the presence of kinky themes both in literature and in everyday interactions. Secondly, through this application to literature, Kinky Criticism sheds new light on characterization and adds complexity to the dynamics between characters. Finally, Kinky Criticism provides a perspective that leads to unexpected conclusions about hotly debated topics in literature, such as the infamous sodomites of Dante's *Inferno*. Although some scholars have commented on kinky themes, their analyses have not yet become a critical movement. This thesis outlines the tenets of Kinky Criticism and aims to establish not only its legitimacy as a critical lens, but also Kinky Criticism's unique contributions to the interpretation of three major literary works: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*.

Keywords: Hemingway; Dante; D.H. Lawrence; Kinky Criticism; literary analysis; BDSM

## Kinky Criticism: BDSM Principles Applied to Literature

Of the innumerable critical theories that various scholars apply to works of literature, many explore power dynamics between various groups; feminist criticism examines the patriarchal exercise of power; Marxist criticism looks at power between different economic classes; post-colonial criticism includes the exchange of power between different races or nationalities. Power play permeates virtually every human interaction, and such a broadly sweeping factor in interpersonal dynamics is worthy of its own exclusive focus. The exercise of power is not an unprecedented element in literary criticism, and virtually all critical theories pay attention to depictions of violence in literature. Critics have mentioned power and violence in the past, but few have focused exclusively on power play and sadomasochism in literary works. Exceptions to this rule include (but are not limited to) Richard Fantina's work on masochism in Hemingway and Christian Talbot's exploration of oral sadism in Dante—but these scholars primarily examine these elements through a psychoanalytic lens. My purpose is to propose another school of literary analysis: Kinky Criticism. This critical theory will examine the presence in literature of themes related to BDSM, an acronym referring to bondage/discipline, domination/submission, and sadism/masochism. My purpose in examining this power exchange and sadomasochism in literature is threefold. Firstly, I aim to reveal the presence of kinky themes in not only a range of literary works, but also leave the reader aware of kink present in everyday human interactions. Secondly, through this application to literature, Kinky Criticism sheds new light on the techniques of characterization and adds complexity to the dynamics between characters. Finally, Kinky Criticism provides a new perspective that leads to unexpected conclusions about hotly debated topics in literature, such as the infamous sodomites of Dante's *Inferno*. Although a few scholars have commented on kinky themes, their analyses have not yet

gained the coherence of a critical movement. This thesis aims to outline the tenets of Kinky Criticism and to establish not only its legitimacy as a critical lens, but also Kinky Criticism's unique contributions to the interpretation of three major literary works: Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*.

I selected these works for the diversity of their cultures and time periods, a choice which illustrates the prevalence of kinky themes throughout human history. Through the perspective of the Kinky Critic, common human dynamics gain an additional element of nuance. By carefully examining the presence of power play and sadomasochism in literature, it becomes obvious that these themes are present in literature precisely because they are inherent in everyday human interaction. Although social taboos have traditionally suppressed BDSM practice, studies have shown that "About 10% of the US population reported engaging in BDSM at least on an occasional basis" (Masters et al. qtd. in Faccio et al.). Granted, the United States is just one subculture within the larger human race, but it is reasonable to assume that a similarly-sized subsection of humanity participates in these activities across international lines. Even beyond the practice of sexually-motivated BDSM, virtually every human on the planet is driven by some derivative of power at one point or another. More problematic is the attempt to find historical evidence of BDSM, given that its practice has been denigrated for centuries. However, as literary analysis reveals, kinky themes have indeed been present throughout history and across many different cultures.

But what exactly is "kink"? It's a euphemism for the practice of BDSM, which Lorca Jolene Sloan argues, "describes consensual interactions in which two or more adults cultivate a power imbalance through physical restraint, emotional vulnerability, role-playing, pain, or other intense sensations" (Sloan 548-9). At its base, Kinky Criticism examines these power dynamics

and the methods used to cultivate them. But through application of BDSM principles, the Kinky Critic is able to identify previously unaddressed complexities in the relationships between characters. This power exchange may include the techniques mentioned by Lorca Jolene Sloan, but the dynamics of modern BDSM practice are far more nuanced than a simple sentence can describe.

Sloan's description touches on another aspect of modern BDSM practice that is widely acknowledged as the most important factor of responsible kink: consent. Morton Ebbe Juul Nielson has observed that "consent is commonly taken to play a pivotal role in defending morally and legally defensible BDSM-practices, as it does in other sexual relationships" (265). This first law of kinky practice complicates Kinky Criticism's application to literary works. In a recreational BDSM interaction, consent is explicitly stated and preceded by a process of negotiation. This is rarely the case in literary depictions of kink, in which consent is either implied or entirely disregarded. Such omissions are problematic for the Kinky Critic, because the law of consent plays so integral a part of BDSM practice, but by necessity cannot be considered a rule-breaker in the context of literature. However, the analysis of *Women in Love* will address consent because of the sadistic Gerald Crich's complete disregard for a main element of the consent law: knowledge.

Knowledge as a prerequisite for consent is complex in and of itself. Nielson has noted that "the consenting parties must have sufficient knowledge about what they are consenting to or accepting consent for; the intention or will of the consenter must be genuine; the consenting parties must be competent mentally. . . and the consent given and accepted must be given voluntarily" (268). These factors all function in important capacities for upholding the moral



rectitude of BDSM practice. If a participant does not understand the content of the scene<sup>1</sup>, consent cannot be genuine. If consent is coerced or reluctant, that is a violation. When the consenter is not mentally capable due to immaturity, intoxication, or any number of factors, responsible BDSM practitioners would not allow participation. Thus foreknowledge, genuine will, mental competence, and voluntary involvement are the standards by which not only real-world BDSM, but also literary depictions of kink may be judged.

Consent is one important element of kink, but Elena Faccio, Claudia Cassini, and Sabrina Cipollette describe four key rules to healthy BDSM practice:

(1) consensuality – who ‘plays’ the submissive role makes the choice to play it and can withdraw his or her consent at any time, (2) the use of a ‘safe word’ – the withdrawal of consent is generally done using a word or gesture previously agreed upon by the participants, (3) flexibility of roles – all participants have the option of being both dominant and submissive, and (4) reciprocity of satisfaction – pleasure has to be bidirectional, but it does not have to be specifically sexual, rather, it may stem from power (753).

These authors’ list is comprehensive and covers many facets of the intricate world of kink. Safe words are the primary method for withdrawing consent, thereby maintaining the first law of BDSM. The different roles involved in kink will be addressed later; of more immediate importance is the idea of bidirectional pleasure derived from BDSM.

The pleasure that different practitioners take from BDSM is often thought to be purely sexual in nature, but this is not always the case. Sloan studied kinky subjects who identified as asexual, not driven by a libidinal urge in the least. She notes that “BDSM provides discursive

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<sup>1</sup> “Scene” is the common term for a modern BDSM interaction. Two or more participants enact a scene, involving a range of possible activities usually involving power exchange, sadomasochism, or other types of kink.

spaces and conceptual frameworks for fostering and validating intimate exchanges that do not derive from or rely on sexual desire” (561). This concept is important to Kinky Criticism because in literature, often power exchange dynamics occur between two characters who are not sexually or romantically involved. Rather, in an asexual context kinky interaction can aid in developing interpersonal dynamics and often, but not always, such interactions are a medium for non-sexual bonding. In literature, sexuality is often understated or even implied rather than described. But the elements of kink remain, defining the relationships between characters via power play or even sadomasochistic practice.

Sadomasochism, like power play, is often asexual in nature. Christian Talbot, in a trailblazing analysis of the Count Ugolino episode in *Inferno XXXIII*, observed that “[a] sampling of the psychoanalytic literature reveals two major understandings of the concept of oral sadism: oral sadism as an expression of the libidinal impulse and as an expression of an aggressive impulse” (108-9). This distinction is absolutely imperative to examining kinky themes in literature. Libidinal sadism is sexual in nature, and although it is present in some literary works, it is often understated or even unstated, probably due to social taboo. On the other hand, aggressive sadism abounds under the umbrella term “violence.” Sadism may refer to any act done with the intended purpose of causing pain to another, whether that pain is physical or even emotional. It is important to distinguish between libidinal sadism—in which the sadist derives sexual pleasure from inflicting suffering—and aggressive sadism, which has little or nothing to do with sexuality, but may instead be driven by anger, hatred, bitterness, or any range of emotions. Aggressive sadism can give nonsexual satisfaction to the sadist, but more often is a source of internal conflict and even moral dilemma. This moral deliberation after violence is apparent in the following analysis of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*’ guerilla leader, Pablo, an

aggressive sadist driven by political conviction. The distinction between libidinal and aggressive kink is not confined to sadomasochistic practice, but may also relate to the power play dynamics that define most modern BDSM practice.

The standard unit of modern BDSM practice is referred to as a “scene.” This is one example of how a common term takes on new meaning in the realm of kink, and the word also suggests a parallel to the elements of literary analysis. Just as a scene is the basic unit of any story, so is it the driving force behind most BDSM interaction. Sloan notes that “BDSM partners collaboratively negotiate and script a power exchange, enact this dynamic during the scene, and dissolve it during aftercare” (551). The careful process of negotiation is the key to a healthy kinky interaction, and many practitioners confine their power exchange to the limits of the scene, with some exceptions.

Power play is the most obvious yet most often misunderstood factor of BDSM practice and also Kinky Criticism. In essence, power play is the exchange of control between a Dominant figure and a submissive figure<sup>2</sup>. This exchange can take place in a wide variety of forms: the assertion of dominance, the willful act of submission, and the practice of discipline between two or more individuals. Discipline is just as often verbal as physical, and may begin to bleed into sadomasochism, or pain exchange. Yet power play is not always sexual in nature, and in fact is usually not sexual. Rather, using a kinky lens, it becomes obvious that power dynamics are present from the most mundane interactions to central relationships. Furthermore, identifying the depictions of power play often complicates the interpretation of character, whether fictional or real. The practices of power play in a real-world BDSM scene are often more overt than the illustration of such dynamics in literature, but the parallels are there to be drawn.

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<sup>2</sup> In BDSM culture, it is customary to denote Dominant roles with capitalization, while submissives merit lower-case titles.

Real-world BDSM interactions all come down to a question of power—who has it, and how they use it. This element can be found not only in different literary critical traditions, but all throughout human society. In her study aimed at the evolutionary origins of BDSM, Eva Jozifkova points out that “Sexual arousal by a higher-ranking [Dominant] or lower-ranking [submissive] partner (considering within-pair hierarchy) correlates positively with markers of reproductive success in the common population” (392). In Jozifkova’s estimation, power dynamics are a contributor to reproductive success, possibly due to the relationship between power exchange and sexual arousal. This biological explanation provides groundwork for the establishment of kinky themes across different historical and cultural boundaries. Hierarchy is a universal element in human societies around the globe, and marrying up or down has been a common phenomenon for centuries. As such, marital hierarchies are illustrated in literary works throughout world history. It is only a step further to examine these relationships for elements of kink.

Kinky relationships are tight-knit and inseparable from the question of power. Faccio and colleagues explain their observations of kinky interaction as follows: “Sexuality was construed as a ‘game’ with specific rules, and ‘pleasure’ was associated with extremely intense experiences. The relationship between the partners was considered fundamental, as it gave meaning to the sexual practice. Both dominant and dominated roles were found to be tightly linked to the possession and management of power between partners” (752). The game these scholars refer to is the key to healthy BDSM practice, and may be related to many instances of power play found in literature. Characters often vie for control over one another, and this conflict is often good-natured in that there is no ill intent. Rather, the struggle for power is a universal human experience and is depicted as such in literary works. Another key element of kink to

which Faccio and colleagues allude is the importance of interpersonal relationships to BDSM practice. Kink is essentially a bonding behavior by which practitioners solidify relationships and explore the boundaries of those relationships. As such, kink serves as a medium for interpersonal communication and is an often subtle way of defining a relationship between people—or characters.

The last element described by Faccio and colleagues is the presence of defined roles, Dominant and dominated. These categories are rather reductive, but do effectively summarize much of the BDSM world's complex interpersonal role-play. There are numerous titles within each category. Seemingly innocuous words like “teacher” take on new meaning in the realm of kink; this term refers to one who has undertaken to train someone in the arts of power play. There is a contrast between “teacher” and “Master” and “Mistress,” which refer to Dominant roles, a status in which individuals possess power over others. According to Faccio and company, “the power role is frequently played by men, [but] it is not rare for women to play the dominant role, subverting the traditional rules of the social game” (755). Which individual assumes power is not always determined by traditional concepts like gender, or even wealth or social status. I will demonstrate this concept in the analysis of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, in which a penniless woman functions as the unquestioned commander of a band of guerrilla fighters. Pilar's example goes to show that virtually anyone can be a Dominant, so long as that individual possesses the qualities of responsible dominance.

Responsibility is the essence of dominance, because the Master or Mistress has a duty to provide for the needs of his or her charge—to guide, to care, and, when necessary, to discipline. Ali Hèbert and Angela Weaver note in a sociological study that “Participants described dominants as empathic and nurturing, desiring and able to take control, and attentive and

responsible” (N.p.). This caretaking quality is a key factor in literary depictions of kink as well as real-life BDSM practice. A true Dominant addresses the needs of his or her submissive, whether physical or emotional. The Dominant not only accepts service, but also offers support, and has the most important duty of BDSM practice—providing the knowledge that is the foundation for genuine consent. Just as a war commander must acknowledge the risks of battle, “the dominant is responsible for having and sharing knowledge concerning the implications and hazards of the activities to which he or she accepts consent – or to which he or she consents to perform” (Nielson 275). This quality is essentially that of clear communication, which is a requirement for consent to be considered genuine. In order for a kinky relationship to work, the Dominant must be an authority in more than title; he or she must also have and share the knowledge necessary for a healthy BDSM interaction.

These qualities of a Dominant are the building blocks for kinky relationships. Sloan explains what it takes to be a good Dominant:

Being an effective dominant requires informants to take responsibility for their capacities to exercise control – by virtue of their intelligence, brawn, or intensity – and wield power in a manner that benefits their partners . . . the “exchange of authority” involved in dominant/submissive relationships generates self-discipline, accountability, and attunement that “isn’t important in a more egalitarian relationship” (554).

What Sloan describes here are the dual duties of a Dominant; the power wielded is not only over the submissive, but also includes control over oneself. Possessing this type of self-discipline ensures that partner-discipline does not cross the boundaries into corruption or abuse. Sloan also alludes to using this power “in a manner that benefits their partners,” the deciding factor in

healthy BDSM. Ultimately, a Dominant's authority will only be recognized if he or she uses it in a manner that ensures reciprocity of reward. Kink is not only beneficial for those in charge; the submissives must also reap substantial gain in the form of pleasure, security, affection, or other benefits.

Playing the submissive may seem negative to the inexperienced, but in fact it is the submissive who has the supreme power in the choice of whether or not to consent. Submissives have the ability to give up dominion over themselves to a Master or Mistress figure, whom they obey without question and often worship overtly—or, in contrast, they can choose not to lower themselves. Sloan asserts that “relinquishing control over their physical and emotional condition requires ‘absolute trust’ in their partners’ intentions, skills, and self-control” (554). This dynamic defines the submissive as well as the Dominant, implying that a true submissive will allow the partner to have control only if that partner is worthy of such authority. This concept is the basis of the kinky relationship, and in literature it is illustrated in the conflicts between characters. When a dominant character attempts to seize power, often the would-be submissive will challenge the Dom's authority as a test of sorts. Thus, submissives are the true deciding factor in any power dynamic, whether real-world or literary. They alone make the decision to surrender their power.

Once power has been surrendered, however, the essential nature of the submissive is revealed. Hébert & Weaver's study revealed that “submissives were characterized as willing to give up control and having a desire to please” (N.p.). That desire to please is the defining characteristic of a submissive. Once dominated, the submissive has a new purpose in life—to serve his or her Dominant. This may be done subtly with small gestures of affection and servitude, overtly by obeying commands, or dramatically in surrendering to verbal or physical

punishment. No matter how it is done, the submissive's motivation is purely to please the Dominant, while that Dominant's power derives from a relationship of mutual respect and affection. By respecting the submissive's consent and looking after the submissive's needs, the Dominant ensures a reciprocal relationship.

The relationship of reciprocity benefits the submissive as well as the Dominant. One of Sloan's submissive study subjects describes the way "BDSM helps her expect respect when she is vulnerable rather than fearing mistreatment if seen as powerless" (554). This type of support is the quintessential reward for a submissive, one that even non-kinky ("vanilla") people would welcome in a relationship. Instead of fearing vulnerability, whether emotional or physical, the submissive embraces that weakness out of trust in his or her partner. Thus, the kinky relationship is the vehicle for genuine support, and serves as an outlet for those darker emotions that many fear to express.

"Darker emotions" is one way to describe the most controversial aspect of kink: sadomasochism. To many in the "vanilla" community, the very idea of sadomasochism represents a completely foreign sexuality far beyond the reaches of "normality" or even sanity. In contrast, Jozifkova's scientific analysis of BDSM argues that "sadomasochistic sex appears as a strengthened adaptive behavior based on natural patterns of reproduction, rather than as pathology" (392). This scholar attempts to normalize this behavior, and proves that sadomasochism is in fact a widespread phenomenon that has developed over the course of human evolution. If Jozifkova's assertions of evolutionary origins are correct, the influence that sadomasochism has had on centuries of literary works cannot be denied.

But what types of behaviors are meant by "sadomasochism"? According to Faccio and colleagues' study on modern BDSM practice, "Sadism and Masochism describes sexual pleasure



derived by inflicting or suffering pain and humiliation within a consensual scenario” (752).

While this is an apt summary of today’s kink community, I must slightly modify definitions for Kinky Criticism in order to apply the theory properly to works of literature. As I have earlier established, sadomasochism is not always sexual in nature. In fact, literary sadomasochism is usually not libidinal. Examining the motivations for sadomasochistic acts provides a unique insight into the central themes that drive a work of literature. In *the Divine Comedy*, sadism and masochism are closely related to divine justice, while in Hemingway, these elements result from political motivations. Whatever the motivation, kink is infused throughout these works in its asexual context as well as its sexual one. In this paper, “masochism” implies self-injury, or a certain welcoming attitude towards the physical or mental suffering of oneself, not necessarily sexual in nature. “Sadism” here means the purposeful infliction of physical or mental pain on another.

These definitions allude to another important distinction in literary depictions of sadomasochism—the fact that the pain involved is often mental or emotional rather than physical. Nielson mentions the way that “pain is taken to include psychological states such as mental distress, feelings of humiliation, etc., and varies not only from person to person, but for the same person in different contexts” (267). Thus, sadomasochism is not confined to physical violence, but may include denigration and the infliction of emotional suffering. In literature, mental sadomasochism abounds in the power play dynamics between contending characters.

The dynamics of power play and sadomasochism, like all interpersonal relationship behaviors, have a deeper purpose beyond the momentary satisfactions of catharsis. In fact, many “BDSM sex participants report increased closeness after a scene” (Jozifkova 395). This relates to the aforementioned interaction of vulnerability and trust; power play and sadomasochism serve

as bonding behaviors that build intimacy both emotionally and physically. Literary evidence of such bonding techniques is widespread, and is particularly obvious in the relationship between Virgil and Dante-pilgrim in the *Divine Comedy*.

### Kinky *Commedia*: Power Play and Sadomasochism in Dante

A reader with any degree of BDSM awareness cannot read the *Divine Comedy* of Dante without noting the distinct presence of kinky undertones. Perhaps the average reader would not deem the *Commedia* “kinky,” but once the patterns are noticed, they are hard to overlook. Kink is universal, as this epic that maps a Christian afterlife reveals. No scholar would object to the notion that there are recurring hierarchical structures in the *Comedy*; it is just a step further to examine these hierarchies for signs of power exchange. It is not a stretch to say that those in paradise have power over those below, and that the saved may use their influence to benefit the penitents and even the damned—yet there are more complex power dynamics to be considered as well. Beyond domination and submission, there are numerous instances of sadomasochism in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, and even mention of masochism in *Paradiso*. All this evidence suggests a complex attitude toward power play and sadomasochism inherent in the *Divine Comedy*; power play is sanctioned, sanctified and ultimately empowering, while sadism is regarded as base yet at times justified, and masochism as a righteous penance. Becoming aware of the presence of power play and sadomasochism in the *Divine Comedy* is integral to having a full appreciation for Dante’s central theme of divine justice, and adds significance to the pilgrim’s holy fate.

The sadistic practices in the *Divine Comedy* are mostly aggressive in nature, and even more significantly, sadism is only present in *Inferno* and not in *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*. This omission in the latter two, which are morally elevated when compared to *Inferno*, reveals

something of Dante's attitude towards sadism; the poet condones sadism only in application toward impenitent sinners. The most memorable example of this defensible sadism takes place in Canto 32, in an encounter at the deepest circle of hell, where the treacherous lie frozen in the surface of a lake. Dante-pilgrim meets an uncooperative sinner who, unlike those in higher circles, refuses to tell his name. The pilgrim meets this opposition with a violent reaction; he "seized him by the hair of the nape and said, 'Either you'll name yourself, or not a hair will be left on you here'" (*Inf.* 32.97-99). Dante-pilgrim proceeds to tear out the hair of the helpless soul until his cries of pain rouse another to call out the victim's name, which is Bocca. This dramatic episode, with neither a tone of regret nor a sign of Virgil's disapproval, plainly communicates that this is the kind of interaction one is expected to have with the damned. Divine punishment alone is not enough, apparently; the virtuous pilgrim also feels the need to exacerbate Bocca's sufferings as just reward for his sin.

Shortly following the encounter with Bocca, the travelers meet Count Ugolino, who eternally cannibalizes his treacherous former partner in crime. Talbot observes that this act is an example of aggressive sadism, to which conclusion it must be added that an element of divine justice is also present. After all, the almighty designer of hell could easily have placed the Count far from his nemesis, but instead the "two [are] frozen in one hole so close that the head of one was a hood for the other" (*Inf.* 32.125-6). Hell, by its very design, enables the sadistic impulses of one to perpetually punish the other—an apt illustration of the *contrapasso* (or cross-punishment) Dante frequently employs.

Perpetual punishment of the guilty is, of course, the very purpose of hell. Dante's delight in it is evident when he is in the tar-pit of the barraters; he writes, "Now, reader, you shall hear new sport" (*Inf.* 22.118), before describing a conflict between demons and a sinner. The sinner,

who has already lost a chunk of his arm to an irritated demon, flees from his winged pursuers and dives into the boiling pitch. Dante's aside to the reader tells us much about his attitude toward the sinner's pain and terror; he regards it as "sport," harmless fun. Still more entertaining is the demons' scrambling pursuit, knocking into each other and falling into the lake of bubbling tar themselves. Their exploits are clearly intended to be comical, and Dante's enjoyment of the sinner's torture and terror, as well as the demons' resulting humiliation and pain, is sadistic in nature. This sadism is condoned, however, as its objects are all evildoers.

Similarly, Dante seems to condone masochism in the *Comedy* when the subject of that masochism is atoning for a sin. The earliest example in *Inferno* occurs at the river Acheron just past the gate of hell, where souls rush to be ferried by Charon and face judgment by Minos. Virgil says that "they are eager to cross the stream, for Divine Justice so spurs them that fear is changed to desire" (*Inf.* 3.124-6). Although the sinners know they are in hell—having passed the gates—they enthusiastically move toward judgment and eternal torment. Such masochism is not without reason; divine justice is the key idea in this passage (and arguably the entire *Comedy*). It serves to motivate even the lowliest of souls, driving them to desire the suffering that results from their impenitent sins. The souls' masochistic actions are in line with divine justice.

Further instances illustrate the sinners' masochism in hell. The flatterers in the eighth circle are heard "smiting themselves with their palms" (*Inf.* 18.105). Many readers consider self-harm to be utterly foreign because of its contrast to the pain-avoiding norm. The contrast between libidinal and aggressive is also applicable to masochism; in this case, the sinners' self-injury is aggressive, asexual, and used as compensation for their sins. The motivation of the sinners' masochism is revealed when one of their number, Alessio Interminei, begins "beating his pate" as soon as Dante-pilgrim calls him by name (*Inf.* 18.124). The recognition is the trigger,

as a reader can easily understand given Alessio's position. He is upset that someone he knew in life has witnessed his sunken state. He is ashamed and expresses this shame by self-injury. Thus Alessio and his fellow sinners further their own suffering, exacerbating the punishment in a masochistic example of divine justice.

Still more convincing examples of masochism are seen as the travelers ascend the mountain of purgatory. On the terrace of pride, Virgil points out, "already you may discern how each [penitent] beats his breast" (*Purg.* 10.120). This self-injury is practiced in order to bring the penitents closer to salvation—further proof that masochism in the *Divine Comedy* is a mechanism of divine justice. Later, on the terrace of gluttony, Forese describes how those who shared his repented sin "drink the sweet wormwood of the torments," undergoing continual spiritual starvation as they pass a tempting tree laden with fruit:

The scent which comes from the fruit, and from the spray that is diffused over the green leaves, kindles within us a craving to eat and to drink; and not once only, as we circle this road, is our pain renewed—I say pain and ought to say solace: for that will leads us to the trees which led glad Christ to say 'Eli,' when He delivered us with His blood (*Purg.* 23.67-86).

Though the gluttons' penance does not include outright physical injury, surely most readers would consider starvation a form of torture. Yet Forese calls his suffering "solace," and invokes the supreme act of masochism: the crucifixion of Christ. Like their savior, the penitents of the sixth terrace choose to undergo pain for the sake of a divine purpose. They must suffer in order to become fit for heaven, so their masochism is the vehicle that gets them there.

Even those souls fit for heaven have awareness of the spiritual value of aggressive masochistic acts. In *Paradiso*, Beatrice explains to the pilgrim why external force does not

excuse a soul's failure of will: "If their will had remained whole, such as held Lawrence on the grid and made Mucius severe to his own hand, it would have urged them back, so soon as they were loosed, by the road along which they had been dragged" (*Par.* 4.82-6). The footnote in Sinclair's translation of *Paradiso* explains that St. Lawrence was roasted to death, and Mucius "held his right hand in the flames because it had failed to stab Lars Porsena, the enemy of Rome" (Sinclair 68). Both of these figures named by Beatrice are examples of willful embracement of pain—masochism—enacted for a greater purpose. In Lawrence's case, the purpose that drove him was divine faith in the Church. Mucius, on the other hand, committed his masochistic act to punish himself for his failure to perform his duty to Rome. Mucius' motivations are reminiscent of the penitents' self-punishment in purgatory, while Lawrence's acceptance of pain landed him in paradise. Both examples cited by Beatrice paint a picture of just masochism for the purpose of spiritual growth.

In strong contrast to such holy illustrations of just masochism and condoned sadism is the slippery moral slope of libidinal sadomasochism. Pain exchange as a sexual practice is socially suppressed, and as a result, not much is known of its history. One historian briefly noted its practice in Roman times; John Boswell mentions in a footnote that "Nero is possibly the sole classical example of a person indulging in what is now called sadomasochism. He would have himself released from a 'den' dressed in the skins of wild animals and 'attack' the private parts of men and women who were bound to stakes" (80). As human beings are violent by nature, it seems logical that this marginalized practice is as old as the race itself. This may not be such a leap, considering the documented presence of other nontraditional sexual behaviors in Dante's time. It is a fact that homosexual practices occurred throughout history, even if the terminology did not yet exist. Since homosexuals lived in the time of the *Comedy*, which the seventh terrace

of purgatory affirms, then it is natural to assume that libidinal sadomasochists did, too. However, libidinal sadomasochists may not have been as relatively accepted as practitioners of other nontraditional sexual behaviors. If known to Dante—a condition that seems probable, given his worldly education—he most likely saw their particular brand of violence as many otherwise liberal-minded people today view sadomasochism: as a deadly sin.

This could explain the presence of the sodomites in *Inferno* 15. Joseph Pequigney notes briefly that “in the Middle Ages sodomy could denote a wider range of sins, and especially the variety of sexual practices thought to be ‘against nature’” (22). The sodomites of *Inferno* trudge across burning sands in the circle of the violent. Their sin, violence against nature, has been interpreted by many scholars, including Pequigney, as proof of their homosexuality. Yet those same scholars go to considerable trouble to reconcile this conclusion with the presence of explicitly identified sodomites in *Purgatorio*. It should be safe to assume that the sodomites depicted in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* represent two entirely different types of sin; after all, nowhere else in the *Comedy* does Dante show the same sin in different locations. Despite that Dante is often figurative, perhaps a literal interpretation of “violence” is appropriate here. Given the assumption that the sodomites of *Inferno* committed physical violence, and that their violence was somehow more unnatural than murder, it is arguable that the infamous sodomites of *Inferno* are actually practitioners of libidinal sadomasochism. This theory of *Inferno*’s sodomites is entirely new to scholarship—just one example of the fruits a Kinky Critical lens may reap.

The most noted among the much-debated group of *Inferno*’s sodomites is Brunetto Latini, Dante’s former teacher. The exchange between Dante-pilgrim and Latini in *Inferno* 15 has been thoroughly examined, but let it feel the knife once more, this time in search of signs of power play. When Latini first recognizes his former student, Dante writes that Latini “took me

by the hem” (*Inf.* 15.23-4). This seizure of the pilgrim’s garment speaks to more than familiarity; it suggests an impulse to violently dominate. By grasping Dante-pilgrim in such an abrupt way, Latini asserts his authority and lays an undeniable claim on his former pupil’s notice. Dante-pilgrim’s response is also significant. He does not draw away, denying Latini’s dominance, but rather the poet writes, “I...fixed my eyes on his scorched face, so that the baked features did not prevent my knowing him, and reaching down my hand toward his face, I answered, ‘Are you here, Ser Brunetto!’” (*Inf.* 15.25-30). The motion of reaching down is a sign of affection, undoubtedly, but it also signifies a lowering of one’s status in deference to another. The pilgrim literally lowers his position in order to connect with Latini in a physical way. This physical act suggests a figurative change in status that renders the pilgrim submissive to Latini. In contrast, translator John Sinclair’s version of the gesture, “bending my face to his,” seems to the kink-aware reader reminiscent of the obedient lowered gaze of a submissive. Whatever the precise action of the pilgrim, his courteous address shows respect and asserts Latini’s status in spite of his damnation. The two reactions in tandem imply submission to his former teacher’s authority. Despite Dante-pilgrim’s relatively higher status in the heavenly hierarchy, the poet has made the choice to characterize his pilgrim as a submissive to Latini’s Dominant.

This impression is reinforced by the exchange that follows. Latini addresses Dante-pilgrim as “my son,” a name that is as diminutive as it is affectionate. He speaks to the pilgrim in commands—“let it not displease you,” “Therefore go on”—while the pilgrim’s replies are all decidedly submissive—“I beg it of you” (*Inf.* 15.31-4). This manner of speaking characterizes Latini as Master and Dante-pilgrim as submissive. However, the pilgrim’s submission is not total; remember that submissives have the choice of consent. Dante-pilgrim “dared not descend from the path to go on a level with him” even as he “kept...head bowed as one who walks in



reverence” (*Inf.* 15.43-5). Although Dante-pilgrim places Latini in an elevated position, he does not entirely forget the true order of things in hell, where sinners are low and the pilgrim is held high. The kinky elements of this scene are complex; they reveal a power dynamic that defies easy BDSM classification, but nonetheless, Latini’s interaction with the pilgrim is decidedly kinky. The purpose of this kinky interaction reaffirms the holiness of the pilgrim’s journey. In spite of his remaining loyalty to earthly life, his encounter with Latini serves as an empowering reminder of the pilgrim’s own divine calling.

The loyalty which Dante-pilgrim still has for his former life leads him into conflicting actions. His feelings of devotion are evident when he says “If my prayers were all fulfilled...you would not yet been banished from human nature, for in my memory is fixed, and now saddens my heart, the dear, kind, paternal image of you, when in the world hour by hour you taught me how man makes himself eternal” (*Inf.* 15.79-85). The wording here, “dear, kind, paternal,” suggests an affectionate detachment from any sexual relationship. Dante-pilgrim’s surprise at Latini’s presence in the violent circle also supports the notion of the poet’s lack of knowledge of libidinal sadomasochism. I do not suggest that Dante himself was involved in any sadomasochistic practice with Latini, but from the dynamics of their behavior, it does seem evident that their relationship had elements of power play. The precise nature of their relationship is suggested by another word choice: “taught.” This may refer, as Michael Camille suggested, to “more than grammatical exercises” (61). Latini taught Dante “how man makes himself eternal,” and in the devout poet’s estimation, the only way to do so is through complete submission to God. What better way to teach this spiritual submission than through the reverential practices illustrated in the exchange between pilgrim and Teacher in the underworld?

Dante-pilgrim has another Teacher throughout the first two books of the *Comedy* who does even more to help make him eternal. Virgil is his guide through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, and Dante calls him everything from “Teacher” to “Leader” to, most interestingly, “Master.” At several points in hell, Dante-pilgrim is hesitant and fearful to continue his divine journey. The most significant of these incidents occurs at the gate of hell, where Virgil comes to his aid: “And he [said] to me, as one who understands, ‘Here must all fear be left behind...’ and when he had placed his hand on mine, with a cheerful look from which I took comfort, he led me among the secret things” (*Inf.* 3.13-21). This passage illustrates a classic Master-submissive interaction, and adds a new element to the much-debated relationship dynamics between Virgil and the pilgrim. In spite of his fear, the pilgrim takes comfort in wholly trusting his Master to lead him onward. Only through submission to Virgil’s experience can Dante-pilgrim’s dread be overcome.

Dante-pilgrim’s submission to Virgil is evident in his behavior toward him, which is similar in manner to his gestures toward Brunetto Latini. Shortly after entering hell, Dante-pilgrim eagerly asks a question about the sinners crossing Acheron, which Virgil postpones answering. Dante-pilgrim takes this postponement for denial, and behaves accordingly: “Then, with eyes downcast and ashamed, fearing that my words had displeased him, I refrained from speaking till we reached the river” (*Inf.* 3.79-81). His averted gaze is the same gesture that the pilgrim in Sinclair’s translation used with Latini, though in this case its cause is shame instead of reverence. But shame is derived from reverence, as the pilgrim’s eagerness to please (and fear to displease) reveals. He tries to correct the perceived offence by self-imposed silence; but Virgil is no more responsive to his charge’s shame as he was to the initial question.

The pilgrim’s guide is not always so insensible, however. In Canto 30 of *Inferno*, Dante-pilgrim lingers a little too long watching the conversations of the fraudulent:

I was standing all intent to listen to them, when the master said to me, ‘Now just you keep on looking a little more and I will quarrel with you!’

When I heard him speak to me in anger, I turned to him with such shame that it circles through my memory even yet...

‘Less shame washes away a greater fault than yours has been,’ said the master, ‘therefore disburden yourself of all sadness; and do not forget that I am always at your side... the wish to hear it is a base wish’ (*Inf.* 30.130-148).

Here Virgil’s rebuke is explicit rather than implied, and the pilgrim’s reaction is accordingly more severe. But like all good Masters, Virgil accepts repentance when it is offered appropriately. He goes further than acceptance, offering forgiveness and an explanation for his criticism. Virgil’s response is an example to his submissive of the true way to immortality; he teaches the pilgrim a moral lesson by using verbal discipline. This empowerment of the submissive is an illustration of the purpose power play serves in the *Divine Comedy*.

Virgil’s divine purpose in using power play is not only exerted over Dante-pilgrim, but over other characters in *Inferno* as well. Geryon, the beast who guards Malebolge, is compelled by Virgil to carry the pair of travelers down into the pit. Sinclair notes that “Geryon, cheated like a falcon of his prey, is ‘angry and sullen,’ but he is wholly at Virgil’s bidding” (223). Later on, when confronted by Malacoda, the leader of the demons who punish barratry, Virgil invokes his own divine ordinance. Malacoda reacts: “Then was his pride so fallen, that he let the hook drop at his feet, and said to the others, ‘Now let no one strike him’” (*Inf.* 21.85-7). This fallen pride is reflected in the action of Malacoda dropping his weapon. Thus disarmed, he does not dare oppose Virgil, and verbally encourages his fellows to submit in like manner. The demon’s

gesture and speech unite to reveal a submission to Virgil's dominance, and to the holy purpose that he represents.

Even in *Purgatorio*, Virgil's authority is hailed by penitents and saved souls alike. Although some critics (such as Kennedy) have argued that Virgil is belittled in purgatory, in fact his admittedly lesser knowledge of the terrain only serves as a contrast to the reverence with which he is treated. When Virgil introduces himself to Sordello in ante-purgatory, Sordello "bent down his brow and humbly approached him again and embraced him where the inferior embraces" (*Purg.* 7.13-5). There are clear signs of submission here, including that recurrent gesture of the head which recalls earlier scenes. More explicitly, Sordello's humble approach and the "inferior" nature of his embrace both demonstrate his profound respect for Virgil. In terms of power play, Virgil is definitely the Dominant here.

These secondary affirmations of Virgil's dominance underscore the different tone of his relationship with Dante-pilgrim. This primary relationship is less formal, and more intimate. The two travelers have a connection that is not only communicated by speech and gesture, but also unconsciously. When they meet with Statius on the fifth terrace of purgatory, Dante writes that Virgil's question to the newly-saved soul, "This asking did he thread the needle's eye of my desire, and with hope alone my thirst was made less craving" (*Purg.* 21.37-9). This is just one example of a common occurrence throughout the *Comedy*: Virgil (and, later, Beatrice) predicts the pilgrim's desire and addresses it before he is ever asked to do so. So Master fulfils his duty to provide for the needs of his charge; so, too, is the submissive assured that his happiness rests in fully trusting his Master.

Dante-pilgrim's unconditional trust in Virgil endures throughout *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, until the pilgrim must go where his beloved Master cannot guide him. In Virgil's final speech, he

tells the pilgrim, “free, upright, and whole is your will, and it would be wrong not to act according to its pleasure; wherefore I crown and mitre you over yourself” (*Purg.* 27.140-2). Here the Master, the Teacher, declares that his charge no longer need submit to his authority. The regal language of “crown and mitre” reminds the pilgrim of the divine calling he must now obey. Thus the submissive surpasses his Dominant, ultimately illustrating the process of empowerment central to the *Divine Comedy*’s depiction of power play.

Although he has surpassed Virgil by the end of *Purgatorio*, Dante-pilgrim is not yet fully empowered. In order to become truly worthy of his divine destiny, he must submit to and learn from one last teacher—his former earthly love, Beatrice. Beatrice died several years before the composition of the *Comedy*, and in the poet’s estimation she is one of the most highly honored of heaven’s ladies. In fact, it is by her influence that Virgil came to guide the pilgrim in the beginning of *Inferno*. At the start of their epic quest, Virgil tells the pilgrim how “a lady called me, so blessed and so fair that I prayed her to command me... [her] command so pleases me, that had I obeyed already it would be late” (*Inf.* 2.53-80). Such language coming from the hallowed Master lets the reader know from the start that the ultimate power lies with the divine lady. Even Virgil’s established dominance is no match for the commands of Beatrice, and he submits to this ultimate Mistress figure.

Despite Virgil’s submission to Beatrice, she too acknowledges the power of her hell-bound male counterpart. During Beatrice’s first appearance in the earthly paradise at the top of purgatory, she explains that “I visited the gate of the dead, and to [Virgil] who has conducted [Dante] up hither my prayers were offered with tears” (*Purg.* 30.139-141). This description of her perspective reveals much about each character’s perception of the other. What was to Virgil a “command” is to Beatrice a “prayer.” Both characters use words that place the dominance in the

hands of the other. Obviously, there is great respect on both sides. Their mutual respect, for each other and from the pilgrim, establishes the two as a dual incarnation of the same dominating force.

It is only through the combined efforts of these two Dominants that Dante-pilgrim can reach truly divine empowerment. Beatrice's first exercise of her power is to reprimand the pilgrim for his tears as Virgil's disappearance: "Dante, because Virgil leaves you, do not weep yet, do not weep yet, for you must weep for another sword . . . How did you deign to climb the mountain? Did you not know that here man is happy?" (*Purg.* 30.55-75). Here she speaks in commands, reminding the tearful submissive that there will be further causes to cry before he reaches the peaceful happiness of paradise. She goes on to tell of the pilgrim's sins in the former life, and how he was unfaithful to her memory after her death. This exercise of verbal discipline serves to empower the pilgrim by debasing him in a manner pleasing to God.

Naming the pilgrim's sins effectively tears him down; after Beatrice asks him to "say if this is true," the poet writes that "Confusion and fear, together mingled, drove forth from my mouth a *Yes* . . . I burst under that heavy load, pouring forth tears and sighs, and my voice failed along its passage" (*Purg.* 31.5-21). The state described here is a vivid illustration of submission under discipline. The pilgrim admits to his sins, and as a result can be forgiven and move forward in his divine journey. This is perhaps the best example in the *Comedy* of the manner in which power play serves to uplift the submissive. Only through such humility can Dante-pilgrim be empowered and become worthy of heaven.

I must also note the behaviors that establish the pilgrim's humility and subservience to Beatrice. When Beatrice bids her charge look at a chariot (representative of the church), the pilgrim responds thus: "I, who at the feet of her commands was all devout, gave my mind and

my eyes whither she willed” (*Purg.* 32.106-8). Sinclair’s translation of the same passage describes the pilgrim as “wholly bowed down and submissive” to Beatrice’s will, but whatever the exact phrasing, Dante-pilgrim’s obedience to the “commands” of his Mistress serves a greater purpose. The chariot he watched on her order illustrates symbolically the evolution and degradation of the holy church. Through the pilgrim’s submission to his Mistress’ will, he witnesses a divine lesson that drives him to make a difference when he comes back to earth.

The pilgrim’s divine guide teaches him many lessons as the two move upward into the heavenly realm. Almost the entirety of *Paradiso* is made up of answers given to Dante-pilgrim in response to his (spoken or unspoken) questions about the universe and how it works. It seems that paradise is all about acquiring power through knowledge. In Canto 15 the travelers meet Cacciaguida, the founder of Dante’s lineage, who invites his descendent to ask what questions he has. Dante writes that “I turned to Beatrice, and she heard before I spoke, and smiled to me a sign that made the wings of my desire increase. And I began” (*Par.* 15.70-3). This passage not only underscores submissive behavior—with Dante requesting and being granted permission to speak—but it also illustrates the empowering effect of this behavior. The wings Dante writes of are a metaphor for the growing confidence and power of his soul. Having been allowed by his great Mistress to speak, he now knows that his speech is justified. Her authority serves to build up his own.

The influence of Beatrice’s authority is ultimately what makes the pilgrim worthy of the honor of being in the presence of God. Yet Dante-pilgrim would never have made it to the earthly paradise to meet his Mistress without the guidance of his experienced Master, Virgil. These two guide characters of the *Divine Comedy* combine to create a flawless illustration of power dynamics in the epic. While the pilgrim consistently submits to both Virgil and Beatrice,

his submission ultimately leads to his empowerment. More complex is the scene of the pilgrim's submission to Brunetto Latini early in the epic, which serves to illustrate that Dante-pilgrim has not yet let go of earthly concerns at that point in the journey. Scholars have hotly debated Latini's damnation, but through knowledge of human sexuality and examination of Latini's forceful body language, it may be inferred that he and his fellow "sodomites" are not homosexuals, but libidinal sadomasochists. While the sexual practice of sadomasochism was worthy of eternal damnation, the text of the *Divine Comedy* sends a clear message that aggressive sadism is excusable when applied to punish a sinner. Similarly, masochism is just atonement for one's own sins. While these attitudes towards what is now euphemistically called "kink" may seem uncompromisingly complex, in fact this very complexity makes sense when one considers the intricate nature of BDSM practices. In the context of the *Comedy*, power play is portrayed as a process of empowerment, and sadomasochism is appropriate only when applied to sin. Although some scholars might shudder at the assertion that the *Divina Commedia* is kinky, in fact its kinkiness serves to emphasize the message of divine justice that is central to this fascinating text.

#### Gerald Crich and Consent: a Kinky Critique of *Women in Love*

Another fascinating text with distinctly kinky themes is D. H. Lawrence's novel *Women in Love*. Lawrence is an author whose preoccupation with violence and power dynamics has kept scholars intrigued for over a century. Sadomasochistic domination is perpetrated by the title character in "The Prussian Officer," and more subtle exchanges are present in Lawrence's other fiction. As Carolyn Jones claims, Lawrence "contemplates power and sees that there is power present in all human relationships, even the most loving ones" (81). This observation is apt, as



the novel portrays a variety of relationships rife with power exchange and sadomasochism. Lawrence's work provides virtually endless potential for the Kinky Critic. In *Women in Love*, every relationship has elements of power play, but it is the fascinatingly complex character of Gerald Crich who offers the most fruitful opportunity for analysis. A thorough examination of Gerald reveals previously unnoted complexities in his character that influence the dynamics of his relationships. Crich's every interaction is essentially a BDSM scene, from his friendship with Rupert Birkin even to the way he interacts with animals throughout the novel. Andrew Howe studied these sadistic animal interactions, pointing out that despite social taboos against sadomasochism, "Lawrence sidesteps this problem of bringing the private to the public by having the sadistic acts carried out against animals instead of humans" (429). This method of using animal proxies is problematic, to say the least. Gerald Crich functions in the novel as the quintessential sadist, and despite the exception of his consensual and reciprocal relationship with Birkin, the way Crich practices his kinky tendencies upon animal surrogates violates the first law of BDSM: consent.

As Nielson, Sloan, and other scholars have noted, consent is the cornerstone of morality in modern BDSM practice. Without viable consent from all concerned parties, kink crosses the line of ethics and becomes abuse. Nielson's description of the four requirements of consent—foreknowledge, genuine will, mental competence, and voluntary involvement—present a standard by which the sadistic practices of Gerald Crich may be judged. Crich is a true libidinal sadist, deriving pleasure from causing pain to the creatures around him. Even in his seemingly reciprocal relationship with Birkin, violence seems an essential part of Crich's character.

But this isn't confined to Crich; the entire novel depicts similar struggles for power, though Crich's efforts are undoubtedly the most extreme. Howe has described "the central thesis

of *Women in Love*: in order to maintain equilibrium in a relationship, both parties need to fight to establish their own individuality and power” (Howe 439). Hermione Roddice’s attack on Birkin illustrates this point, as do Birkin and Ursula’s rocky beginnings, and most dramatically, Gerald’s descent from animal abuse to domestic violence. All throughout *Women in Love*, characters practice power play and sadomasochism in a struggle for control; it is a fruitful source for Kinky Criticism.

Crich’s various struggles for power are largely negative, but his only somewhat positive power dynamic is his relationship with Rupert Birkin. These men’s relationship is what modern readers might call a “bromance,” but it also has distinctly kinky themes. The men engage in a dynamic that fluctuates between one or the other man acting as dominant. Jones has observed that “Birkin and Gerald, who have an instinctive and instant attraction to each other, represent the conflicting modes of being, the contraries that struggle for equilibrium” (67). Crich and Birkin are very different men, and their differences sometimes become conflicts. The two men seem to consider themselves equals, although that does not prevent them from engaging in various verbal debates and one instance of physical violence.

The physical violence between the men is contained within a single scene, wherein Birkin and Crich spend an evening wrestling naked. Yoshinobu Shimotori has rightly recognized that this scene “could be regarded as an instance of ‘degenitalized’ physical pleasure,” but it also has distinct sadomasochistic undertones. It is a physical contest of strength, a violent but controlled interaction in which both men attempt to come out on top. It begins with a visit and a seemingly simple conversation. As Birkin enters the room, Gerald addresses him: “ ‘By God, Rupert,’ he said, ‘I’d just come to the conclusion that nothing in the world mattered except somebody to take the edge off one’s being alone: the right somebody.’ . . . ‘The right woman, I suppose you mean,’

said Birkin spitefully” (253). Birkin seems to respond with bitterness to Gerald’s gesture of intimacy. This simple exchange represents a burgeoning conflict that is never directly addressed, a struggle for power between equals.

This friendly struggle between equal men directly correlates to another scene in which Birkin’s pet tomcat, the Mino, has a violent encounter with a stray female. According to Howe, the cats’ goal is “an equal relationship” (438). This assertion recalls the “struggle for equilibrium” described by Jones as the defining dynamic between Crich and Birkin. In both cases, the kinky participants begin with a conflict, interact violently, and end with a more stable relationship. Although Howe has argued that the cats are representative of Birkin and Ursula’s relationship, I contend that the scene with the cats parallels the wrestling scene of Crich and Birkin.

After Birkin’s “spiteful” retort, Gerald confides that he is restless and Birkin agrees to show him Japanese wrestling to pass the time. They strip and approach one another, tension mounting. Birkin says, ““You let me take you so—’ And his hands closed on the naked body of the other man. In another moment, he had Gerald swung over lightly and balanced against his knee, head downwards. Relaxed, Gerald sprang to his feet with eyes glittering” (256). This is an intriguing exchange for several reasons. Most importantly, it is the only instance in the novel in which Gerald Crich allows himself to play the submissive. He accepts Birkin as his teacher because Birkin has a skill that Crich wants to acquire. They begin with Birkin dominant, and their sadomasochistic exchange has a purpose. Gerald’s relaxation and glittering eyes seem to denote enjoyment; he is pleased at being violently overcome.

Compared to the two men’s wrestling, the cats’ exchange is more overtly violent, but both interactions are virtually identical in purpose and in the controlled nature of the violence. At

first, the female stray “began to quicken her pace, in a moment she would be gone like a dream, when the young grey lord sprang before her, and gave her a light handsome cuff. She subsided at once, submissively” (137-8). The contrast is that the female cat attempts to avoid conflict, whereas both men enter into it willingly. However, the Mino’s “light handsome cuff” does have a similar tone to Birkin’s initial disabling of Crich. Both are violent, but relatively gentle forms of domination. Citing such adjectives as proof, Howe argues that “Clearly, his [Mino’s] blows are playful in nature and are not meant to cause harm or injury to the wild cat” (438). This controlled manner of violence seems to suggest the same welcoming attitude to violence that defines BDSM scenes. If the cats are playful, the men are definitely so. Both exchanges may be defined as instances of libidinal sadomasochism, because the violence included is consensual and clearly a mechanism for power play dynamics.

The purpose behind each of these libidinal sadomasochistic exchanges is that violence may be used as a method of bonding, as in modern BDSM practice. Roland Pierloot comments that “for Birkin the ideal fulfillment exceeds the man-woman relation, which should be complemented by a man-man brotherhood” (168). This fulfillment through brotherhood is precisely what Birkin seeks in meeting Gerald Crich with sadomasochism and power play, but it may be added that their relationship has erotic components. The two men engage in a distinctly kinky relationship, and their exercise of sadomasochism seems to be libidinal rather than aggressive. Their kink is intended to help them reach the “star-equilibrium” that Birkin so desires. Birkin’s bond with Gerald is a meeting of equals, just as Birkin projects that the Mino “wants super-fine stability . . . it is the desire to bring this female cat into a pure stable equilibrium, a transcendent and abiding *rapport* with the single male” (138-9). The genders of

participants are irrelevant; it is the equality resulting from power exchange that Birkin seeks. Equality, in *Women in Love*, can only be achieved through conflict.

This kinky conflict is friendly and good-natured despite the modern stigma against BDSM. In the wrestling match, Gerald and Birkin “stopped, they discussed methods, they practised grips and throws, they became accustomed to each other, to each other’s rhythm, they got a kind of mutual physical understanding” (256). This is a perfect example of the negotiation and communication processes involved in modern BDSM practice, but in this context, it serves to maintain the equilibrium enjoyed by the two men. What follows is an exercise of violence intended to explore and test their sense of equality: “And then again they had a real struggle. They seemed to drive their white flesh deeper and deeper against each other, as if they would break into oneness” (256). This oneness is the goal of their fighting: unity, equality, partnership. The physical struggle does not negate the respect they have for each other, and the violence they use functions as a bonding mechanism rather than a disruption of their relationship.

Similarly, the cats interact with a violence that is not truly aggressive in nature, but is rather a display of power exchange not intended to cause physical injury. Lawrence’s description of their dynamic reveals this: “In a lovely springing leap, like a wind, the Mino was upon her, and had boxed her twice, very definitely, with a white, delicate fist. She sank and slid back, unquestioning. He walked after her, and cuffed her once or twice, leisurely, with sudden little blows of his magic white paws” (138). The female cat’s calm acceptance of the Mino’s behavior reveals the balance that this dynamic establishes between them. Although he hits her, she is the one who leads the way as he follows. Each of the cats has some share in the power, though admittedly the Mino’s power is more plainly evident. Their interaction, like that of the men, is ambiguous but ultimately equalizing.

There is a comparably ambiguous end to the wrestling match between the two men. Though Gerald is described as the stronger of the two, when they cease their fighting, it is Birkin who is literally on top: “ ‘I could have thrown you—using violence—’ panted Gerald. ‘But you beat me right enough.’ / ‘Yes,’ said Birkin . . . ‘you’re much stronger than I—you could beat me—easily’” (258). This is a verbal draw of sorts that establishes the power equality of the two fighters. For Birkin and Gerald, “Wrestling is a working-out over time of the relationship between two bodies. It climaxes either in the stillness of the submission of one to the other, or in the stillness of balance, of the recognition of equal power of the combatants” (Jones 69). The balance between Birkin and Crich results from an episode of intense power play and sadomasochism that reinforced mutual respect and affection between them.

Unfortunately, respect and affection are not characteristic of all of Crich’s kinky interactions. Quite the opposite is true, in fact; Birkin seems to be the only character for whom Crich has any degree of respect. Jones has noted that “Gerald, who represents the patriarchy, can see the world only in terms of power” (68). Crich is a white male and the head of a successful coal mine, so his socioeconomic status is consequently elevated. These factors make him believe himself superior to virtually everyone around him, and he even thinks of them as mere parts of the machine that is his life.

This tendency leads Crich to treat others with disrespect and even nonconsensual violence. As Howe observes of Gerald, “He also feels it is permissible for those atop the hierarchy to treat those in lower positions violently if necessary” (433). Because of his status, “those in lower positions” refers to nearly every living creature Crich encounters. Violent sadism is the vehicle by which Crich dominates and uses those around him. This may not be quite so problematic if all his kinky exchanges were as mutual as his relationship with Birkin; however,

Crich also exercises his sadistic tendencies against creatures that have no power of consent. In order to render kinky themes acceptable, Lawrence depicts “the struggles inherent in human relationships, ones based on dominance and ownership . . . projected onto animal proxies” (Howe 430). This manner of portraying sadomasochism in a less controversial way appears early in the novel and continues throughout, utilizing several different animals as surrogates for Crich’s sadistic impulses.

The first of these violated animals is Crich’s horse, a skittish Arab mare. As he sits atop her next to a passing train, the mare fears the noise and tries to shy away. But Gerald “sat glistening and obstinate, forcing the wheeling mare, which spun and swerved like a wing, and yet could not get out of the grasp of his will” (101). This is clearly dominance behavior; Crich imposes his will upon the horse, who resists submission even while her sides bleed from his spurs. The two are fighting for power, but the man seems to dominate. The sisters are watching, and Ursula hysterically criticizes Gerald’s cruelty. The man reacts:

A sharpened look came on Gerald’s face. He bit himself down on the mare like a keen edge biting home, and *forced* her round. She roared as she breathed, her nostrils were two wide, hot holes, her mouth was apart, her eyes frenzied. It was a repulsive sight. But he held on her unrelaxed, with an almost mechanical relentlessness, keen as a sword pressing into her. Both man and horse were sweating with violence. Yet he seemed calm as a ray of cold sunshine (101-2).

The imagery here is of weaponry—“sharpened,” “keen edge,” “sword”—implying a life-and-death struggle. Crich is described as if he were himself a weapon, rigid and sharp. He is aligned with the tools of pain, and the horse feels the excruciating effects of his power over her. He dominates, and she fights with all her power but cannot entirely resist his violent control.

Scholars have commented on Gerald's violent dominance of the horse. Howe argues that "The episode is best interpreted as a sadistic rape, as it is violent and against the mare's will" (431). Gerald spurs her to the point of bleeding, forcing her to submit to his will. This matter of will recalls the concept of consent in modern BDSM practice. Consent, the first law of BDSM, requires foreknowledge and genuine will. Crich blatantly disregards both of these elements. The horse is clearly not willing to do as he requires, and her fear of the train suggests she has no knowledge of it. The mare's lack of knowledge alone means that she is incapable of consent, and her active resistance to Crich's will confirms the violation of this law of kink. Gerald Crich is, indeed, a rapist, and would be classified in modern BDSM communities as an abuser.

The horse episode suggests a human parallel as strongly as that of the cats. The two sisters watch the exchange, including Gerald's paramour, Gudrun. Unlike her sister, Gudrun is not made angry by Gerald's treatment of the horse. Instead, "Gudrun was as if numbed in her mind by the sense of indomitable soft weight of the man, bearing down into the living body of the horse: the strong, indomitable thighs of the blond man clenching the palpitating body of the mare into pure control; a sort of soft white magnetic domination from the loins and thighs and calves" (103-4). Gudrun's fixation on Gerald's physical body suggests a sexual aspect to her response. The clenching thighs, "domination from the loins," indicate that the woman is aroused by this display of sadistic dominance. Howe observes that "her attraction for Gerald is driven by some masochistic need" (432). Gudrun's attraction to such violent dominance certainly suggests that she wants to be a part of it. But, I have qualms with labeling Gudrun as a masochist. There are no signs that she wants to receive pain at Gerald's hands. Rather, she seems to want to participate in the sadistic violence, as another animal interaction later in the book confirms.



Later in the novel, another violation of consent against an animal serves to bond the two sadistic lovers. Gudrun wishes to sketch Crich's youngest sister's pet rabbit, Bismarck, so she and Gerald go to move the animal. Bismarck's reaction demonstrates that he does not wish to be touched, and that any contact would be a violation of his will. When the rabbit resists Gerald's touch, "a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. Simultaneously, there came the unearthly abhorrent scream of a rabbit in fear of death . . . then he had it slung round and had it under his arm, fast. It cowered and skulked. His face was gleaming with a smile" (228). Gerald's smile denotes his pleasure in the violent domination of this creature. Bismarck clearly did not want to be grabbed and hit. The rabbit's scream is a safe word of sorts, an expression of terror at Crich's methods of dominance. Any modern kinkster would draw back at this expression of utter violation. Crich is not only a libidinal sadist, but he blatantly disregards all value for consent and therefore crosses the line from defensible kink to indefensible cruelty.

This cruelty is a bonding moment between Gudrun and Gerald, making them abominable allies in this nonconsensual kink. After the rabbit has been released from its torture, "There was a queer, faint, obscene smile over his face. She looked at him and saw him, and knew that he was initiate as she was" (230). They silently communicate their common pleasure in the sadistic domination, and then each show the other the bloody scratches caused by the fighting rabbit. This is a moment of bonding between sadists, but the way Bismarck's will was expressly violated does not bode well for the couple's future relationship.

Gudrun and Gerald's future is, predictably, a violent one, and ends with an episode of domestic violence that no one could call consensual or defensible. Gudrun develops a friendship

with another man, Loerke, and Gerald confronts the two together. It comes to blows between the men, until Gudrun intervenes, hitting Gerald. Then:

Wide, wide his soul opened, in wonder, feeling the pain. Then it laughed, turning, with strong hands outstretched, at last to take the apple of his desire. At last he could finish his desire.

He took the throat of Gudrun between his hands, that were hard and indomitably powerful. And her throat was beautifully, so beautifully soft, save that, within, he could feel the slippery cords of her life. And this he crushed, this he could crush. What bliss! . . . The struggling was her reciprocal lustful passion in this embrace, the more violent it became, the greater the frenzy of delight, till the zenith was reached, the crisis, the struggle was overborne, her movement became softer, appeased (453).

Gerald takes a deeply sexual pleasure in this sadistic act, and Lawrence's language reflects that. The murderous desire of Crichton is the end result of the steadily increasing violations seen throughout the novel. It began with violating the horse, and finally turned to the victim he wanted all along, "the apple of his desire," Gudrun. Gerald's consent violations escalated from animal cruelty to outright domestic violence. But Lawrence does not allow the sadist to win out; Gerald releases Gudrun, and wanders off to die from exposure. Gerald's fate may be interpreted as a form of suicide, but it is the direct result of his sadistic nature. Perhaps the climax of his sadistic impulses forced Gerald to acknowledge this darkest side of himself, and he was as disgusted by himself as Lawrence's readers are. Whatever the character's motivation, it is clear that in Lawrence's literary world, violating consent is punished with death. This result is

comparable to, though more dramatic than, the attitude toward consent violation within modern BDSM practice.

Consensual BDSM practice has little to do with the sadistic dominance behaviors displayed by Gerald Crich throughout *Women in Love*. Careful analysis of Gerald's dynamics with other creatures reveal his true nature as a rapist and violent violator of wills. Although his practices are rooted in a similar libidinal impulse to that of modern kinksters, Crich's violation of the consent law condemns his behavior as pure cruelty. The only exception to this label lies in Crich's relationship with Birkin, which is based in respect and is entirely consensual. Just as Crich and Birkin are paralleled with the battling cats, other animals function in the novel as surrogates for Crich's kinky desires; the tortures of the horse and rabbit are twisted bonding behaviors for the sadomasochistic relationship between Gerald and Gudrun. This romantic pairing gains new significance when considered in the context of Gerald's escalating violence throughout the novel, projected onto animal proxies until the point of final conflict. Lawrence's use of these animals attempted to make Crich's sadistic behaviors palatable his audience, but in a modern view, the sadism depicted in *Women in Love* is positively abhorrent because of its violation of the law of consent.

#### For Whom the Whip Cracks: A Kinky Critique of Hemingway's Novel

The unfortunate consequences of misdirected sadism are not confined to Lawrence, but are also evident in the works of Ernest Hemingway. Sadism has overtly negative treatment in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and masochism also plays an important part in the novel. Both of these elements contribute to the compelling intricacy of each unique and memorable character. This

story is full of kinky themes, and its characters engage in complex power dynamics that complicate their relationships and demonstrate the author's preoccupation with the abiding principle of dominance. Marc Baldwin has commented on Hemingway's fixation on dominance in reference to *the Sun Also Rises*, arguing that "In dominating one is dominated, for the precedent once set assures an illimitable succession of competitive struggles . . . Lovers, presidents, governments, states, and nations: all that dominate have been or will be dominated. Such is the plight of humankind" (31). Of course, power play permeates the very fabric of human society, and is certainly evident in Hemingway's work. The Hemingway canon contains an illimitable variety of power exchange dynamics and sadomasochistic interactions, sometimes sexual in nature. As Carl Eby points out, "an appreciation for Hemingway's psychosexual concerns is not only essential for understanding his own or his characters' unconscious motivations; it is also essential for understanding his *subject matter* insofar as human sexuality and gender identity remained major concerns throughout his career" (2). Although Eby's focus is on Hemingway's hair fetish, his argument applies to a Kinky Critical approach to the author as well. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, complex power dynamics are illustrated in the way Pilar functions as the ruling Dominant, with Robert Jordan as a reluctant switch and Maria playing the role of service submissive; still more complex is the depiction of Pablo as an aggressive sadist who ultimately submits to Pilar's authority.

Pablo uses sadism in an attempt to obtain political justice, but his flawed ideals render his use of sadism ineffective, at best. Compared to Dante's divine justice, this earthly version of sadism is fallible because of the imperfect human characters who enact it. The dubious nature of Pablo's politically-driven sadism is suggested when Pablo leads a band of republican rebels to overthrow fascist control of their small, rural village. After Pablo tells the fascist guards that he

plans to kill them immediately, one guard comments that “‘it is an ugly thing.’ / ‘And you are an ugly thing,’ Pablo said. ‘You murderer of peasants. You who would shoot your own mother.’ / ‘I have never killed anyone,’ the *civil* said. ‘And do not speak of my mother’” (101). Several things are significant in this passage. First and foremost, Pablo attempts to establish his dominance through violence and verbal humiliation. Second and no less important, the *civil* calls Pablo’s notion of justice into question by correcting his assertion that the fascists have murderous tendencies. The rebel leader’s ideals are just that—ideals, not based in reality, as the guard’s retort reveals. By contradicting Pablo’s insults, the guard is both undercutting the rebel’s dominance and suggesting that Pablo’s aggressive sadism is misplaced.

The insults that Pablo throws at his captives are consistent with modern BDSM practice in one sense. Although he disregards consent, Pablo’s assertion of dominance through spoken degradation is in fact a common occurrence in the kinky community. Jozifkova notes that “Verbal humiliation may occur during BDSM sexual interaction called a ‘scene,’ but only when all the partners agree, and when the activity has a sexual meaning for all of them” (393). Though the sexual factor is irrelevant in Hemingway’s scene, the element of verbal humiliation is undoubtedly present. Pablo is using conventional kinky techniques to establish his dominance, however ineffectively.

In the eyes of the Kinky Critic, the ineffective nature of Pablo’s dominance over these captives casts doubt on his claim to that role. In the same scene, Pablo orders the guards to kneel for their execution. They hesitate to obey, and look to their corporal. He says, “It is as well to kneel . . . it is of no importance” (101). The corporal’s commentary undercuts Pablo’s authority, nullifying any status the rebel may have hoped to establish. Pablo fails to establish himself as a Dominant, because the characters he considers submissives do not acknowledge this status.

Thus, the supposed submissive wields the power even at the cost of his own life. Nevertheless, Pablo continues his pattern of aggressive sadism, pulling the trigger against each of their heads.

Pablo's aggressive sadism and its source—his belief in Republicanism—are evident in a later scene when the republican rebels overtake the village, capturing and mortally torturing a number of fascist sympathizers. Eby's assertion that "*belief* is essential to the structure of the perversions" applies to Pablo's faith in his political rectitude (10). Pablo's sadistic actions are justified in his eyes, because he believes that winning the war against fascism is worth the violence it requires. Pilar, his lover and eventual mutineer, comments that "Pablo is very intelligent but very brutal. He had this of the village well planned and well ordered" (104). She alludes to his brutality, a synonym for sadism. The formulaic nature of the tortures Pablo orders suggests that he has thought deeply about these acts, their execution and their significance.

Pablo carefully plans the punishment of the village's fascist sympathizers, an act of aggressive sadism if ever there was one. The fascists are supposed to pass through two lines of armed men, of whom "those who did not have flails had heavy herdsman's clubs, or ox-goats, and some had wooden pitchforks . . . Some had sickles and reaping hooks but these Pablo placed at the far end where the lines reached the edge of the cliff" (105). Pablo's organization of the torture deliberately delays death in a way meant to maximize the amount of suffering each fascist experiences. In Pablo's estimation, the crime of fascism deserves a slow and painful death, and executing this sentence is entirely just. Pablo's aggressive sadism functions as a vehicle to achieve his conception of justice.

Pablo intends to achieve justice through sadism, but because fallible humans execute it, the sadism in this novel evokes a distinct reaction of disturbance and disgust from those who witness it. The attitude towards sadism in this novel is complex; although it is a necessity (as in

Dante), the flaws of the humans performing sadistic acts render the consequences chaotic and reprehensible. Pablo's well-organized torture inevitably becomes a chaotic mob, bloodthirsty for the remaining fascist sympathizers. The result is a massacre that leaves even Pablo with conflicting emotions.

Pablo's inner conflict over orchestrating such violence is revealed in the aftermath of the massacre. In bed that night, Pablo tells Pilar, "tonight we will do nothing . . . I think it would be bad taste after the killing of so many people . . . I am a finished man this night" (128). Pablo feels drained and incapable of performing sexually with Pilar on the night following the massacre, suggesting that he is not a true libidinal sadist, but rather an aggressive sadist who sees violence as an unpleasant necessity. A libidinal sadist would have been aroused by the violence, but Pablo is "finished," exhausted by battling enemies and emotions. In a thesis on Hemingway's war literature, Byron Calhoun noted that the horrors of battle are in part due to "the psychological toll of killing one's enemy" (3). The toll of killing enemies is present in the violent scenes of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and reveals the moral significance of sadism.

Beyond the depiction of sadism, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* also has fascinatingly complex elements of D/s interaction. The novel's ultimate Dominant is Pilar, a guerilla fighter who starts as the lover of the band's leader, then overthrows him and takes control herself. Pilar's dominance is established before she even has a proper name. Rafael, the gypsy guerrilla, says of her, "she has a tongue that scalds and that bites like a bull whip. With this tongue she takes the hide from anyone. In strips. She is of an unbelievable barbarousness" (28). Pilar verbally dominates those around her even before she is the official leader of the guerrilla band. Rafael perceives Pilar's verbal abuse as sadistic. The vivid imagery of stripping a hide with her words suggests that the mental or emotional pain she inflicts is done slowly and deliberately, recalling

the formulaic nature of Pablo's torture. This parallel is further supported when Rafael labels Pilar as "barbarous," which recalls Pilar's assertion that Pablo is "brutal."

However, there is a multifaceted difference between Pablo's failed sadism and Pilar's verbal dominance. Pilar wields control over her fellow guerrillas, where Pablo attempted to dominate his enemies. It is also notable that Pilar does not use physical violence to dominate, but rather uses her words, and dominates in a less dramatic way. She is, like *the Sun Also Rises*' count in Baldwin's estimation, "dominating by the strength of [her] performance" (17). This performance is not as extreme as Pablo's excruciating tortures, but is more effective, perhaps because of its subtle nature. Pilar is a more effective Dominant than Pablo in virtually every way.

Pilar and Pablo vie for dominance over the guerrilla group in a memorable scene, and the woman comes out on top. Pablo, disenchanted with the violence his ideals seem to require, is opposed to the project of exploding the bridge, while Pilar and the rest of the band are eager to participate further in the war. The band essentially votes for Pilar to lead, and Pablo submits reluctantly, still muttering that they are all going to die. Pilar, still without her proper name, turns her bull-whip tongue on her former lover: "'Shut up,' the woman of Pablo said to him and . . . was wildly, unreasoningly angry. 'Shut up, coward. Shut up, bad luck bird. Shut up, murderer.' / 'Good,' Pablo said. 'I shut up. It is thou who commands now'" (58). The insults that Pilar throws at her lover are designed to cut to Pablo's heart—a perfect example of verbal humiliation. She even calls him "murderer," seemingly alluding to the ugliness of the village massacre. Disenchanted, Pablo submits to Pilar, albeit reluctantly.

Other scholars have commented on this scene, underscoring Pilar's domination of her lover. Eby notes that "After symbolically unmanning Pablo by taking control of the guerrilla band, Pilar stands brandishing 'a big wooden stirring spoon' that functions as the phallic insignia



of her office and mocks her husband's assertion" (45). According to Eby, Pilar is one of Hemingway's "phallic women," an apt assertion that perhaps speaks to the nature of her dominance. Pilar, a woman of the 1930's, commands a group of men; she plays this unconventional role perhaps in part because of her masculine qualities. Whatever the source of her dominance, it remains virtually unchallenged throughout the novel.

Pilar not only dominates the guerrillas, but also the novel's central romantic couple, the refugee, Maria, and the visiting explosives specialist, Robert Jordan. Pilar is instrumental in enabling the couple's affair, and she wields her authority over them in a more subtle, but nonetheless dominating way. After Maria and Jordan return from a sexual escapade, Pilar questions the shy refugee girl:

'Maria,' Pilar said, and her voice was as hard as her face and there was nothing friendly in her face. 'Tell me one thing of thy own volition.'

The girl shook her head . . .

'Leave her alone,' Robert Jordan said and his voice did not sound like his own voice. I'll slap her anyway and the hell with it, he thought.

Pilar did not even speak to him . . . There was a spreading, though, as a cobra's hood spreads. He could feel this. . . the spreading was a domination, not of evil, but of searching . . .

'Now you will tell me,' Pilar told her. 'Anything at all. You will see. Now you will tell me.'

'The earth moved,' Maria said, not looking at the woman. (173-4).

The first aspect of this exchange that interests the Kinky Critic is Pilar's insistence that Maria obey "of thy own volition," hoping for consensual submission. Although Pilar is being forceful

in her speech, she does not wish to violate Maria's will, but rather seems to hope that the girl's obedience is sincere. Jordan resists her—we will examine his role later—but Maria, after initial resistance, does choose to submit. Maria even displays the same averted gaze, indicative of submission, seen in Dante. Maria is clearly the submissive in this interaction; however, her submission occurs only after a show of dominance that is more about body language than verbal or physical force.

Pilar's domination through body language is likened to a cobra, a subtle predator that is deadly in spite of its seemingly unremarkable size. Like the cobra, Pilar may not at first glance be viewed as dangerous or Dominant. But through her predatory body language, she impresses her authority upon those around her. Eby comments that "When through an interrogation Pilar tries to experience by proxy Jordan's and Maria's lovemaking, she takes on menacing, phallic, serpentine qualities . . . and we are told twice that Pilar's voice becomes '*hard*'" (Eby 50). This reaffirms the idea that Pilar is a "phallic woman," but also suggests that her masculine, predatory qualities are the vehicle by which she dominates Maria—and by extension, Jordan.

Pilar's dominance over the couple is apparent in many scenes, and although Jordan is not quite so submissive as Maria, Pilar dominates him nevertheless. This is done purely in reference to Pilar's authority over the girl; Maria, with her split loyalty to both Pilar and Jordan, functions in a later scene as a bargaining chip between the two who love her:

[Pilar:] 'But I give you back your rabbit. Nor ever did I try to take your rabbit.

That's a good name for her. I heard you call her that this morning.'

Robert Jordan felt his face redden.

'You are a very hard woman,' he told her.

‘No,’ Pilar said. ‘But so simple I am very complicated. Are you very complicated, *Inglés?*’

‘No. Nor so simple.’

‘You please me, *Inglés,*’ Pilar said. Then she smiled . . . (156).

Pilar clearly regards Maria as an object of exchange, a possession of sorts that Pilar magnanimously allows Jordan to hold. In the woman’s comment about the intimate nickname Jordan has assigned to Maria, Pilar subtly humiliates Jordan in a show of quiet dominance. His attempt to insult her is rebuked, and she places him in the position of submission by means of praise.

Male submission to female authority in Hemingway’s work has been noted by scholars. For example, Richard Fantina argues that Hemingway’s male protagonists show a “general physical and psychological submission to women, who alternately punish, humiliate, and nurture these suffering men, [that] convincingly demonstrates masochism” (*Ernest* 1). Fantina describes an interesting type of relationship—a kinky one. The dynamics he describes are not only sadomasochistic, but also have an undeniable element of power exchange. The passage of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* cited above seems to be a combination of this humiliation/nurturing dichotomy which defines a D/s exchange. Pilar embarrasses Jordan in her reference to Maria, which illustrates the humiliation mentioned by Fantina. She then praises Jordan, a gesture of nurturing. Using these power exchange techniques, Pilar assigns Robert Jordan the submissive role.

But Jordan is not simply a submissive in this novel; he functions as what BDSM practitioners call a “switch,” playing both Dominant and submissive roles at different times.

Jordan's resistance to Pilar's dominance is one sign that his role is not easily defined. When Pilar is pressuring Maria to discuss her sex life, Jordan becomes angry at the woman's domineering quality: "Robert Jordan was thinking, if I did not have to work with this woman and her drunken man and her chicken-crut outfit, I would slap her so hard across the face" (173). Thus Jordan privately denigrates the group over which Pilar has authority, but he does not quite dare to insult her even if he fantasizes about violent domination. He plays the submissive role reluctantly, even bitterly. Fantina acknowledges that Hemingway's "characters resent certain domineering, as opposed to dominant, types of women" but also suggests that "some of his texts demonstrate a masochistic desire to yield to a willful, dominant woman" (*Ernest* 10-11). It is Pilar's domineering quality that Jordan dislikes, but on some level he acknowledges her power and yields, accepting—for the moment—the submissive role.

Jordan is reluctantly submissive to Pilar, as one scene reveals. Pilar, Jordan, and Maria walk to see El Sordo and Pilar stops to rest on the way: "'Come on,' Robert Jordan said. 'Rest at the top.' / 'I rest now,' the woman said, and sat down by the stream. The girl sat by her in the heather" (96). Pilar goes on, "'Give me a cigarette, *Inglés*,' she said and taking it, lit it from a flint and steel lighter in the pocket of her shirt. She puffed on the cigarette and looked at Maria and Robert Jordan" (97). Jordan here attempts to dominate the woman by speaking in a manner akin to an order; but Jordan fails to dominate, as Pilar utterly disregards his commands. After ignoring Jordan's order, she then orders *him* to give her a cigarette, and he obeys. In spite of Jordan's attempt to play the dominant role, Pilar forces him back in the submissive's place.

Although Jordan here plays the reluctant submissive, there is one character who seems to revel in her submissive role: Maria. The girl displays split loyalty to both Jordan and Pilar throughout the novel. It is through Pilar's instigation that the relationship between Robert Jordan

and Maria is initiated and enabled. When Maria and Jordan are in bed together for the first time, Maria repeatedly refers to Pilar, first to ask him, “I can go with thee as Pilar said?” (70). This instance seems to be a process of negotiation between kinky partners as is conventional in modern BDSM. Maria references her previous Dominant in order to gauge the authority of the new Dominant, Robert Jordan. Then, after Maria confesses her past as a rape victim, she says Pilar advised her how to handle this situation as well: “She said for me to tell you that I am not sick. She knows about such things and she said to tell you that” (73). Maria’s reference to Pilar’s authority once again affirms that Pilar plays her Dominant—having and sharing knowledge of risks—and Maria welcomes the chance to serve as submissive.

Maria also serves Robert Jordan, who acts as a rather mild-mannered Dominant, requiring only small favors and offering praise. When the two are first introduced, Jordan immediately acknowledges her submissive potential: “he called to the girl. ‘Bring me a cup of water.’ / The girl looked at the woman, who said nothing, and gave no sign of having heard, then she went to the kettle containing water and dipped a cup full. She brought it to the table and put it down before him. Robert Jordan smiled at her” (50). Although it is notable that Maria refers to Pilar before obeying the command, the girl nonetheless obeys. She performs a small service for Jordan, and he rewards her with a smile. This mild scene offers hints at the dynamic that later develops between the couple.

The later dynamic between Robert Jordan and Maria clearly places Maria in the submissive role. After the two have fallen in love, Maria tells Jordan, “If I am to be thy woman I should please thee in all ways” (160). This might serve as a motto for submissives in a BDSM context. Maria’s speech recalls the eagerness to please that characterizes submissive sexuality in modern BDSM practice. This reading of Hemingway is not completely novel; Fantina argues

that in Hemingway's work, "submissive sexuality reveals itself more subtly and at times more dramatically than in the ritualized fantasies of *Venus in Furs*" ("Hemingway's" 84). Although Fantina builds towards a depiction of male submission to female dominance, the reverse is clearly apparent in Maria's attitude toward Jordan.

This attitude is defined by Maria's willingness to surrender completely to Jordan's every desire, both sexual and otherwise. When Jordan speaks admiringly of Maria's body, she says, "For thee and for thee always and only for thee. But it is little to bring thee. I would learn to take good care of thee" (161). Thus Maria dedicates herself body and soul to this man, expressing regret that she does not feel worthy. Her feeling of insufficiency indicates that she holds him on a pedestal, thinking of him as a Dominant who deserves all she can give. Maria swears fidelity and servitude in a manner quite obviously indicative of power play dynamics.

The power play dynamics in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are too obvious to be denied, and this is just one element of a fruitful Kinky Critique of this compelling novel. Complex power exchange occurs between virtually every character, and to do true justice to these elements, a much longer thesis would be preferable. However, the preceding study does effectively demonstrate the characters' various and evolving roles. These roles add dimension to an analysis of each character, and complicate the dynamics between them. Pilar's victorious dominance over the male characters in particular aligns her with the confident dominatrix so frequently portrayed as the figurehead of BDSM. In contrast, Maria's soft-spoken eagerness to please places her in a clearly submissive role. The men of the story are equally intriguing; Robert Jordan's vacillation between submissive and dominant roles offers the Kinky Critic one of the few literary depictions of switch sexuality. Finally, Pablo also presents a developing role throughout the course of the novel. Although he was once a dominant sadist driven by notions of political justice, Pablo's

disenchantment with the violence he perpetrates leads him at last to submit to the Dom of the day, Pilar. The complicated nature of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*' power exchange dynamics and depiction of sadomasochism leave much room for future analysis, but these cursory comments already contribute intriguing complications to scholarship on the novel.

### A Call for Kinky Critics

There remains much more to be written regarding power play and sadomasochism in each of these fascinating works. Kinky Criticism offers a new lens through which characters gain further dimensions, and relationships become manifestations of a power dynamic even more intricate than previously acknowledged. The Kinky Critical perspective can offer entirely new interpretations of texts and characters, as seen in the analysis of *Inferno*'s sodomites and Robert Jordan's switch identity. The potential as yet unexplored is not limited to Hemingway, Lawrence, and Dante; virtually all literature contains kinky themes that relatively few scholars have addressed. Those who have touched on these themes usually apply the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, a technique that neglects many of the nuances of modern BDSM practice. Kink is not exclusively a psychological condition, but is rather an expression of many influences interacting: cultural, evolutionary, theological, and sociological, to name a few. Kink essentially functions as the umbrella under which all other power dynamics fall; it may be influenced by patriarchy, class, or any number of factors, but the power and violence that this school of theory examines is a subject all its own, and does not depend exclusively on any of these cultural factors. Rather, kink is universal. Any scholar who hopes to do justice to the complexity of power exchange and sadomasochism in literature must necessarily address these in terms of kink. Without the missing link of BDSM, analyses of power and violence fall short because their scope

is too limited. A coherent critical movement is needed to fully do justice to the myriad instances of power exchange, aggressive and libidinal sadomasochism, and countless other aspects of BDSM in the worldwide canon of literary art. The future of Kinky Criticism has yet to be seen, but I am eager to forge a pathway for unconventional and imaginative scholarship to come.



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## Vita

Maria Dominguez was born and raised in Charlotte, North Carolina. She received her Bachelor's degree in English from Queens University of Charlotte in 2014. She joined the University of New Orleans English graduate program to obtain her M.A. with a focus in American Literature. While at UNO, she worked as a graduate assistant in the Writing Center from 2014-15. She has served as a Teaching Assistant from 2015-16, leading a class of freshmen writers. She hopes to go on to earn her Ph.D. in English and teach at the university level.