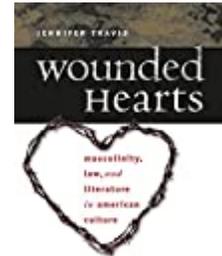




Jennifer Travis. *Wounded Hearts: Masculinity, Law, and Literature in American Culture.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. x + 222 pp. \$22.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5635-2; \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2974-5.



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Gendering of Wounds: Male Emotional Injury in Literature, Medicine, and the Law

In *Wounded Hearts*, Jennifer Travis argues against the popular notion that narratives of male emotionalism “feminize” male characters and detract from their sense of masculinity. Instead, Travis claims, the language of injury and suffering in the realist novel of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States is “often hegemonic in voice and effect” and as such signifies the power of male pain (pp. 17, 19). Travis, an assistant professor of English at St. John’s University, offers a dynamic new perspective on the study of emotions and masculinity in literature by combining literary analysis with the discourses of the battlefield, university, and the courtroom.

Travis’s contribution to the recent critical work of masculinity in literature is particularly interesting in that she demonstrates that the display of deep emotions does not only exist in narratives about racialized manhood or modern metrosexual masculinity, but is integral to the white middle-class male characters of canonical American literature, who are often considered as “emotionless or emotionally repressed” (p. 10). *Wounded Hearts* also traces the genealogy of the rhetoric of injury in the realist novel—from William Dean Howells to Willa Cather—and

argues that the novel had a central role in reflecting and shaping the cultural recognition of male psychic injury emergent in the fields of medicine and the law. Travis analyzes the development of the rhetoric of psychic injury by discussing the differences between the feminine emotionalism of the sentimental novel and the language of masculine pain of the realist novel. More importantly, she shows that medical and legal discourses influenced the literature of authors such as Cather, Stephen Crane, and Howells and that their use of these discourses speaks about their knowledge of the fields.

For the readers interested in the intersections of literature and the law, the most engaging sections of the book are chapters 2 and 3. These chapters link the analysis of two novels, William Dean Howells’s *A Modern Instance* (1882) and Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* (1923), with the development of divorce law. Other legal issues that *Wounded Hearts* covers are the emergence of tort law (injury law) and a proposal regarding the laws governing the copyright of unpublished manuscripts. In their 1890 *Harvard Law Review* article, “The Right to Privacy,” Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis argued that the

“thoughts, emotions, and sensations” of the authors of such manuscripts should be recognized and protected by the law (quoted, p. 125).

In chapter 2, Travis analyzes William Dean Howells’s divorce novel *A Modern Instance* (1882) and draws upon the latter nineteenth-century legal discourse of “injury to emotions” that allows parties to seek divorce on grounds of cruelty (p. 74). Through her analysis of Marcia and Bartley Hubbard’s marriage, Travis demonstrates that the development of legal narratives about divorce gave male emotional pain public visibility and empowered men by recognizing that they too can legally be victims of mental and verbal abuse.

Another novel illustrating the parallel development of literature, divorce law, and the possible recompense of male emotional distress is Willa Cather’s *A Lost Lady* (1923), analyzed in chapter 3. In the context of the adulterous relationship between Marian Forrester and Frank Ellinger, Travis narrates the evolution of “criminal conversation” cases, which “were choreographed to privilege the male citizen’s emotional life by producing and compensating the injured male victim” (p. 81). “Criminal conversation” is actually a *civil* law that awards compensation to the injured party of a divorce case, and as such can be applied even without direct proof for adultery (p. 181). The possible damages that Captain Forrester, the male victim in the novel, could bring against the third party, Mr. Ellinger, would recompense his loss of sexual relations with his wife (p. 92).

Although Travis’s interdisciplinary discussion of criminal conversation, which includes both fictional and real-life marital narratives together with an inquiry into the evolving law concerning injured emotions, is impressive, the fact that the actual link between the novel and the law is missing makes her case slightly less compelling: criminal conversation is an action Captain Forrester *might*, yet does not, take in Cather’s novel. The wires also show in chapter 4, which focuses on Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Travis offers a fresh reading of James’s psychological realism, focusing on Prince Amerigo as an emotionally injured male character who empowers himself by capitalizing on his “private emotional life” (p. 126). Yet the link between Amerigo’s strategic use of his emotional injury as property to renegotiate his marital agreement and Warren and Brandeis’s legal position on the inviolability of authors’ private thoughts as argued in “The Right to Privacy” is conceivable but somewhat artificial.

In addition to the focus on domestic injury, Travis adds another interesting dimension to her analysis of Cather’s *A Lost Lady* by looking at the emergence of injury, or tort, law in the mid-nineteenth century. In that novel, as in many others, the railroad represents the promise of a prosperous future for investors like Captain Forrester, yet the history of the railroad industry is also marred by the physical injuries it caused to many laborers. Travis excels in her approach to this element of the historical setting of Cather’s novel. Her analysis shows that the legislation at the time privileged the emotional injuries of wealthy men, while compensation for physical injuries of the working-class men was largely unavailable. As an example of the expansion of injury law Travis cites the 1842 “fellow-servant rule,” which ensured that laborers could not sue their employers for injuries caused by co-workers (p. 88).

Equally strong is Travis’s exploration of medical texts about physical and psychological wounding during the Civil War, and the autobiographical texts and fiction that were inspired by them. In chapter 1, she analyzes the representation of the medical syndrome known as “the soldier’s heart,” in the context of Stephen Crane’s novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). The concept of the soldier’s heart precedes terms such as shell shock or wartime trauma and denotes the emotional injuries from which soldiers suffered during the Civil War. The medical texts studied in this chapter are accounts by doctors who struggled to describe and diagnose emotional trauma in the absence of modern psychological terminology. In addition to Crane’s novel, Travis cites autobiographical texts reflecting a similar need to articulate emotionally wounded masculinity and a struggle to legitimize it during a time that was preoccupied with physical injury. As Travis demonstrates, the emerging rhetoric of emotional distress in the wartime medical, autobiographical, and literary discourses produced a new sense of masculinity and enhanced the cultural recognition of male emotional injury.

Wounded Hearts is an exciting study of male emotional injury in literature, medicine, and the law. Travis’s strategy of carefully framing the scope of her book gives the reader a clear idea of what to expect and her energetic writing style makes it a pleasure to read. Since much of the appeal of *Wounded Hearts* lies in its clever interdisciplinary approach, it is likely to also attract audiences outside the literary domain, in the fields of history and law.

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