

**Petra SRŠIĆ**

University of Osijek, Croatia  
petrasrsic134@gmail.com

## MOTHERHOOD, DISABILITY, AND REBELLION: CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER IN Hobb'S *LIVESHIP TRADERS* TRILOGY

**Abstract:** Like many fantasy works, Robin Hobb's *Liveship Traders* trilogy is set in a patriarchal society, and the author, among other topics, portrays a variety of women characters and different ways they deal with it. There is limited research on Hobb's literary opus and feminist readings of the *Liveship Traders* trilogy are confined to student theses. Therefore, this paper aims to expand and add to the existing corpus of feminist and feminist disability readings by focusing on a character whose portrayal serves as a critique of the patriarchal system and the subordination of women through the intersectionality of gender and disability. The paper portrays how Mother's disability and gender role intersect to create specific conditions of othering and subordination that lead to her internalization of the role and attempts at rebellion against imposed constraints. Firstly, based on the research of Nancy J. Chodorow, Andrea O'Reilly, Catherine Rottenberg, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, a short overview of feminist approaches to motherhood and feminist disability theory is provided. The paper then examines the role of violence, trauma, and naming as elements of identity construction. The chapter dealing with the mother-son relationship shows how Kennit others Mother, and the final chapter talks about Mother's internalization of motherhood and rebellion against Kennit. The paper concludes that Mother is othered by Kennit due to his perception of her failure as a mother and her disability that allows him to ascertain his power over her and serves as a cautionary tale of the effects patriarchal motherhood and disability can have on women.

**Keywords:** Robin Hobb, *Liveship Traders*, motherhood, disability, patriarchy

### 1. Introduction

Today most women in Western culture are able to choose how they will live their lives and decide whether marriage and motherhood will be a feature of those lives or not. For some, the choice is easy and their environment supportive, while others, such as disabled women, are discouraged from motherhood because they may transmit faulty genes and fear being judged incapable and inadequate (Mohamed & Shefer,

2015; Thomas, 1997). In addition, if disability is caused by a violent and traumatic event whilst already a mother, the woman must adjust her wishes and desires to a new reality. This happens to a character known as Mother in Robin Hobb's *The Liveship Traders* trilogy, comprised of *Ship of Magic* (1998), *Mad Ship* (1999), and *Ship of Destiny* (2000). Set in a patriarchal, pseudo-medieval fantasy world, the trilogy tells the story of the Vestrit family, traders who own a liveship – a magical sentient ship, and all those they meet along the way in their attempt to save the family from bankruptcy. When the ship is seized by the cruel pirate Kennit, Althea Vestrit and others embark on a dangerous quest to reclaim her and restore their family's wealth and honour, while other Vestrits become involved in local affairs and politics involving ancient, dragon-related powers. As literature is often produced by taking examples from real life and magnifying them, it can show readers the intricacies of the human character and the way people deal with various challenges. While many of the female characters in the trilogy challenge conventional gender roles and defy traditional portrayals of women, Mother embodies the impact of patriarchal expectations of motherhood combined with disability. Mother's portrayal highlights how gender and disability intersect and constrain her identity. Although a minor character, it is valuable to analyse her experience – she has suffered trauma and injury – her tongue was cut out (Hobb, 2015a), and her relationship with the men around her has led to the internalization of her role identity of the mother.

This paper analyses the intersectionality of gender and disability in terms of identity formation to show how Mother is othered and to illustrate her rebellion against her oppressor as her attempt at self-actualization. The paper aims to expand the research on the representation of motherhood in fantasy literature in terms of intersections of gender and disability, as in Kidd (2004), in which the author discusses how children's lives and experiences are shaped in connection to their mentally disabled mothers (2004). To do so, the paper utilizes intersectionality as a research paradigm because of its ability to “illuminate various interacting factors that affect human lives” (Goethals et al., 2015, p. 77), and identifies how these factors reproduce inequality. Thus, feminist theory, feminist disability theory, deconstruction, performativity, psychoanalysis, and identity theory are used to analyse Mother from a postmodern perspective.<sup>1</sup> By adopting an anti-essentialist view on identity,<sup>2</sup> the paper analyses what are, in fact, essentialist tendencies in Hobb's construction of Mother.

---

<sup>1</sup> Postmodern feminism rejects the thesis that there is only one theory that can explain the position of women in society and advocates a combination of multiple theories of equal value (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). Postmodern feminists consider the deconstruction of male, phallic language as necessary for progress and base their approach on the work of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Michel Foucault (Tong, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The anti-essentialist view of identity prevails in contemporary scholarship and posits that identity is changeable, fluid, plastic, and fragmented, but also constructed by language and discourse, depending on different cultural and social practices and institutions (Peternai Andrić, 2012; Peternai Andrić, 2019).

There is a large body of work researching motherhood and mothers in different literary and non-literary genres and from different perspectives, including fantasy, “developing especially since the 1980s” (Wahlström Henriksson et al., 2023, p. 6). There is no general overview of motherhood in fantasy literature, but there are many studies on women and gender that include motherhood as part of the analysis. Jeanne Hoeker LaHaie’s work *Girls, Mothers and Others: Female Representation in the Adolescent Fantasy of J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, and Terry Pratchett* (2012) concludes that contemporary fantasy texts perpetuate and promote maternal values as the ideal for women, and Lisa Rowe Fraustino and Karen Coats’ collection of essays *Mothers in Children’s and Young Adult Literature* (2016) incorporates essays on mothers and maternal care in fantasy literature. While Hob@b’s novels have been examined from several perspectives, e.g. queer potential (Melville, 2018; Prater, 2016) and fluid identities (Räsänen, 2016), a deeper analysis of female characters in her opus is currently contained to student theses.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Feminism, Motherhood, and Disability

Although analysing intersections of identity is “not simply a matter of integrating sexism with other axes of power and difference, but also facing up to the complex dynamics and complicities in play” (Gill, 2011, p. 69), these “crossings are nodal points for the materialization and subjectivation of the dictated conditions, promoting spaces of marginalization and nonacceptance of diversity as a historical and social way of life” (Crenshaw, 2002, as cited in Gomes et al., 2019, p. 3). Therefore, this chapter will provide an overview of the feminist view on motherhood and disability as two factors which may have negative effects on identity formation. The feminist view on motherhood is split between those who regard it as a uniting element among women and those who critique it as being used to deny women @rights and equality (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011). Motherhood is viewed as natural to women and central to their identity (Fahlgren & Williams, 2023) due to women’s eligibility to have children and provide primary sustenance. These biological facts confirm gender as natural and justify social norms concerning sex roles, also presupposing the existence of the mothering instinct and a natural connection of the mother and the child (Paternai Andrić, 2019; Wahlström Henriksson et al., 2023).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Shift from the Traditional Feminine Role in Robin Hobb’s Characters in her The Farseer Trilogy and The Tawny Man Trilogy* (2011) by Goran Katavić and Saga Bokne’s *Patriarchy Under Scrutiny: Tracing Feminist Discourse in Hobb’s The Realm of the Elderlings* (2017).

<sup>4</sup> The strengthening of the model of motherhood as women’s calling and their subordination has occurred in the 19th century through the church ideology. Moreover, psychoanalysis states that because the woman lacks a phallus, she is perceived as the lack and must achieve integrity and completeness by having children – that is, through the Other (Grosz, 1990; Paternai Andrić, 2019).

Many feminists have refuted these claims and in recent times Judith Butler's performative-discursive theory of the development of gender identity has become widely accepted. Butler states that gender is construed by discursive practices and the process of the repetition of norms concerning the relationship of the subject, power, and resistance (Butler, 1999). The construction of gender "fundamentally affects men and women's perceptions and experiences" (Felski, 1989, p. 48). If they wish to be recognized as @ is a new conservatism in Northern Europe that formulates motherhood as a full-time job and asks women to turn away from paid employment" (Wahlström Henriksson et al., 2023, p. 3). In recent decades, "the role of the mother has emerged as the most important in women's lives" (Badinter, 2011, as cited in Fahlgren & Williams, 2023, p. 136). Postmodern and poststructural feminism views motherhood as a part of a woman's identity and allows for a positive identification with motherhood (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011). Similarly, a recent strand of feminism, neoliberal feminism, posits the successful balance between family and career as an ideal to strive for and a path to happiness.<sup>5</sup> Neoliberal feminism does not encourage political activism targeted at improving social conditions and lives of women because it considers the goals of feminism to be mostly achieved (Rottenberg, 2018). Instead, it promotes the actualization of women in the private sphere, as wives and mothers, and in the public sphere, as successful businesswomen. However, women of other races, poor women, and immigrant women serve as unrecognized care providers, enabling professional women to pursue balance (Rottenberg, 2018).

The importance, meanings, and expectations connected to motherhood change when it comes to disabled women and mothers, whose experiences are researched by feminist disability scholars. Disability can be defined as an "umbrella term for any impairment, activity limitation or participation restriction which limits functioning within con-textual (personal and environmental) factors" (Palmer & Harley, 2012, p. 359). Feminist disability theory understands disability as a "culturally fabricated narrative of the body" which "produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies" (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 17), usually as subordinate within a system of exclusions and representation and "reveals discriminatory attitudes and practices directed at those bodies ... as an effect of power relations" (Garland-Thomson, 2005, pp. 1557-58). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states that "many parallels exist between the social meanings attributed to female bodies and those assigned to disabled bodies," such as their casting as deviant and inferior, exclusion from full participation in public and economic life, and defining them "in opposition

---

<sup>5</sup> The term 'neoliberal feminism' was coined by Catherine Rottenberg under the influence of neoliberalism, a critical approach to postfeminism developed by Rosalind Gill, and a new feminist vocabulary present in the influential essay "Why Women Still Can't Have It All" (2012) by Anne-Marie Slaughter and Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) (Rottenberg, 2018).

to a norm that is assumed to possess natural physical superiority” (1997, p. 19). However, disabled women are often denied or discouraged from the reproductive role and their social and cultural capital is reduced, making them unfit subjects when analysed from the perspective of neoliberal feminism.

### 3. Violence, Trauma, and Naming

Considering that “feminist critique of patriarchal values cannot occur outside ideological and social structures in some privileged space, but constantly interacts with the very frameworks it challenges” (Felski, 1989, p. 59), Hobb creates a patriarchal society with the desire to critique it. Men have played important roles in Mother’s life, influencing it with their actions and decisions. Mother was a girl from the pirate isles whom a liveship merchant from Bingtown married and they had a child named Kennit. They lived on an island where they made their home and lived in splendour. However, the island was invaded by Igrot, a pirate captain who wanted their liveship. In reality, “97% of impairments are acquired rather than congenital” (Mohamed & Shefer, 2015, p. 2), and so is Mother’s. Igrot set fire to their home, killed Kennit’s father, and cut off Mother’s tongue: “Such an orgy of cruelty as Igrot indulged to his sensual limits” (Hobb, 2015a, p. 376). This happened nearly thirty-five years before the time of the narrative. He did an intentional act of violence, and such acts, as Anne Morris explains, are “aimed at achieving certain outcomes” (2005, p. 224), such as asserting the man’s control over the woman and her child (2005). Igrot used Kennit in order to blackmail the liveship, Paragon, into sailing with him<sup>6</sup> and by his actions and their consequences on the victims created a rift between Mother and Kennit. Cathy Caruth states that “the shocking and unexpected occurrence of an accident” is what haunts the trauma victim (1996, p. 6). This is applicable to Mother, who is traumatized by the invasion and captivity. Trauma can refer to a state or condition produced by a stress or blow that causes disordered feelings or behaviour (Erikson, 1994). One of those feelings is fear and Sara Ahmed states that it relates to the present and the future and “involves an anticipation of hurt or injury” (2004, p. 65). Fear causes an intense bodily experience that may at times involve paralysis as it works “to restrict some bodies through the movement or expansion of others” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 65). By expanding his domain on Mother’s island, Igrot restricted Mother’s freedom, hurt her both physically and mentally; the fear and terror she felt paralysed her and made her unwilling to act against him in any way, for her sake or for Kennit’s.

The memories of trauma are intermingled with the victim’s everyday thoughts and can turn up in the form of symptoms including anxiety (Horvitz, 2000, p. 17).

---

<sup>6</sup> Igrot also sexually abused Kennit, thus the boy and the liveship made a plan. Kennit killed Igrot and sent Paragon away.

Mother's fear lingers and turns into anxiety that translates into a desire to remain on the island and live a simple life: "Now she no longer wanted luxuries and wealth on display. No. She trusted to her simple life to protect her" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 377). Mother displays what Ahmed terms "fear of 'the world' as the scene of a future injury ... which shrinks bodies in a state of afraidness, a shrinkage which may involve a refusal to leave the enclosed spaces of home" (2004, pp. 70). Although she does not want to leave the island, Mother cannot think of anyone living in the big house where the crimes happened without an emotional reaction—she cries out when an event triggers remembrance (Hobb, 2015a, p. 376). Caruth states that stories of trauma involve "the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (1996, p. 7), which is further complicated for Mother as she is now mute. She has lived in isolation since Kennit killed Igot, as he is the only person who knows where Mother is, but he rarely visits. His behaviour agrees with the fact that one of the ways people deal with disability is by "avoiding anomalous things" or segregating them (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 35), which causes women with disabilities to experience greater social isolation (Mohamed & Shefer, 2015). Kennit brings Mother companions in the second novel when it becomes convenient for him to do so and she does not object to the company.

Considering that she is a side character, mute, and connected to Kennit, Mother's description comes from other characters—chiefly Kennit and Paragon—and they always refer to her as Mother, never by her name. According to the study of performative language, the act of naming provides a temporary stabilization of fluid identity.<sup>7</sup> It is a speech act which in saying does what it says, and does it in the moment of that saying (Austin, 1962). To be addressed is to "have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible" (Butler, 1997, p. 5), and it can represent inclusion into a community or exclusion from it (Paternai Andrić, 2012). Mother is always addressed as Mother; thus, that is her only identity—the one the community accepts and by which it knows her. This supports with Louis Althusser's statement that if individuals are called by their names, they are "always-already interpellated as subjects with a personal identity," and if the subject responds affirmatively and accepts its name, it recognizes that it really does occupy the place designated for it (1971, p. 178). As Mother's name is not known, neither are her personal or other identities, but by accepting only the interpellation of "Mother," she situates herself firmly in the sphere of motherhood. Mother is also referred to as Lucky's widow (Hobb, 2015b, p. 643) and Ludluck woman (Hobb, 2015b, p. 643), according to her relation to her husband. Women as "others" are identified in terms of their relationships to men who—unlike women—are assumed to have identities in themselves (Westkott, 1977). In the novels, all the characters in the trilogy need Mother to be Kennit's mother and influence him; they require nothing more from her.

---

<sup>7</sup> The theory of performativity states that language creates and transfers meaning, the relationship of the subject and reality is always mediated by language, and that language is the one that determines human activity (Paternai Andrić, 2019).

## 4. Mother-Son Relationship

Mother's early relationship with Kennit illustrates Freud's pre-oedipal dynamic, wherein the child experiences the mother as both nurturing and omnipotent. His perception of her as phallic, which Elizabeth Grosz terms "a consequence of a masculine fantasy of maternity" rather than a recognition of her lived maternal experience (1990, p. 151), highlights the Freudian and Lacanian imaginary structure of early mother-child relations. During captivity, Kennit sought comfort and imagined revenge against Igot: "he would climb onto her lap, hug her neck tightly, and try to whisper his plans for vengeance into her ear. She would desperately and fearfully shush him. She had not even dared dream of revenge" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 380). Her passivity and fear of Igot, combined with her lack of social power, ultimately shaped Kennit's perception of her as weak, spurring his desire to become strong and masculine in opposition. This dynamic aligns with Lacan's theory of the "Law of the Father," where the imaginary dyad between mother and child must be broken by the symbolic intervention of the father, who represents law, language, and authority (Grosz, 1990). The child must sacrifice his desire for the mother to enter the symbolic order, internalizing the father's authority and forming the superego (Grosz, 1990). In this process, the mother is symbolically castrated—not due to anatomical lack but because the child perceives her subordination to the father's authority and desire (Grosz, 1990). Kennit's internalization of this dynamic is evident in his identification with Igot, whom he despises yet sees as a figure of masculine power. According to Lacan's concept of the Name-of-the-Father, the child's symbolic entry into culture depends on renouncing his mother and gaining a speaking position as a subject through paternal metaphor (Grosz, 1990). As Lacan argues, this transformation is not grounded in biological kinship but in symbolic naming and law, wherein the child becomes a cultural subject by aligning with patriarchal structures (Grosz, 1990). Thus, Kennit's psychological development, shaped by his mother's symbolic castration and Igot's authoritarian presence, exemplifies the psychoanalytic narrative of subject formation through loss, repression, and patriarchal substitution. Grosz states that this pact "founds patriarchy anew for each generation, guaranteeing the son a position as heir to the father's position in so far as he takes on the father's attributes" (1990, p. 68), which Kennit does. Moreover, Julia Kristeva explains that taking on the father's attributes issues the struggle "against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject," repelling, rejecting, and abjecting" (1982, p. 13). Abject is what "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1982, p. 4). The one by whom abject exists divides and excludes, judges, and condemns, (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 8-13), all behaviours Kennit displays towards Mother, who can be construed as an abject body.

Thus, Kennit adheres to Olga Silverstein and Beth Rashbaum's (1995) claim that "the love of a mother—both the son's for her, and hers for him" will

'feminize' him, "make him soft, weak, dependent, homebound ... only through renunciation of the loving mother" does he become a man (as cited in O'Reilly, 2004b, p. 167). Kennit does what Chodorow describes as a part of masculine role training, he "represses those qualities he takes to be feminine inside himself, and rejects and devalues women and whatever he considers to be feminine in the social world" (1978, p. 181). Along with Kennit's continued perception of Mother as weak: "As he stepped away from his mother, she surrendered, as she always did. She sank down onto the chair ... and wept. She always wept. It made no sense to him. How many times had she found that tears solved nothing?" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 384), he also finds her naïve and foolish. He disagrees with her conviction that a simple life will deter robbers: "No one can have so little that someone else can find nothing to envy" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 377). Kennit's abjection and 'othering' of Mother is also visible in his treatment of her with disgust. The construction of normalcy rationalises and bolsters the 'othering' of bodies "that do not fit into a particular culture's imaginary" of the acceptable" (Mohamed & Shefer, 2015, p. 2). Kennit does not consider her behaviour, appearance, and attempts at communication acceptable and is disgusted by them: "She was barefoot, he noted with distaste, and dressed in cotton tunic and trousers like a peasant ... Never a slender woman, she had thickened with the years ... She hurried toward him at an inglorious trot. He had to suffer the indignity of her squashy embrace ... It revealed the stump of her tongue. Kennit looked aside in distaste" (Hobb, 2015a: 375-376). He cannot bear the fact Mother chooses to live a simple life, when she could do otherwise and is critical of her weight and injury. Furthermore, those who cause disgust are "constructed as non-human, as beneath and, below the bodies of the disgusted. Indeed, through the disgust reaction, 'belowness' and 'beneathness' become properties of their bodies. They embody that which is lower than human or civil life" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 97). It is evident Kennit considers Mother as the one beneath himself in his comment on the cutting of her tongue: "over the years he had come to see it was not an entirely unfortunate incident. She still talked endlessly, or tried to, but since the event he could steer the conversation as he wished it to go. He told her when she agreed with him, and when a topic was settled" (Hobb, 2015a, p. 375). Kennit uses Mother's disability to ascertain his control over her by ignoring her attempts at communication, perceiving them as dumb, and disregarding her wishes and desires: 'his mother gabbled frantically at him. He nodded in approval. "I knew you wouldn't mind"' (Hobb, 2015a, p. 377). By taking away Mother's ability to communicate, Kennit takes away her agency and turns her into a passive object. Michael Palmer and David Harley state that "the modern response to impairment has cast disabled people as the 'other', excluded from and denied access to society" (2012, p. 358). Therefore, another way in which Kennit others Mother is by denying her access to society and not allowing her to be an active participant and disregarding her autonomy and desires. Peter Brooks states that

muteness is used to represent “extreme moral and emotional conditions” and it “became symbolic of the defencelessness of innocence” (1974, p. 552), which can be applied to Mother as she is left powerless by Igot and Kennit.

## 5. Internalization and Rebellion

By giving birth to a child, women adopt the role identity of the mother and self-meanings and expectations that accompany the role. Some, if not most, “then act to represent and preserve these meanings and expectations” (Thoits & Virshup, 1997, as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 227). The meanings society attributes to mothers and considers maternal virtues and tasks are giving unconditional love, guiding and teaching, endurance, self-sacrifice, devotion, housework, and childcare (Rich, 1995; Stets & Lee, 2000). Women who possess these virtues are labelled good mothers, whereas bad mothers are “selfish, not caring or sacrificial enough” (Peternai Andrić, 2019, p. 140); they are not executing “correct” motherhood (Jiao, 2019). As the patriarchal society of the novel limits Mother’s possibilities for a career, she is not in a position to execute the neoliberal feminist ideal of balance between her career and her family. Thus Mother accepts her address and Althusser’s statement that “the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order ... that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’” (1971, p. 182) can be applied to her. Mother thus focuses on her role of the wife and mother and is positively described until the occurrence of violent events that prevent the normal continuation of her mothering. Agreeing with the fact that “women with disabilities are often stereotypically considered ... unsuitable as parents” (Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 1567), the relationship between her and Kennit changes, causing him to consider her weak and indeed unsuitable. “If looked upon with disdain and being ill-treated by others, the self-esteem of people with disabilities are harmed” (Gomes et al., 2019, p. 6) causing disabled women to feel pressure to demonstrate that they are ‘good enough mothers’ (Thomas, 1997). “If a woman performs her mother role in a way that carries meanings consistent with her mother identity meanings, she should be more likely to experience identity verification and feel competent and efficacious” (Stets & Lee, 2000, p. 134), but “individuals who are unable to conform to the societal expectations are set up for feelings of failure” (Hochschild, 1989, as cited in Mayer, 2012, p. 7). Moreover, according to the neoliberal feminist ethics that promotes the achievement of a woman’s full potential (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg, 2019), and makes the woman responsible for her own failures in life (Rottenberg, 2018), Mother is unable to achieve her full potential as a mother with Kennit and her crying is an expression of her negative emotions and feelings of failure. Rich’s statement that “grief at all we cannot do for our children in a society so inadequate to meet human needs ... becomes translated into guilt and

self-laceration” (1995, p. 52) can be applied to Mother. Therefore, the desire for self-actualization as a mother combined with the failure to do so causes Mother to internalize society’s patriarchal understanding of motherhood and its meanings of good maternal behaviour. This internalization involves distortions, defences, and transformations (Chodorow, 1978), which result in Mother accepting and perpetuating the subjugated position society places her in. In the end, Kennit dies after being declared King of the Pirate Isles and Mother grieves for him (Hobb, 2015b). However, she does not accept a noble title and position, but decides to care for and help Etta, Kennit’s pregnant partner, evidencing that she is still trying to succeed in her prescribed role. This agrees with the observation that “[t]he guilt and shame women experience in failing to live up to what is in fact an impossible ideal is neither accidental nor inconsequential. Rather it perpetuates female sacrifice, resulting in the loss of female subjectivity and autonomy” (Jiao, 2019, p. 544). Mother shows her devotion to her late son and his offspring. By focusing her mothering on Etta and her future child, she negates any other possible self-identity.

Although she wishes to fulfil her role, Mother’s garbling expresses her desire to be heard and to transgress the boundaries of her disability and the other’s perception of her as disabled and therefore defected, unable to express herself. This can be analysed as an attempt to establish her subjectivity through an act of rebellion against imposed social constraints. Moreover, she rebels against Kennit and the constraints he put on her motherhood. She decides to retake control and join the protagonists on their way to confront Kennit in order to once again be a mother to him and try to save him from doing more evil. This is the only instance in which Mother directly disobeys Kennit’s order to remain hidden on the island, and it is the moment when Mother becomes an active agent and expresses her desires. An opportunity provided by male characters allows her to take action, and, although their main plan is to use her to reach Kennit, she understands their goals and is a willing participant. In addition, Mother shows agency when she helps restore Paragon’s memories. In her desire to get to Kennit, she is trying to fulfil her role of the guide and role model for her child (Hobb, 2015b). Although she disobeys her son, she is doing so to help him, which again aligns with the traits stereotypically related to nurturing mothers.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, disability intersects with gender in ways that have profound consequences for Mother’s physical and psychological well-being. Hobb constructs Mother as a character who embodies the gender role of the woman as mother who wishes to achieve her full potential by mothering. She wants to be the archetypal mother – caring, loving, and self-sacrificial, but Igrat’s act of violence causes her disability and traumatizes her so much she cannot rebel against him out of fear

and fulfil her role. Other than Igot, her identity is influenced by her son, and less her husband, who affect and control her life in such a measure that she is only ever addressed according to her relation to them. Furthermore, their captivity and Mother's passivity change Kennit's perception of her to one that agrees with Garland-Thomson's statement that women with disabilities "have been cast in the collective cultural imagination as inferior, lacking, excessive, incapable, unfit, and useless" (Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 1567). Kennit feels abjection and disgust towards Mother, thus, he others her both physically, by letting her live alone on the island, and emotionally and mentally by intentionally misunderstanding her wishes and desires, thus taking away her agency, asserting his power, and subordinating her. Mother's relationship with Kennit, or the lack thereof, leads to feelings of shame and guilt for her, and she ultimately feels such remorse at her unsuccessful mothering of Kennit that she internalizes her role and transfers her attentions to his wife and offspring, providing care for them as she could not do for Kennit. Although Mother does not fully accept her situation and rebels by trying to communicate her wishes and by disregarding Kennit's instructions, she does the latter to try to help him become a better person.

Therefore, Mother presents a mode of femininity still valued and accepted in many cultures, the ultimate mother and a modest woman who cares for others and seeks no fame or renown for herself, but her story can be understood as a cautionary tale of patriarchal motherhood and the trappings of disability. Her muteness makes it easier to disregard her wishes and subordinate her to others. By portraying a woman so immersed in her role as to only be recognizable by it, but who is othered because of her failure to fulfil it and her physical inadequacy, Hobb showcases how deeply gender norms, disability, and patriarchal structures influence and shape the lives of individuals, especially women. Hobb presents Mother as an extreme example of the influence of patriarchy and of men on women by creating her as a person without further identity, one who rejects other identities and devotes her life to her family.

## References

- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Clarendon Press.
- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. (B. Brewster, Trans.). Monthly Review Press.
- Banet-Weiser, S., Rosalind G., & Rottenberg C. (2019). Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation. *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700119842555>
- Bokne, S. (2017). *Patriarchy under scrutiny; Tracing feminist discourse in Hobb's The Realm of the Elderlings*. [Master's thesis, Institutionen för språk och litteraturer]. Göteborgs universitets publikationer – elektroniskt arkiv.

- Brooks, P. (1974). The text of muteness. *New Literary History*, 5(3), 549–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/468360>
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. The John Hopkins University Press.
- Chodorow, N. J. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*. University of California Press.
- Chodorow, N. J. (2021). Women mother daughters: The reproduction of mothering after forty years. In P. Bueskens (Ed.), *Nancy Chodorow and the reproduction of mothering: forty years on* (pp. 49–80). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55590-0>
- Erikson, K. (1994). *A new species of trouble: Explorations in disaster, trauma, and community*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Fahlgren, M., & Williams, A. (2023). Contested motherhood in autobiographical writing: Rachel Husk and Sheila Heti. In H. Wahlström Henriksson, A. Williams & M. Fahlgren (Eds.), *Narratives of motherhood and mothering in fiction and life writing* (135–151). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17211-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17211-3_1)
- Felski, R. (1989). *Beyond feminist aesthetics: Feminist literature and social change*. Harvard University Press.
- Garland-Thomson, R. (1997). *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring physical disability in American culture and literature*. Columbia University Press.
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2005). Feminist disability studies. *Signs*, 30(2), 1557–1587. <https://doi.org/10.1086/423352>
- Gill, R. (2011). Sexism reloaded, or, it's time to get angry again!. *Feminist Media Studies*, 11(1), 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2011.537029>
- Goethals, T., De Schauwer, E., & Van Hove, G. (2015). Weaving intersectionality into disability studies research: Inclusion, reflexivity and anti-essentialism. *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 2(1–2), 75–94. <https://doi.org/10.11116/jdivegendstud.2.1-2.0075>
- Gomes, R. B., Lopes, P. H., Gesser, M., & Toneli, M. J. F. (2019). New dialogues in feminist disability studies. *Estudos Feministas*, (27)1, 1–13., <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26634954>
- Grosz, E. (1990). *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction*. Routledge.
- Haralambos, M., & Holborn, M. (2008). *Sociologija: teme i perspektive*. Golden marketing.
- Henriksson, H. W., Williams, A., & Fahlgren, M. (2023). Ambivalent narratives of motherhood and mothering: From normal and natural to not-at-all. In H. Wahlström Henriksson, A. Williams & M. Fahlgren (Eds.), *Narratives of motherhood and mothering in fiction and life writing* (1–16). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17211-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17211-3_1)
- Hobb, R. (2015a). *Mad ship*. HarperVoyager.
- Hobb, R. (2015b). *Ship of destiny*. HarperVoyager.
- Horvitz, D. M. (2000). *Literary trauma: Sadism, memory, and sexual violence in American women's fiction*. State University of New York Press.
- Jiao, M. (2019). Mothering and motherhood: Experience, ideology, and agency. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 56(3), 541–556. <https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.56.3.0541>
- Katavić, G. (2011). *The shift from the traditional feminine role in Robin Hobb's characters in her The Farseer trilogy and The Tawny Man trilogy* [Master's thesis, University of Maribor]. Digital Library of University of Maribor.
- Kerry, K. (2004). The mother and the angel: Disability studies, mothering and the 'unreal' in children's fiction. *Disability Culture in Children's Literature*, 24(1), <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/847/1022>
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection* (L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1980)

- LaHaie, J. H. (2012). *Girls, mothers and others: Female representation in the adolescent fantasy of J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, and Terry Pratchett* [Doctoral dissertation, Western Michigan University].
- Mayer, K. (2012). *Mother: A textual analysis of contemporary mother identities in popular discourse*. [Master's thesis, Marquette University]. Raynor Library.
- Melville, P. (2018). Queerness and homophobia in Robin Hobb's Farseer trilogies. *Extrapolation*, 59(3), 281–303. <https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.2018.17>
- Mohamed, K., & Shefer, T. (2015). Gendering disability and disabling gender: Critical reflections on intersections of gender and disability. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 29(2), 2–13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43825166>
- Moi, T. (2001). *What is a woman? And other essays*. Oxford University Press.
- Morris, A. (2005). Naming Maternal Alienation. In M. Porter, P. Short & A. O'Reilly (Eds.), *Motherhood: Power and oppression* (pp. 223–236). Women's Press.
- Neyer, G., & Bernardi, L. (2011). Feminist perspectives on motherhood and reproduction. *Historical Social Research*, 36(2), 162–176. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.2.162-176>
- O'Reilly, A. (2004a). Introduction. In A. O'Reilly (Ed.), *From motherhood to mothering: The legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of woman born* (pp. 1–23). State University of New York Press.
- O'Reilly, A. (2004b). Mothering against motherhood and the possibility of empowered maternity for mothers and their children. In A. O'Reilly (Ed.), *From motherhood to mothering: The legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of woman born* (pp. 159–174). State University of New York Press.
- Palmer, M., & Harley, D. (2012). Models and Measurement in Disability: An International Review. *Health Policy and Planning*, (27)5, 357–64. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czr047>
- Peternai Andrić, K. (2012). *Ime i identitet u književnoj teoriji*. Izdanja Antibarbarus.
- Peternai Andrić, K. (2019). *Priopovijedanje, identitet, invaliditet*. Meandarmedia.
- Prater, L. (2016). Queering magic: Robin Hobb and fantasy literature's radical potential. In J. Roberts & E. MacCallum-Stewart (Eds.), *Gender and sexuality in contemporary popular fantasy: Beyond boy wizards and kick-ass chicks* (pp. 21–34). Routledge.
- Räsänen, H. (2016). *How do you politely explain to someone that you had always believed him a moron as well as a fool? – Marginality, transformations and identity in Robin Hobb's Beloved* [Master's Thesis, University of Tampere]. Trepo.
- Rich, A. (1995). *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Rowe Fraustino, L., & Coats, K. (Eds.). (2016). *Mothers in children's and young adult literature: From the eighteenth century to postfeminism*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Rottenberg, C. (2018). *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. Oxford University Press.
- Stets, J. E., & Lee, J. (2021). The mother identity and self-esteem. In P. S. Brenner, J. E. Stets & R. T. Serpe (Eds.), *Identities in action: Developments in identity theory* (pp. 133–53). Springer.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224–237. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870>
- Thomas, C. (1997). The baby and the bath water: disabled women and motherhood in social context. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, (19)5, 622–643. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.1997.tb00423.x>
- Tong, R. (2014). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction* (4th ed.). Westview Press.
- Westcott, M. (1977). Dialectics of fantasy. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2(3), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346342>