

PERFORMING MANHOOD: GLAHN AND THE MASCULINITY CRISIS IN HAMSUN'S *PAN*¹

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It is generally acknowledged that Hamsun's *Pan* tells a tragic story about the romantic love between Glahn and Edvarda; however, the cause of the tragedy in this novel is not easily found. This novel with its simplicity of language and plot exemplifies Hemingway's "Tip of Iceberg" writing style. The narrative in *Pan* only serves as a passage to what is unknown, especially the mysterious psychological motives behind the strange acts of the protagonist Glahn towards Edvarda and his other male competitors. The fundamental problem with Glahn is that he holds an essentialist notion of masculinity that has gradually fallen out of fashion in the context of emerging Norwegian modernity during the late 19th century. His acts of violence, which are performative of his masculine identity, not only do harm to others, but also become self-destructive. The main questions that will be discussed in the following article include: What kinds of conflicts take place between Glahn and the other male competitors in their relationship with Edvarda? How does Glahn's masculinity crisis come into being? What kind of social, historical, and cultural changes are reflected as well as enacted in *Pan*? In order to adequately deal with the above questions concerning Glahn and the novel as a whole, it is first necessary to explain this article's theoretical rationale and research methodology.


Theoretical rationale

There have been numerous discussions of feminism and modernity focused on the emergence of "new women" since the late 19th century. These "new women" were dissatisfied with their traditional roles at home and longed to be independent, respected, and active participants in society. In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski argues for a new approach to modernity from a feminist perspective that does away with the seductive desire for grand narratives. (cf. Felski, 13). The liberation of women is not just subversive to the existing order of the patriarchy, but representative of a new imagination and expectation of the future. One problem with the feminist discourse is that it replaces the grand discourse of patriarchy with another grand discourse of feminism. The new relationship that women have with men, especially its effects on the self-esteem and identity of individual men, has not been sufficiently analyzed in feminist studies. This gap in scholarship gave rise to new studies on modernism and masculinity that began in the 1990s.

One of the main topics in masculinity studies in the recent decades is the masculinity crisis, on which there have been at least three different kinds of

¹ Some of the main ideas in this paper have appeared in my monograph in Chinese. See Chengzhou He, *Duihua Bei'ou Jingdian: Yi Bu Sheng, Si Te Lin Bao yu Ha Mu Sheng* (The Canonical Nordic Writers: Ibsen, Strindberg and Hamsun), Beijing: Peking UP, 2009.

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analysis. First, as modernization progresses, some new types of manhood become prioritized, and as a consequence, the old dominant style of masculinity is challenged or even falls into crisis. Second, the core values of modernity are in fundamental conflict with the principles of patriarchy. The former promotes the equality of people irrespective of their gender or ethnicity, while the latter holds the traditional idea of male superiority over female. Thirdly, as the gender conflicts become more and more intense, important changes have taken place in the male attitude towards ideal manhood. Some may come to realize that the traditional notions of masculinity have become so self-restraining or self-oppressing that they want to give up those notions and start their life anew. Others may stubbornly insist on and repeatedly, or even violently, perform their outdated ideas of masculinity until their tragic end. “It has rarely occurred to men to criticize masculinity. It is their territory, they identify themselves by it. In its name they undergo all kinds of suffering and commit all kinds of atrocities, but they do not question it. They see masculinity as a law of nature. It makes them feel at ease; it is the proof of their power. They do not imagine that it could be their poison.” (qtd. in Allwood, 46-47) Glahn is such a man with an essentialist understanding of traditional masculinity, who inevitably undergoes an identity crisis and enters into serious conflicts with the people around him.

Research methodology

This article draws methodological inspiration from two books. Firstly, in *Masculinities*, R. W. Connell writes that it is important to realize that there are multiple masculinities. In the contemporary Western gender order, Connell recognizes four main patterns of masculinity: hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization. Like the interplay among gender, race, and class, these patterns are dynamic. “These two types of relationship – hegemony, domination/subordination and complicity on the one hand, marginalization/authorization on the other – provide a framework in which we can analyze specific masculinities. I emphasize that terms such as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘marginalized masculinities’ name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships. Any theory of masculinity worth having must give an account of this process of change.” (Connell, 81) Although the male world in *Pan* is different from that in the contemporary Australian or American multi-ethnic society that Connell’s theory focuses on, Connell’s interactive model of different types of masculinity provides clues for understanding the competitions between Glahn and the other male characters in the novel.

Secondly, in *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (2001), Kam Louie identifies a paradigm of *wen-wu* concerning the construction and transformations in the history of Chinese masculinity. While *wen* means “the mental or civil,” *wu* means “the physical or martial.” (10). According to Louie, *wen* and *wu* provide “a paradigm that unravels the way the Chinese have hitherto conceptualized masculinity. The coordinates of this paradigm can and do change with social transformations. Clearly, it is not immutable” (13). The *wen-wu* paradigm, which is mainly used to analyze the dynamic power that shapes the

history of Chinese masculinity, may be useful for us to understand the inevitable transformations of ideal manhood in turn-of-the-century Norwegian society that Glahn fails to recognize, or is perhaps unwilling to accept.

Through a close reading of *Pan*, this article will provide an elaborate discussion of Glahn's troubled identity of manhood and his violent but futile struggles, while also reflecting on the relationship between masculinity and Norwegian modernity.

“The ideal manhood”: the rivalry between men

Pan has a subtitle: “From Lieutenant Thomas Glahn's Papers.” The novel, except the last part entitled “Glahn's Death”, is written as a first person narrative. With little being known about his past, Glahn has left a deep impression on the people around him as a very strong and energetic man. His masculine charm is appreciated not only by young women but also by his male companions. In the last part of the novel, his hunting partner in India gives a description of him as follows: “He looked magnificent, was full of youthful vigour and had an irresistible way with him. When he looked at you with his animal eyes, you could not help feeling his power, even I felt it. A woman is supposed to have said, ‘When he looks at me I am lost; I feel as though he were touching me’.”(165) Glahn has a strong sense of moral ethics that makes him a representative of classical masculinity based on physical strength and courage.

Glahn is completely aware of his masculine charm, and he is accustomed to the attention of women around him. He is very sensitive about how people look at him and gets very upset if his presence is ignored on social occasions. During an outdoor party, Edvarda, the host, keeps talking to the Doctor who has attracted everyone's attention with his humor. Depressed, Glahn hurls Edvarda's shoe far out over the water. The purpose of doing this, as he confesses, is to “remind her of my existence.” (65)

Glahn knows from the very beginning that the Doctor is his rival in his relationship with Edvarda. The Doctor, a very intelligent and humorous man, has won the favor of many women around him, including Edvarda. Glahn feels contemptuous toward him, because he is lame. When he laughs at the Doctor's physical defects, it irritates Edvarda. She speaks to him humiliatingly, “You are not lame, no; but even if you were, you couldn't compare with him; no, you couldn't, you could never compare with him. There.” (77) Desperate to take his revenge, Glahn stops the Doctor on his way and orders him to jump over his gun like a dog; nevertheless, the Doctor handles himself well and exhibits his strong communicative abilities. Overcoming his initial embarrassment and shock, he smiles and kindly asks Glahn: “Why are you really doing all this? There is something wrong with you. If you tell me what it is, perhaps” (78) The surprising calmness in the Doctor's response makes Glahn feel ashamed of his rudeness. Later, Glahn finds out that the Doctor is very knowledgeable, understanding, confident, and even willing to make self-sacrifices. This shakes Glahn's essentialist notion of ideal manhood. The Doctor is representative of a new kind of masculine image that is not only more in accordance with the standard of education in modern times, but also in direct opposition to Glahn's

notion of physical strength defining masculine identity.

The Finnish Baron, a man of science, is another strong competitor of Glahn, especially since he is chosen by Edvarda's father as her future husband. In Glahn's opinion, this man is even less manly than the Doctor. Glahn's opinion is made obvious in his descriptions of the Baron: "A little man of about forty, with a long, narrow face, prominent cheekbones and a thin black beard. He had a sharp and penetrating glance, but he wore thick glasses... He stooped a little, and his lean hands were blue-veined, but the nails were like yellow metal." (100) The Baron with the five-pointed coronets on his shirt indicating his aristocratic status always becomes the center of attention at Edvarda's parties. As all the women gather around the Baron and none of them, particularly Edvarda, is interested in Glahn any longer, Glahn becomes very jealous. Once again, Glahn does something incredibly childish and provocative to his competitor. "I went over to the Baron, bent over him as though I wanted to whisper something, and when I was close enough I spat in his ear." (138)

In *Pan*, the rivalry among Glahn, the Doctor, and the Finnish Baron for the love of Edvarda is a metaphor for the competition among different notions of manhood. This can be closely related to the struggle between differing forms of masculinity in Norwegian society at that time. Masculinities are not self-contained; they are relational, depending on social and cultural conditions and transformations. "To understand gender, then, we must constantly go beyond gender." (Connell, 76) In late 19th century Norway, class remained very influential. Such aristocratic titles as "Baron" would still enjoy reasonably high social status and respect. One can compare this kind of respect and fame to that of General Gabler in Ibsen's play *Hedda Gabler* (1890). Also at this time, education and knowledge of science were regarded as important achievements that men could attain in order to distinguish themselves. Physical strength was no longer valued as much as it used to be in the general notion of masculinity. Because of this, the conceptions of ideal manhood transformed significantly during this period of social transition not only in Norway but also in other countries across the globe. What the novel *Pan* dramatizes so forcefully is how Glahn refuses to face the reality of evolving masculine ideals and adapt to the changes. His stubbornness and blind confidence are largely accountable for his tragic story.

As the Norwegian patriarchal society was in the process of disintegration, women were becoming more and more independent and active in society. In the literary and cultural spheres, the character of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was a symbol of female emancipation that made a tremendous impact on the relationship between genders in Norwegian society both then and thereafter. One of the theatrical reviews of *A Doll's House* in 1879, states "Vi har[ve] ikke i dramatisk eller digterisk Form set noget bedre, kraftigere Indlæg i Spørgsmaalet om Kvindens Frigørelse!" (Ibsen, 251) Due to his ignorance of women's thoughts and desires, Glahn fights a sexual war with Edvarda throughout the novel, providing yet another challenge to his masculine pride.

The Challenge of "New Women"

Published in 1894, *Pan* was written when the author lived in Paris and

Kristiansand. At that time, Hamsun was enthusiastic about modernism in French literature and art, and he could have been inspired by themes and motives from French authors such as Mallarmé and Verlaine. “Slik blir det materialisten og populærforfatteren som sitter og skriver om unge menneskers ulykkelige kjærlighet, om helter og heltinner, slik som vi kjenner det i mange populære sammenhenger. Det kunne kan like gjerne ha gjort i Norge, og det er i Norge han avslutter boken *Pan*.” (Kristiansen, 91) Hamsun’s *Pan* is about the tragic love of two young people. The story is symbolic and full of mysteries. The seasonal change from spring to autumn in the novel mirrors their relationship. They get acquainted with each other in spring, fall in love in the summer, and experience a bitter farewell in the autumn.

In *Pan*, Edvarda is as important and complicated a character as Glahn, so much so that the author seriously considered using “Edvarda” as the title of the novel. (cf. Fergusson, 153) Shy as she is, Edvarda looks younger than her real age. The Doctor discovers after investigations that she is twenty years old, but she looks fifteen. Because her mother died many years ago, she appears to be a little bit sentimental. When he first meets her, Glahn says that he immediately feels sympathetic towards her. During his life, Glahn seems to be extremely confident about his ability to know people. “For many years I have supposed that I could read the minds of everyone I met.” (29) It turns out that he overestimates himself, at least in his relationship with Edvarda, for she is very different from how she appears.

Edvarda is actually a very strong and determined young woman. Since her mother died when she was little, her father became very fond of her and spoiled her. She became very stubborn. Because her father did not get remarried, she became the mistress of the most influential family in the village. She takes charge of everything at home and does not compromise when making decisions. Unlike other girls, she is used to making arrangements on her own and does not show her weaknesses. She may be called an “unwomanly woman” in that regard.

In his relationship with Edvarda, Glahn does not feel that he is in control, but rather just the opposite. This gradually drives him into despair. In the several “love triangles” of the novel (cf. Sjaavik 1992), Edvarda is at the core of the relationships, while Glahn is just one of the male players. Even when she is deeply in love with Glahn, she makes him jealous by having the Doctor host her party on the island. Edvarda does not like to be passively looked after by men, but rather enjoys being the initiator of the relationship. The Doctor understands Edvarda’s character and says, “One does not propose to Edvarda—she takes him who pleases her most.” (82) She is good at playing a hide-and-seek game with her admirers who are usually attracted by her charm. When they attempt to woo her at close quarters, she behaves very proudly so as to discourage them from making further advances. She likes to be in control in her relationships with men. That explains why she suddenly disappears for a few days or treats Glahn coldly when he passionately falls in love with her. Then, when he becomes crest-fallen because of her neglect, she approaches him with affection, thus continuing the cycle by making him happy and excited again. Edvarda is not afraid of Glahn’s revenge. Instead, she seems to be confident about how to deal with it until things gradually

get out of control. Unlike what has happened previously in her relationships with men, Glahn is extremely unpredictable and aggressive. When Edvarda's father, Mack, presents the Baron as a suitor for Edvarda, Glahn begins to have a sexual relationship with Eva, the young wife of the Blacksmith, who is also Mack's secret mistress. Thereafter, the love game turns into an irrevocable conflict that has seriously damaging effects on all sides. Edvarda's choice to marry the Baron puts a stop to the game, but it does not prevent Glahn from his tragic death.

After her husband dies, Edvarda tries one last time to approach Glahn by sending him a letter, the content of which is not revealed. Upon receiving the letter, Glahn feels humiliated. "Ha! Ha! Imagine a man, and a married woman making advances to him, a married woman!" (176) Turning desperate about his masculine pride, Glahn starts a suicidal gun fight with another hunter. Being violent from the beginning of the novel, it is no surprise that Glahn comes to a violent end.

Guns, Violence and Death

Gender, according to Judith Butler, is a repeated performance. "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *a stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body, and hence must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gender self" (Butler, 140). In this respect, the violence that Glahn commits with his gun betrays his repeated efforts to fulfil his illusion of the masculine self.

In the beginning of the novel, Glahn likes to shoot in the forest and then listen to the echoes in the valley. The gun is his method to interfere with nature, a symbol of feminine passivity. When looked at from the eco-feminist point of view, "nature is not only feminine, it is highly sexualized and objectified by 'Luxurious Man,' who views it solely in terms of promoting his unnatural vice." (Williams, 22) As far as Glahn is concerned, both nature and women are objectified as well as othered in his pursuit of masculine identification.

As befitting a lieutenant, he almost always appears with a gun in his hand and tends to use his gun in solving his problems. Earlier in this article, it was mentioned that Glahn asked the Doctor to jump over his gun in order to humiliate him. Later in the story, when he becomes dissatisfied with what he has done to the Doctor, Glahn shoots at his own foot after returning to his hut in the forest. His inclination towards self-harm anticipates his suicidal act of irritating his fellow English hunter in India.

Upon hearing the news of the Baron's departure, Glahn decides to express his anger in a crazy manner. He bores small holes in the cliff face, fills them with powder, and then lights the fuse so that the huge rocks rolling down into the abyss create a big noise and a frightening spectacle when the Baron's ship passes by. He also shoots into the sky, creating lingering echoes. This is his way of both demonstrating his anger and displaying his masculine existence. Unfortunately, Eva is working under the cliff and struck dead by the rocks. She is a silent victim

of the rivalry between Glahn and Mack, who is aware of Glahn's plan and purposefully instructs Eva to work under the cliff. Eva's death suggests just how dangerous and destructive the violence of masculinity can become. That being said, Hamun's treatment of Eva in the story is too simplistic to give any acknowledgment of her subjectivity and individual value. Her role only serves the need of the male author to create his male characters in the story. A feminist critique of the characterization of Eva in *Pan* may justify another separate research paper.

Knowing that Edvarda is going to marry the Baron and leave the place, Glahn becomes increasingly insane. Wearing his uniform, he pays a farewell visit to Edvarda, who then requests that he leave his dog to her. In a fit of madness, he shoots his dear dog and has the dog's dead body sent to Edvarda. Whenever he encounters his masculine crisis, Glahn cannot stay calm and think about what he must do next. Instead, he gets more stubborn and demonstrates his masculinity in violent ways. After his departure from northern Norway, Glahn travels to India, where he hopes to regain his confidence in his masculine self. Unfortunately, he falls into another rivalry with another European hunter over their relationship with the same native girl. In the meantime, he receives a letter from Edvarda, who tells him that her husband the Baron has died and hints at their reunion. Glahn takes Edvarda's letter as an insult that does excessive harm to his male self-esteem. Disillusioned, he provokes his hunting partner to shoot him. To be killed in a duel is something of which he can be proud. Although their motivations are different, Glahn's notion of courageous death is reminiscent of Ibsen's Hedda Gabler.

The problem with Glahn is that he dreams of possessing absolute power to take control in his sexual encounters with women. He indulges in this patriarchal dream when he retells his sexual fantasy about Diderik and Iselin (34-37). In this fantasy, he can easily get his hands on Iselin, while keeping Diderik away. He is entrenched with his absolute power over and attraction to Iselin. The following is his confession to Eva:

"I love three things," I say then. "I love a dream of love I once had; I love you; and I love this patch of earth."

"And which do you love best?" Eva asks.

"The dream." (124)

What happens to Glahn is that he has endeavored to control and conquer in his relationship with Edvarda but has failed. He gradually realizes that he has lost his ability to attract women when compared to other men, who he does not respect or see as his equals. He has blamed himself for his failures and "taken revenge on himself." Because of this, he has experienced despair, humiliation, and a feeling of castration. Glahn's death is his last attempt to defend his masculine pride. To a certain extent, this is reminiscent of the death of the Lieutenant in Strindberg's *Father* (1887). Both works suggest that the traditional notions of masculinity, which have been challenged by social transformations that affect gender relations, prove to be both harmful to women and restraining and destructive to men themselves.

Conclusion

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler talks about “the fragility of masculinity.” (57) Glahn’s sense of masculinity is fragile. This is because he is accustomed to his male power and confidence. When small conflicts make him feel vulnerable, he can only react by becoming upset or desperate. His death suggests that he is not able to adapt to social changes. His notions of ideal manhood seem outdated in an age when women play a more and more important role, and there are different types of masculinity competing for attention and dominance.

That Glahn is “performing manhood,” whether consciously or unconsciously, in the changing circumstances of the novel is evident and has been carefully analyzed. In addition, the whole novel can be interpreted as a performative conduct, in which the different notions of masculinity are enacted so that the readers of today can still respond to and give comment on them. Fictional works like *Pan* should not be treated just as unchanging texts, but also as acts or events in light of the theories of performativity in literature by J. Hillis Miller, Jonathan Culler, Derek Attridge, and Terry Eagleton. It will perhaps become even more fruitful to approach the performative aspects of manhood in *Pan* in relation to the intentions of the author, the history of Norwegian society and gender, and the performance of reading in changing times.

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Summary:

In Hamsun's novel *Pan*, Lieutenant Glahn holds an essentialist notion of masculinity that is somewhat outdated in the context of emerging Norwegian modernity. His acts of violence, which are performative of his male pride, not only bring harm to others, but also become destructive to himself. The masculinity crisis enacted in *Pan* is put into the context of the social, historical, and cultural changes related to gender and modernity that occurred during the end of the 19th century in Norway and beyond.

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Hamsun, masculinity, performativity