

## The Power of Female Rage: Challenging the Feminine Mystique

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the representation and critique of domesticity through female rage in Rachel Yoder's novel *Nightbitch*. The two primary topics of the study are (1) how domesticity is depicted in the novel and (2) how the female protagonist challenges traditional domestic roles through the expression of rage. This qualitative study employs textual analysis within a feminist literary framework, drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Betty Friedan's concept of the feminine mystique. This study is important as it examines the societal pressures on women in domestic roles and investigates how female rage serves as a means of resistance and identity reconstruction. The findings indicate that domesticity is represented as a socially constructed identity influenced by patriarchal norms, which limits the protagonist to the roles of mother and wife. The protagonist redefines womanhood and motherhood through symbolic acts, including naming herself "Nightbitch," transforming into a dog, and expressing suppressed rage, thereby redefining the womanhood and motherhood on her own terms. These findings demonstrate that female rage functions not as a destructive force but as a catalyst for liberation and identity reconstruction. Beyond the novel itself, the study highlights how contemporary feminist literature reclaims women's anger as a resource for challenging gender expectations and expanding the discourse on motherhood and femininity.

**Keywords:** Femininity; Domesticity; Gender roles; Identity transformation; Female rage

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## INTRODUCTION

Individuals are unconsciously given roles based on their gender even when they are not born yet (Koçak et al., 2022). Social events such as gender reveal parties exemplify this phenomenon, as colors like blue and pink represent societal expectations of masculinity and femininity, consequently reinforcing traditional gender roles prior to the child's birth (Oswald et al., 2021). This gendering goes beyond symbolism to societal preferences, as societies continue to favor sons over daughters (Ben-Noun, 2016). This evidence indicates that even prior to their existence, women are already subjected to societal rejection.

Society automatically expects that women will take on the role of primary caregivers as they transition into adulthood. Society has normalized the perception that caregiving and domestic responsibilities are essential to womanhood, thereby reinforcing the idea that women should prioritize these roles above professional or personal ambitions. Studies such as *Homes, Food and Domesticity: Rethinking the Housewife in Twentieth Century Britain* (Andrews et al., 2024) show how domesticity is being revisited in historical as well as contemporary literary and cultural contexts, indicating the persistence and evolving critique of the domestic role. Recent literary studies have begun exploring how modern authors challenge traditional domestic roles. For example,

Challenging Domesticity (Castillejos et al., 2024) indicates that similar critiques can be found in both literature and architecture, which suggests that domesticity is no longer an unbreakable ideal. The topic of assigned gender roles often emerges in discussions regarding societal expectations. Men are less likely than women to be expected to take on primary caregiving activities such as childcare, household maintenance, and meal preparation (Sauer, 2022). Forbes indicates that women devote an astounding 40% more of their time to caregiving than men do in heterosexual relationships, where both partners work full-time (Alon et al., 2020). Although the idea of males as homemakers is no longer wholly taboo in modern culture, a subconscious stigma exists, particularly among full-time stay-at-home fathers (Shirani et al., 2012).

Historically, women have had to advocate for their rights to education, to vote, and to work alongside men (Dolton & Graham, 2014; Jacquemart, 2017). Despite attaining educational opportunities equal to those of men, societal norms continue to prescribe their roles and responsibilities, often reducing them to the position of homemaker (Anderson et al., 2021). For centuries, women's identities have been defined mainly within the confines of the home, with societal expectations continuing to prioritize domestic roles over personal ambitions or fulfillment. Women are often assumed to find fulfillment in marriage, bearing children, having a beautiful house, and having a good husband (Friedan, 2001; Muafiah & Suryani, 2024). Barbara Welter reinforced this ideology as the Cult of True Womanhood, or what can be referred to as the Cult of Domesticity, which emerged in the 19th century and emphasized virtues such as piety, purity, obedience, and domesticity as essential traits of womanhood (Welter, 1966).

By the mid-20th century, many women felt their lives revolved around maintaining a household, caring for children, and ensuring their husbands' happiness, leaving little room for personal fulfillment (Friedan, 2001). In "The Feminine Mystique," Friedan examined the causes of women's confinement within traditional domestic roles. She identified what she termed "the problem that has no name," describing the widespread dissatisfaction and unspoken turmoil experienced by women despite material comfort. Friedan used interviews and media analysis to show how these emotions were widely disregarded by public discourse, which blamed them on ingratitude rather than structural gender limitations. This deeply ingrained belief that women should find fulfillment exclusively in domestic life persists in public narratives today. Recent study of Friedan argue that while her concept remains influential, it must be expanded to reflect intersectional and contemporary contexts, as the mystique was originally centered on white, middle-class women (Johns Speese, 2023). Re-readings of classic feminist theory also examines how the feminine mystique has been challenged and reshaped over time. For example, *Domestic Feminism: The Politics of Reproduction and Motherhood in Hulu's The Handmaid's Tale* (Boyle, 2024) addresses how modern narratives expose and complicate existing domestic and reproductive roles.

Friedan's concept of "the problem that has no name" is rooted in the ideology of domesticity. Domesticity refers to the idea of home and family life as the center of a woman's world (Hollows, 2011). The unhappiness women go through with imposed domesticity is not only an individual struggle but also a systemic issue that remains deeply rooted in the social system. Friedan introduced the concept of 'feminine mystique' to describe how societal expectations define femininity through imposed domesticity, positioning motherhood and marriage as the ultimate fulfillment of womanhood.

Women today experience such frustration due to societal expectations and imposed domestic responsibilities (Delgado-Herrera et al., 2024). The persistence of this issue in contemporary literature and media suggests that women continue to face similar struggles. The theme of female dissatisfaction with societal expectations and limits would not be as common in books and movies if this were no longer an issue. Narratives

addressing women's unhappiness with traditional gender roles remain prevalent, as reflected by Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (Kanjilal, 2016) and Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (Gonzales, 2023). The protagonist in both novels is a woman who encounters frustration due to the societal expectations imposed upon her. In *Gone Girl*, Amy Dunne critiques societal expectations that compel women to suppress their originality to satisfy men (Bouhamla, 2023), thereby portraying a pleasant, joyful, and simplistic persona.

Meanwhile, the unnamed narrator in *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* experiences frustration in a society that glorifies appearances and objectifies women (Font, 2024). Both characters encounter dissatisfaction that results in female rage, though expressed differently. Amy channels her rage through a vengeful plot to assert control in a patriarchal society. In contrast, the unnamed narrator internalizes her rage, manifesting it through withdrawal, apathy, and destructive habits as a means of passive resistance. These portrayals highlight how literature continues to explore women's struggle with societal expectations, demonstrating that frustration with imposed societal expectations remains a powerful theme. These fictional portrayals are part of a wider trend of contemporary crime and non-crime fiction where female rage becomes central to character agency and critique of patriarchal norms (Reitz, 2024).

Building upon this discussion, *Nightbitch* by Rachel Yoder, published in 2021, presents a compelling examination of the frustrations resulting from imposed domesticity. Yoder's novel explores the effects caused by traditional gender roles, such as imposed domesticity, which then manifest into suppressed anger and unfulfilled personal fulfillment. The societal expectations and domestic roles imposed on women that Friedan describes as a source of frustration are parallel to what Yoder's protagonist experiences. The protagonist, a former art director, feels obliged to become a stay-at-home mother and abandon her career to devote herself to her newborn. The significant shift in her lifestyle contributes to her feeling of confinement, along with burdensome household responsibilities and a regularly absent spouse. As she internalizes this frustration, it begins to manifest; thus, she finds herself transforming into a dog as a metaphor for her rage and a reclaiming of power. Similar to Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into an insect in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, which symbolizes alienation and the loss of agency (Kaur & Singh, 2024), the protagonist's transformation into a dog in *Nightbitch* represents her rage and a reclamation of power against imposed domesticity. The two main characters experience transformations that embody their internal conflicts, rendering their bodily alterations powerful as metaphorical depictions of oppression and resistance. This study, however, investigates in closer detail how Rachel Yoder's novel, *Nightbitch*, portrays rage in addition to being as an expression of frustration, but also as a form of rebellion against the limitations of domestic life. It shows how female rage in *Nightbitch* is a powerful force that lets the main character take back authority and alter the way she sees motherhood beyond the limits of the feminine mystique. More broadly, studies on domesticity in modern literature reveal how female protagonists confront imposed domestic responsibilities and overcome domestic confinement, thereby clarifying and expanding earlier feminist critiques (Castillejos et al., 2024; Jabeen et al., 2022).

The phenomenon of female rage has gained increasing attention recently across various fields (Brüning, 2021; Kee, 2022; Pistone, 2023; Reitz, 2024; Schaller & Winch, 2025). Given its growing prominence, female rage presents an important area of study. To contextualize this discussion, a thorough review of existing literature was conducted to establish its definition. Nordahl Pettersen (2023) wrote that female rage, as portrayed in the media, can be called a response to systematic oppression stemming from a patriarchal society's expectation of compliance and subsequent shaming of women

expressing their anger. Marysia (2024) claimed that female rage refers to women's psychological and physiological response to centuries of ruthless and unflinching sexism. Female rage encompasses women's affirmation of their anguish and emotions following years of being dismissed (Ng, 2024; Termos, 2024). Kovari (2023) added that female rage is often suppressed and internalized due to patriarchy (Brown, 2021). Therefore, it can be concluded that female rage is a justified reaction to systematic oppression and societal expectations imposed on women, stemming from millennia of forced submission and repressed emotions (Kaplan et al., 2021; Wallaert, 2023). This representation matches the significant cultural studies research examining the rise of "female rage" as a discourse in literature, film, and digital media during the 21st century (Castillejos et al., 2024; Reitz, 2024)

Although anger is often regarded as counterproductive and damaging by society (Archer & Mills, 2019), this is not always the case. Srinivasan (2018) states that anger can be appropriate in certain situations. She cites Lorde, who remarked that women's anger is not only a 'source of energy' that can be directly used for political purposes, but it is also a 'clarification,' a means by which women can better see their oppression (Srinivasan, 2018). Josephat Adoga & Otsi (2021) further argued that female rage is not only a reaction to oppression but also a source of empowerment. Thus, women's anger can be interpreted as a way to empower and pave the way for transformation (Murphy, 2024a). Instead of being destructive, anger can have positive potential. Murphy asserts that women's rage may catalyze significant positive transformation in a patriarchal society, exemplified by the suffragette movement, the #MeToo movement, and the latest 4B movement in South Korea that initially emerged from women's rage.

Rogoz (2023) discussed how the novel criticizes the pressures mothers face, especially unrealistic social media standards, and highlights the emotional complexity of motherhood, where feelings of anger, guilt, and alienation might coexist. Ivan uses the trope of the monstrous mother as a theoretical framework in writing his piece. Walsh (2024) compared the portrayal of motherhood using "seven markers of monstrous motherhood." One of the novels she compared was *Nightbitch*. In her conclusion, Walsh emphasized that the horrific aspects of motherhood are not inherently evil but rather reflect the complexities and pressures faced by mothers. Hostetler (2022) discusses the novel *Nightbitch* and how the metaphorical mother's transformation process illustrates her struggle in navigating her new life as a mother. Hostetler compares the main female character in the novel *Nightbitch* with the female character in the novel *The Yellow Wallpaper*, who goes through the same transformation. However, while the latter succumbs to her situation, the former embarks on a journey of self-discovery and reintegration. While female rage has been widely discussed in academic literature, much of the existing research on *Nightbitch* focuses on its portrayal of motherhood and the monstrous mother trope. A review of these studies reveals a gap in analyzing the novel through the lens of female rage as a form of empowerment.

This current research highlights that, among the few existing studies on Yoder's *Nightbitch*, nearly all focus on the monstrous mother trope or monstrous motherhood. However, none have addressed how the issues Friedan discussed decades ago continue to manifest today and how female rage serves as an appropriate reaction to the repressive social expectations imposed on women, particularly mothers. Rachel Yoder's novel *Nightbitch* portrays the problems that women in the 1960s experienced, as described in Friedan's book, and these problems are still relevant in today's society. The challenges experienced by women, as portrayed in both pieces, show how these societal problems are still relevant today.

This study also led to the two main objectives of this study, which are to examine how the domesticity of the female character in Yoder's *Nightbitch* as a housewife and



mother reflects the concept of the feminine mystique as described by Friedan and to analyze how the female character challenges domesticity through female rage, as conceptualized by the feminine mystique. Building upon these objectives, the study is guided by two central research questions: (1) How does *Nightbitch* portray domesticity as a reflection of Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*? and (2) In what ways does the protagonist's female rage function as a form of empowerment that challenges domestic confinement and traditional gender expectations?

## METHOD

To address the research objectives, this study employs a qualitative method as the most suitable approach to analyze Yoder's *Nightbitch*. Rather than focusing on numerical data, qualitative research emphasizes close engagement with texts to understand how meaning is produced and how social realities are represented (Hawkins, 2017; McKee, 2003; Oranga & Matere, 2023). Cleland & Cleland (2017) and (Arya, 2020) also affirm the same thing, saying that the strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to provide textual and complex descriptions of why and how people experience certain phenomena. The article analyzes how *Nightbitch* represents the feminine mystique and depicts female rage through a textual analysis of the language, themes, and narrative structures in the novel (Arya, 2020). This approach is appropriate because it allows for examining how domesticity and rage are articulated in the novel and how they reflect broader feminist discourses.

The primary text analyzed is *Nightbitch* by Rachel Yoder, with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* serving as the theoretical framework. The primary text serves as the unit of analysis, while the protagonist functions as the focal character for examining domesticity and rage. The research data consists of words, phrases, and sentences that illustrate the concept of the feminine mystique in the protagonist, as well as her challenge to domesticity through expressions of female rage. Passages were selected based on their relevance to domestic life, expressions of frustration, and manifestations of rage, with thematic codes guided by Friedan's concept of the feminine mystique and feminist theories of female rage.

The analytical process proceeded in three stages: (1) close reading of relevant passages to examine imagery, tone, and language; (2) thematic coding of recurring patterns such as confinement, frustration, transformation, and empowerment; and (3) interpretation of these themes in dialogue with Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* to highlight how Yoder critiques domestic expectations. This method enables an explanation of how Yoder critiques the societal expectations associated with being a woman, using her protagonist's transformation as a metaphor for rejecting the feminine mystique. To enhance clarity, the findings are also summarized in a figure illustrating the progression from domestic confinement stem from feminine mystique to female rage and empowerment.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Imposed Domesticity of the Female Character: Reflections of the Feminine Mystique in *Nightbitch*

The term domestic comes from the Latin word *domus*, which means house or dwelling place (Connellan, 2016), emphasizing that domesticity refers to a space inhabited by a family. While the practice of domesticity has existed since the hunting-gathering era, the ideology of domesticity that describes true womanhood was introduced by Barbara Welter in 1966. Known as the Cult of Domesticity, this ideology originated from the Industrial Revolution era, which placed the home as the scope of women and the workplace as the scope of men (Fehlbaum, 2016). As the economy and

politics that shape society changed rapidly, so did the concept of womanhood. Thus, the Cult of Domesticity was born, where women are judged by society on how they take care of the house, children, and husband, as one aspect that defined their true womanhood.

Betty Friedan introduced the concept of feminine mystique, which closely relates to the concept of domesticity. The feminine mystique is a widespread societal belief due to exposure to media, advertising, and popular culture that portrays images of happy women, especially in suburban families, as ideal and aspirational figures for women. This deeply rooted societal belief depicts a woman's true happiness as being only in her role as a mother and housewife. There is nothing wrong with this belief; however, it also instills the idea that a woman who wants to have a career, or pursue higher education, or anything outside of her role as a mother or wife is considered unfeminine. This belief implies that a woman who aspires to something beyond her role as a mother and wife is unlikely to find true happiness. As such, this societal belief is highly problematic, as a woman deserves to have a life and identity apart from just being a mother and a wife.

In relation to the first research question, these frameworks of domesticity and the feminine mystique provide the foundation for analyzing how *Nightbitch* portrays the protagonist's confinement within the gendered roles. By situating Yoder's character within this ideological backdrop, the novel demonstrates the persistence of Friedan's "problem with no name" in contemporary contexts.

The concept of domesticity as a gender role expectation supports the philosophy of the feminine mystique and serves as the central theme in Rachel Yoder's novel *Nightbitch*, in which her responsibilities restrict the protagonist's identity as a mother and wife. The protagonist of the novel experienced a sense of entrapment because of the insignificance of her existence as a mother and wife. She abandoned her aspiration of becoming a museum director after careful consideration of caring for her newborn. The protagonist experienced frustration due to her husband's indifferent attitude toward her growing discomfort. Consequently, her unhappiness manifests in her transformation into a dog, which she subsequently refers to as *Nightbitch*. This transition serves as a metaphor for her reclamation of freedom and identity as her former self, rather than merely as the child's mother and the husband's wife.

This analysis underscores how *Nightbitch* directly reflects Friedan's critique of imposed domesticity, where women are pressured to sacrifice ambition and identity for motherhood, resulting in frustration and resentment. By illustrating this through the protagonist's transformation, Yoder dramatizes how the feminine mystique continues to constrain women's lives, and thereby addressing the first research question: How does *Nightbitch* portray domesticity as a reflection of Friedan's Feminine Mystique?

The protagonist in Yoder's *Nightbitch* is not merely a mother and a wife; she is an intelligent woman with a promising career. Prior to motherhood, she took pride in her career and developed a strong sense of identity through her passion for art, as illustrated by a passage in the novel: "She pushed to the very back of her mind the fact that she'd had a job, before the baby, to which she'd actively referred as her 'dream job,'... and doing something she believed in, and actually getting paid to do such a job, working in the arts, one of those rare and magical jobs." (Yoder, 2021, p. 29). However, she has to balance caring for the infant and her career after becoming a mother, which creates challenges. The infant requires feeding, diaper changes, and naptime, all of which can only be attended to by the protagonist during her working hours, as the infant is averse to daycare. She bitterly had to quit work to attend to her child without those worries, as Yoder writes: "It was a job she had always wanted. She was advancing in her career. She was growing up. She was succeeding. And she had a baby" (Yoder, 2021, p. 29). The protagonist's feelings after leaving her job mirror research showing that many women

who leave the workforce to become stay-at-home mothers often experience regret and a diminished sense of identity (Psychol & Preto, 2019; Torres et al., 2024; Wiese & Stertz, 2023).

Not only did she have to abandon her dream career, but she also found herself confined to motherhood. In the past, as a museum director, the protagonist devoted her days to conceptualizing fascinating art exhibitions, as shown in the line, "She had once, in grad school, conceptualized an entire outdoor nighttime installation..." (Yoder, 2021, p. 51). Nowadays, she finds herself trapped in the dullness of household duties. She claims that "Every morning, the same. Every day, the same, ... Was this boring? Yes, she knew it was, and she wanted someone to understand the monotony, the mind-numbing routine, the way in which her mental activity began to slow." She must inevitably include her child in her efforts to rekindle her artistic spirit, as leaving him behind is not an option. This change signifies the beginning of a new, overwhelming identity rather than just the loss of a career. In the domestic space, she is recognized not by her name or profession, but exclusively by her identity as a mother. This identity feels limiting and often imposed. Although she does not deliberately avoid friendships with other mothers, she begrudges the thought of being viewed exclusively through the lens of motherhood, as Yoder puts it: "While she would not actively avoid a friendship with a woman because she, too, was a mother, she felt that to begin one merely because of this shared motherhood was repugnant (Yoder, 2021)."

In another passage, the protagonist admits her frustration that she knows her career is over, her art is on hold, and that without her baby, she has nothing to her name, as she says: "Without him, did she even exist at all?" Her view suggests that while she accepts her role as a mother, she craves recognition as a person with depth, history, and ambitions beyond motherhood. Yoder portrays this transformation as confining, reflecting Betty Friedan's critique in *The Feminine Mystique*, which argues that postwar American ideals glorified the domestic woman, assuring her fulfillment and most significant achievement is through selflessness and dedication to her family. Yoder highlights this imagery in the passage in which the mother even forgets to feed herself, a clear example of how a mother often puts other needs above her own: "She felt another cry coming on, and rose to feed herself, for she had forgotten to do so while remembering to feed everyone else in the house. (Yoder 2021, 258)" At this point, the protagonist's entire identity revolves around providing care; she is even oblivious to her own needs. In this instance, motherhood transcends beyond simple responsibility; it becomes the protagonist's entire existence.

In *Nightbitch*, the economy and societal gender expectations impose domesticity, not as a personal choice, but as a social norm. Although the baby belongs to both parents, it is the wife who is expected to give up her career and care for the baby, merely because the husband earns more money. The protagonist bitterly recalls, "And so, when it had come time to make a baby and then make a decision, it was her husband who made more money and she who made less, which ensured it was she who was made to stay home. It was just that simple (Yoder, 2021, p. 35). The novel critiques how unequal finances are used to normalize traditional gender roles, reinforcing the idea that women must be the ones to sacrifice their ambitions, even though the protagonist had a more promising career and higher educational achievements than her husband.

The husband's low participation in parenting worsens the situation. Even when the baby cries in the middle of the night, her husband continues to sleep, leaving the protagonist to tend to their baby alone: "At first she did nothing, waiting for her husband to wake, which he did not, because that wasn't a thing he ever did," (Yoder, 2021, p.18). The protagonist bitterly admits that since the childbirth, she bears the burden of sleepless nights and taking care of the baby alone: "A testament to her goodness: that preternatural

ability to wake and wake and wake again, night after night, ever since the day the boy was born, ... as if waking at all hours of the night and getting up at 5:30 a.m. was something she was somehow genetically programmed for (Yoder, 2021, p. 37)." When the husband comes home from his business trip, he would bathe the baby. However, the protagonist still has to prepare everything else for him: "She was grateful he was bathing the boy, though during said bath he had asked that she put the boy's towel in the dryer to warm it, that she bring in a piece of toast for the boy to eat, that she fetch the boy's pajamas from his room, all as the man sat on the closed lid of the toilet, next to the tub, reading something on his phone (Yoder, 2021, p. 98)." These scenes illustrate how the absence of emotional and physical support from a spouse would contribute to the feeling of confinement within domesticity. Studies indicate that women lacking substantial help from their partners in childcare and domestic responsibilities frequently encounter negative thoughts and feelings, including stress, resentment, and a sense of pressure stemming from their multiple responsibilities (Prasiska et al., 2024). Yoder's protagonist might not have had to give up her job completely or felt as though motherhood had taken over her entire identity if her spouse had taken on more domestic duties.

Despite her exhaustion, the protagonist felt she had no right to complain. She is entirely aware of her privilege as a white middle-class woman, which society uses as a weapon against her. She reflects, "In fact, wasn't it a bit, you know, hoity-toity, a bit oblivious middle-class white lady of her, even to think about complaining? If she read the articles, examined the data, contemplated her lot in life, her place in society, her historical role in the oppression of everyone other than white men, she really had not even a sparse spot of yard on which to stand and emit one single strangled scream (Yoder, 2021, p. 35)." People refer to her whiteness and middle-class status as "white privilege." Her awareness of white privilege makes her hesitant to complain because society often perceives her problems as less challenging than those faced by people of color. Critics say white privilege ignores the challenges of middle-class white people and treats all white people as a homogeneous group who receive unequal benefits. It can mask white middle-class people's economic hardship, mental health concerns, and other non-racial issues. This internalized guilt suppresses her anger and builds the belief that she must unconditionally accept her duty. The novel criticizes society's control over women's emotions and pressure to be grateful despite feeling worn out. The main character's experiences mirror Friedan's argument in *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan emphasizes society's condemnation of women who express dissatisfaction with their domestic roles as a sign of ungratefulness. Friedan referenced a *Newsweek* article: She is dissatisfied with a lot that women of other lands can only dream of (Friedan, 2001, p. 49).

This narrative reflects Friedan's argument in *The Feminine Mystique*, which shows how American culture glorified women's roles as mothers and homemakers, regardless of their fulfillment or ambition. As Friedan repeatedly writes in her book, women were taught to find happiness solely in bearing children and keeping their husbands happy, instead of any other fulfillment. Domesticity in *Nightbitch* becomes harmful because the protagonist is denied her freedom to choose, not because caregiving is necessarily degrading. Her identity has been reduced to that of an expected caregiver, a role that she never entirely accepted.

The husband's lack of contribution in taking care of their baby and his ignorance toward his wife's feelings left her feeling unheard, frustrated, and resentful. The sense of entrapment in motherhood further intensified her frustration. She was frustrated because she felt she was losing the creativity that she used to have, as she reflects in one passage: "Now there was nothing. Not a single creative impulse inside her, no matter how she searched (Yoder, 2021, p. 46)." If she had not chosen art, the protagonist could have made a greater income than her husband. Therefore, she would not have to take on the



responsibilities of a stay-at-home mother. The protagonist grows resentful of her husband for her decision to remain at home and her preference for art over better-paid professions. She feels that it is not right that her husband can fulfill himself while she must stay at home, knowing that society devalues her work as a stay-at-home mother and wife. Friedan addresses this phenomenon in *The Feminine Mystique*, particularly in the chapter "The Problem That Has No Name," where she interviews women who similarly feel stripped of their identities. One of them states, "The problem is always being the children's mommy, or the minister's wife and never being myself (Friedan, 2001, p. 56)." This quote illustrates the emotional consequences of abandoning education or a career in favor of domestic life. Friedan argues that women are led to believe their highest fulfillment lies in childbearing and pleasing their husbands, a belief that ultimately confines them to narrow ideals of "true womanhood."

### **Challenging Domesticity: Female Rage and the Rejection of the Feminine Mystique**

The protagonist's choice to name herself Nightbitch is her first conscious rejection of domestic norms. It frees her from the identity that society has given her and allows her to start accepting her new self. The act of naming herself reflects Judith Butler's concept of performativity as a rebellious act. Butler argues that gender identity is not innate but constituted through repetitive, socially enforced acts (Butler, 1988). The protagonist's role as a mother and wife is not a natural condition; rather, it is a taught behavior established through the repetition of societal expectations. Occasionally, the protagonist recalls her mother sacrificing her ambitions for the sake of the family (Yoder, 2021, p. 266), which is similar to the protagonist's actions in adulthood. By adopting the identity of Nightbitch, the protagonist disrupts the established pattern. Her new identity symbolizes a rejection of the traditional, nurturing, and self-sacrificing maternal ideal. She is no longer embodying the quiet, self-sacrificing maternal position that compensates for her husband's lack of participation in the house. She is no longer only "a mom"; she transforms into a furious, angry, authentic being. The act of embracing the name Nightbitch transforms her rage, frustration, and exhaustion into a source of empowerment. This demonstrates how rage functions as a form of empowerment, directly addressing the second research question by highlighting the protagonist's rejection of the feminine mystique as her sole identity.

Study claims that rage is a robust psychological response that drives individuals to take action instead of being passive, thereby transforming personal frustrations into positive pursuits for justice and societal change (Murphy, 2024b). The protagonist's rage in Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch* functions as a catalyst for remarkable transformation, empowering her to free herself from the confines of domesticity and redefine her identity beyond that of a mother and wife. Her anger comes from her frustration with her loss of identity pre-motherhood, such as her career and artistic creativity. However, through her rage, she is able to reclaim parts of herself she lost. After she accepts and acknowledges her transformation into a dog, she begins doing things for herself again, not out of duty as a mother and wife, but by her desire. Once she acknowledges her transformation, she dresses herself like never before and no longer cares what other mothers think (Yoder, 2021, p. 305). The protagonist also starts to demand her husband take more part in caring for the baby; in one instance, the protagonist says, "It was plain she was now owed years of night- nights. And it was also now clear her husband would make it his job to attend to night-nights each night he was home. It was as simple as that (Yoder, 2021, p. 338)." In another line, she clearly clarifies that she should have demanded more; after all, marriage is about partnership, and her husband should have done more than bring home money. Through her rage, the protagonist realizes that she should stop suppressing her needs and starts to regain her sense of self. This transformation illustrates how rage, rather

than being counterproductive, encourages the protagonist to confront domesticity and reestablish power dynamics within her marriage, thus addressing the second research question.

The protagonist's transformation into a dog symbolizes not a descent into madness, but rather a liberation from the restricted and domesticated identity imposed upon her as a stay-at-home mother and wife. Her transformation into a feral creature symbolizes the rejection of the traditional feminine mystique that portrays women as caring, submissive, and self-sacrificing beings. Her changes result in behavior identical to that of wild animals. In one instance, she seizes a half-eaten burger from another's plate and consumes it (Yoder, 2021, p. 251); this audacious act symbolizes a rejection of conventional standards and expectations. Upon her transformation into a dog, the protagonist howls during the night, signifying her complete acceptance of her primal nature. She can also acknowledge that she is no longer afraid because of this metamorphosis; instead, she feels strong, loves her body, and loves her child (Yoder, 2021, p.133). This knowledge is unusual for her, as she confesses her disdain for how motherhood has lowered her attractiveness (Yoder, 2021, p.57). Only through this transformation does the protagonist acquire power and establish a new conception of motherhood that is liberated from the societal standards that previously constrained her.

Ultimately, *Nightbitch* presents an entirely new version of femininity and motherhood through her performance. Upon accepting her transformation, the protagonist wanders the streets every night, indulging her primal instincts, asserting that this was her method of preparing her project with the assistance of the other mother, Jen, who admits to experiencing similar feelings as the protagonist. The protagonist delivered a performance that revealed her authentic nature as a feral being, illustrating her pursuit and slaughter of a rabbit, among other actions. The protagonist asserts that her performance demonstrates, "Womanhood and motherhood are perhaps the most potent forces in human society, which of course men have been hasty to quash, for they are right to fear these forces (Yoder, 2021, p.391)." This assertion reasserts the concept of motherhood as a powerful force that patriarchal society has been trying to silence. Other moms learn from the protagonist's journey that accepting the harshness and beauty of parenthood is not a sign of failure but instead of liberation, a break from the idealized persona in favor of a more truthful, independent self. In the end, her artistic performance symbolizes her final transition, indicating that she has moved past domesticity and is consciously choosing her path in life. The protagonist admits that she does not dismiss motherhood; instead, she accepts it on her terms, recognizing that caring for a child matters most when it comes from personal choice rather than societal pressure (Yoder, 2021, p.379). Her identity surpasses the label of 'just a mom'; she can define herself as she desires, free from societal pressure.

This analysis responds to the second question by illustrating how *Nightbitch* conceptualizes female rage as a source of empowerment. Rage empowers the protagonist to assert her autonomy, challenge the feminine mystique, and construct a new conception of motherhood that conforms to her own standards. By connecting rage with empowerment, the novel connects the fundamental themes of domesticity, frustration, and resistance, providing a unique perspective on how female rage can confront and alter the confines of imposed domesticity.

## CONCLUSION

The depiction of domesticity in Rachel Yoder's *Nightbitch* mirrors the concept of the Feminine Mystique introduced by Betty Friedan that views domesticity as a socially imposed identity that limits women's sense of self to that of a mother and wife. The feminine mystique is a concept wherein society believes that women's fulfillment is only

derived from their roles as mothers and wives, hence diminishing their identity and deeming them less feminine if they fail to conform to traditional standards. This study reveals that the concept aligns with the protagonist in Rachel Yoder's novel, as the protagonist feels frustrated and loses her identity after having children and becoming a stay-at-home mother. Through the expression of female rage, the protagonist breaks down traditional patterns, reconstructs her identity, and achieves freedom, symbolized by her transformation into a dog. This self-naming is considered the protagonist's first step in taking back her autonomy and rebuilding her identity outside of being a mother and wife. Through her transformation into a dog and adopting the name Nightbitch, the protagonist successfully liberates herself from a socially imposed identity. Her transformation allows her to embrace motherhood while maintaining her identity. The protagonist realizes that she does not feel trapped in domesticity anymore. Through the protagonist's experience, the novel emphasizes that women do not need to erase and diminish their identity when they choose to become mothers and wives, and that society cannot label them less feminine if they do not meet these standards. The study also shows that female rage is not inherently harmful or destructive; instead, it catalyzes challenging social expectations and redefines womanhood.

These results have effects on feminist literary studies and gender discourse that expand beyond the scope of this novel. Women's emotions, especially rage, can be recognized as means of resistance and transformation rather than being viewed as unreasonable or counterproductive. In *Nightbitch*, rage becomes an artistic power that lets the main character transform her anger into action, which goes against the conventional norm of seeing women's anger as harmful or unproductive. Additionally, the novel confronts the feminist critique of motherhood. Yoder reinterprets motherhood as something where actions of resistance and self-expression can coexist with caregiving, demonstrating that domestic life need not erase women's identities. Rage serves as an encouragement for the protagonist to reject the limiting concepts of "good motherhood" and to adopt a maternal identity that is both genuine and liberating.

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