

REINFORCING THE DOMESTIC ROLE OF WOMEN THROUGH THE *WOMAN AS CHICKEN* METAPHOR. A DIACHRONIC STUDY *

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“The chicken metaphor tells the whole story of a woman’s life. In her youth she is a *chick*. Then she marries and begins *feathering her nest*. Soon she begins feeling *cooped up*, so she goes to *hen parties* where she *cackles* with her friends. Then she has her *brood*, begins to *henpeck* her husband, and finally turns into an *old biddy*.”
(Nilsen, 1994:374)

This paper traces the origin, evolution and survival of the WOMAN AS CHICKEN metaphor from Antiquity to present day in order to unveil the patriarchal views transmitted regarding the role of women by means of such an animal image. By looking at different sorts of sources which include literary fragments, proverbs, medical treatises, religious, didactic and political texts as well as newspaper and magazine articles, the different figurative senses attached to such an animal term are analyzed. The study reveals that regardless of the time lapse sexist attitudes towards the role of women have not changed that much throughout history.

Key words: *sexism, women, chicken, hen, metaphor*

El presente artículo traza el origen, evolución y pervivencia de la metáfora animal que equipara a la mujer con una gallina desde la Antigüedad Clásica hasta el momento actual con el objetivo de analizar la ideología sexista que subyace bajo esta imagen aviar. Mediante un cotejo de textos de índole muy diversa que incluyen refranes, fragmentos literarios, tratados médicos,

religiosos, filosóficos y didácticos así como panfletos políticos y artículos periodísticos, se proporciona una visión panorámica de los distintos sentidos adquiridos por dicho vocablo animal. El estudio revela de esta manera que a pesar del lapso temporal transcurrido la ideología sexista que se transmite mediante dicha metáfora no ha cambiado tanto a través de la historia.

Palabras clave: *sexismo, mujeres, pollitos, gallina, metáfora*

1. INTRODUCTION

From the gospel of Saint Matthew to the latest pop sensation of the Dixie Chicks through Aesop's fables, mystery plays, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's works, Restoration comedies, the essays from *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, D. H. Lawrence's articles, political campaigns against the suffragette movement, proverbs, songs and nursery rhymes, the chicken metaphor has a long tradition in Western culture.

This paper attempts to provide a diachronic approach to the WOMAN AS CHICKEN metaphor in order to show how patriarchal views regarding the role of women are transmitted and perpetuated through such an animal image. First, the article will provide a brief sojourn throughout history in order to trace the origin and evolution of the woman as chicken metaphor. Literary, religious, political, economic and didactic texts along with proverbs will be consulted in order to shed some light onto the different figurative senses acquired by this animal term. This diachronic study will be followed by an analysis of a corpus of metaphors taken from today's written press, which will prove not only the continuity of such a metaphor, but also its productivity, judging from the metaphorical networks generated. The discussion section will adopt a cognitive approach to unveil the underlying assumptions that motivate the use of such linguistic products. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn regarding the origin, existence and productivity of the WOMAN AS CHICKEN metaphor in today's society.

2. A DIACHRONIC APPROACH TO THE WOMAN AS CHICKEN METAPHOR: FROM ANTIQUITY TO PRESENT DAY

References to hens as feminine symbols can already be found in the Classical World. In the second century A.D. Aelian wrote about the existence of two temples in Greece which were separated by a stream. One was consecrated to Hercules; the other to his wife Hebe. Roosters were kept in the temple of the god and hens in that of the goddess. Once a year the roosters would cross the stream to mate, returning with any male offspring and leaving the females for the hens to raise (Sax, 2001).

As time went by, with their gradual and widespread domestication, these two originally exotic birds became quintessentially associated with the male and female sex. Probably based on the observation of their behavior, roosters were extolled for their sexual vigor, aggressiveness, vigilance and courage. They were also in charge of taking care of hens and chickens and of providing them with food and care, embodying therefore the ideal virile qualities held within the Greco-Roman society (Dubisch, 1993:272-287). By the same token, hens became the paragons of domesticity and motherhood due to the protective attitude shown towards their offspring and the unquestioning obedience displayed to their male. In fact, several treatises of the time devoted to the education of children such as Plutarch's *De amore parentis* often resorted to the figure of the hen as the archetype of motherly love:

What of the **hens** whom we observe each day at home, with what care and assiduity they govern and guard their **chicks**? Some let down their wings for the **chicks** to come under; others arch their backs for them to climb upon; there is no part of their bodies with which they do not wish to cherish their **chicks** if they can, nor do they do this without a joy and alacrity which they seem to exhibit by the sound of their voices" (quoted in Smith and Daniel, 1975:160).

The rooster, by contrast, turned into a solar emblem.¹ His cry on announcing the dawn was interpreted as a greeting to the sun and soon took on a religious dimension. In fact, the rooster epitomized the

victory over the night and in classical mythology one of the most common representations of the gods of light, Zeus and Apollo, was a rooster (Sax, 2001). The religious significance of this animal will continue with Christianity, where the rooster's crow marking the end of darkness allegorically represents the triumph of good over evil and, ultimately, Christ (Cirlot, 2002).²

Within the Hebrew tradition in which the Bible is inscribed, the hen remained a symbol of parental love. In the Gospel of St. Matthew (23:37) the rejection of the Israelites to take part in the messianic banquet culminates with Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, in which he invokes the feminine image of the hen to express the relationship he desires to have with the Hebrew people: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a **hen** gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

Yet, running parallel to the positive metaphorical identification of women with hens the image of a fussy, domineering and stubborn animal started to emerge in Antiquity. Certainly, hens stand out for their intransigence, noisy disposition and obstinacy, since they always lie in the same location and have a rigid system of accessing food. These negative traits made their way into language and the metaphoric *hen* started to undergo a process of pejoration, being used as a term of contempt for those females who did not conform to the normative view of docile, submissive and quiet women established in the male chauvinistic Ancient world. Indeed, it is not uncommon to come across images of hens with the purpose of ridiculing females, as in Aesop's fable "Venus and the hen," where the supposedly stubborn nature of women is explained in the light of the hen's behavior:

When Juno boasted of her chastity, Venus didn't want to quarrel with her so she did not dispute what Juno said, but in order to show that no other woman was as chaste as Juno she reportedly asked some questions of a **hen**. 'So,' Venus said to the **hen**, 'could you please tell me how much food it would take to satisfy you?' The **hen** answered, 'Whatever you give me will be enough, as long as you let me use my feet to scratch for something

more.’ ‘What about a peck of wheat: would that be enough to keep you from scratching?’ ‘Oh my, that is more than enough food, of course, but please let me go on scratching.’ Venus asked, ‘Then what do you want to completely give up scratching?’ At that point the **hen** finally confessed her natural-born weakness and said, ‘Even if I had access to a whole barn full of grain, I would still just keep on scratching.’ Juno is said to have laughed at Venus’s joke, because by means of that **hen** the goddess had made an indictment of women in general. (Aesop, translated by Gibbs, 2002:100).

Stubbornness as an innate characteristic of women is also at the core of the conversation between Socrates and Alcibiades. The former, when asked about his inability to control his wife, resorted to an analogy with a hen to explain the similarities between the two beings, both physiologically and personally speaking.

It was said of Socrates that when Alcibiades asked him why he did not turn out his shrewish wife (the same wife whose naggings were reputed after all to have made him philosophical about life), Socrates replied, “why don’t you drive out **hens** that are noisy with their wings?” When Alcibiades answered, “Because they lay eggs,” Socrates replied, “A wife bears children for me.” (Fowler & Abadie, 1986: 238)

During the Middle Ages the predominant view of animals was symbolic and allegorical. Bestiaries and fables resorted to beasts as vehicles for religious allegory and moral instruction (Flores, 2000; Yamamoto, 2000). The fox embodied slyness; the owl, wisdom; the snake, deception; the rooster, vigilance, courage, leadership, arrogance and the hen epitomized naivety and weakness.³ Several short stories presented hens as preys easily deceived by cunning wolves or foxes, subtly implying lack of intelligence in this female species. The vulnerability of the bird was equally transmitted in countless medieval tales, like “The Widow’s Son,” which narrates the story of a poor widow whose only possession is a hen. Both creatures are alone and vulnerable. One day the Roman army passed by the widow’s house

and the hawk of the king's son flew at her window, eventually killing the hen. The moral of the story seems to echo the idea of protecting those who are defenseless and without male protection.

Being domestic animals, hens came to symbolizing easily manipulated subjects. The miniature from Jean Froissart's *Chronicles* illustrates a group of hens devouring grain. According to the legend, the Turkish king, pictured in the balcony, threatened to send an army equaling the number of grains in a bag to attack the king of Hungary, to which the latter replied by having starving hens eat the grain, showing in this way his military power over the citizens.



Figure 1. Miniature from Jean Froissart's *Chronicles*

As far as the rooster is concerned, its religious associations with Christ were reinforced at this time. Its crowing made it an emblem of the Christian's attitude of watchfulness and readiness for the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment of mankind. Rooster, then, came to represent resurrection and vigilance, appearing in weather vanes or church steeples and later on in houses (Sax, 2001).

The pair rooster/hen kept on encompassing the ideal virtues of a married couple. Society's notions of expected male and female

behavior were supposed to mirror those of these farmyard animals. Books on marriage advice delimited the male and female spheres through avian imagery: “The cock flyeth to bring in and the dam siteth upon the nest to keep all at home” (Fletcher, 1995: 61). Reversing those gender roles was judged as an infringement of society’s order, which, within medieval thought, reflected God’s design of the universe and, therefore, the commitment of a sin.

In this regard it is worth mentioning that within the Medieval imagery the universe was conceived in a strict hierarchical order through the mental schema of the Great Chain of Being, pictured as a chain vertically extended where every existing thing had its place depending on their properties and behavior (Lovejoy, 1936). That is, the more complex the being, the higher it stood. Hence at the bottom stand natural physical things such as the four elements. Higher up are plants; then, animals; afterwards human beings, followed by celestial creatures and finally the almighty God. Within each level there are sub-levels defined by different degrees of complexity and power in relation to each other (e.g. within the animal realm the fox is above the hen, which, in turn, is above the worm. Likewise, within society man was above woman). This ranked structure, then, presupposes that the natural order of the cosmos is that higher forms of existence dominate lower forms of existence. Order and harmony reign when the hierarchy is respected. Yet, chaos will take place if any element is altered.

Violation of this natural order was sanctioned through fowl symbolism. Figure 2, taken from the 14th-century manuscript the *Luttrell Psalter*, warns of the dangers of angry women by depicting a female holding a distaff while threatening a man who is imploring piety. Next to the chaotic image resulting from powerful women, there appears a woman taking care of her chickens and hens, the distaff this time is in her waistband. The juxtaposition of those images relies on the distaff but also in the avian imagery, for chickens and hens ran parallel to the domestic role of females.



Figure 2. Luttrell Psalter Manuscript. The British Library.⁴

The 12th-century text *On Various Arts* warns of the dangers involved in reversing gender roles by imagining monstrous creatures like the legendary *cockatrice*, a monster born from the union of a serpent and a rooster, mentioned as an example of depravity due to the shift of the domestic roles traditionally assigned to men and women. Actually, images of the so-called “maternal roosters” pervaded medieval bestiaries with the didactic purpose of showing the consequences of going against nature and, within a theocentric mentality, ultimately against God (Hodkinson, 2013).

Medical treatises also accounted for the reproductive system of human beings with such birds. Hens were praised for their fertility due to their ability to lay many eggs throughout their life and women were encouraged to follow the example (Sullivan, 1986: 98-99)—just like men were supposed to display the sexual vigor exhibited by the rooster. Nevertheless, the highly productive hen also encompassed negative views about women, since in the Middle Ages the animal often denoted loose women and even prostitutes (Vivanco, 2002:5-27). The old saying “Women and hens by too much gadding are lost” superbly highlights the dangers of women wandering—both in the literal and moral sense.

Prostitution is at the core of *La Celestina* and so are images of hens. The well-known go-between that gives name to the literary work is repeatedly described as a hen herself and is even physically feathered by the law, a common type of punishment given to prostitutes in order to make the public aware of their status (Classen & Scarborough, 2012: 412).

Celestina: Elicia, Elicia, arise and come down quickly, and bring me my mantle; for by heaven, I will hie me to the Justice, and there cry out and rail at you, like a mad-woman. What is 't you would have? What do you mean, to menace me thus in mine own house? Shall your valour and your bravings be exercised on a poor silly innocent sheep? On a **hen**, that is tied by the leg, and cannot fly from you? On an old woman of sixty years of age? (p.192)

Similarly, the other women who work in the brothel, Elicia and Areúsa, are called *hens* in reference to their profession and even Melibea, who does not work in the sexual business, is compared to a hen when she is on the verge of sexual initiation.

Som good bodi take this old thefe fro me, That thus wold (me) disseyue me with her fals sleight! Go owt of my syght now! get the **hens** streight ! C. If I n an yuyll howre cam I hyther ; I may say, I wold I had brokyn my legges twayn. M. Go **hens**, thou brothell, go **hens**, in the dyuyll way! Bydyst thou yet to increase my payn? (p.285)

The negative views attached to hens in Antiquity prevailed in the representation of females during the Middle Ages. There are proverbs galore reflecting the relationship between women's verbosity and hens, presumably because of the almost continuous twittering of the animal: "A whilsting woman and a crowing hen are neither good for God nor men" or "When the hen crows the house goes to ruin" (Sommer & Weiss, 1996; de la Cruz Cabanillas & Tejedor Martínez, 2006) will suffice to illustrate the case tackled.

This misogynistic tradition is likewise reflected in literary sources, which employ hen imagery in the representation of disagreeable women. Within the early theatrical performances *The Second Shepherds' Play* of the Townley Cycle 13, based on the biblical visitation of the shepherds, provides a monstrous portrayal of a wife through animal imagery. Advising young men never to marry, the shepherd Gib describes the size of his wife "as great as a whale withal" whose insufferable bossy and chatty character equals her to a hen:

But as far as I know, or yet as I go,
We poor wedded men suffer such woe.

Old comb **our hen**, both to and fro
She **cackles**.
But begin she to croak
To prod or to poke,
For our **cock** it's no joke
For he is in shackles.

These men that are wed have not their own will,
They are full hard put to, but they sigh full still.
God knows they are led full hard and full ill;
In bower and in bed, but speak not then till.
Now, in an aside.

(Guthrie, 1999:4)

It was thanks to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, however, that the metaphorical conceptualization of women in the guise of hens caught on in the collective imagination of Medieval people. In "The Nun's Priest Tale" the author provides "an example of human marital relationships" (Ashton, 1998:113) by means of the rooster Chauntecleer and Pertelote the hen. The symbolic associations of the name Pertelote, meaning "one who confuses somebody's lot or fate," already reveal the allegorical dimension of the tale, which seems to echo the biblical story of the fall of man, with Chauntecleer as Adam misled by Eve cast in the role of Pertelote (Spearing, 2000; Wallace, 2002). The tale tells of Chauntecleer's fright at a dream in which he sees that a fox kills him. Asking Pertelote for advice, the hen mocks him for his cowardice telling him that he is just sick and in need of

some laxative. Following the hen's counsel, Chaunticleer ignores his dream and eventually is almost devoured by a fox, although his wit enables him to escape. Pertelote, then, reflects this dual image of the hen as a symbol, on the one hand, of domestic virtues and, on the other hand, of bossiness and intransigence.

During the Renaissance the connections of the hen with the household strengthened.⁵ The feudal attitude whereby women were regarded as men's chattel made domestic animals a common vehicle for the conceptualization of women. The hen comprised the epitome of motherhood set at the ideological center of Renaissance society and together with the rooster became synonymous with ideal marital relationship. The proverbial lore of this period echoes the division of the male and female domains forged upon the image of those barnyard animals: "If you be a cock, crow; if a hen, lay eggs," for instance suggests that the main role of the female sex was procreation whereas the authority pertained exclusively to the male. Interestingly, reversing the roles was channeled by shifting the animal imagery: "A sad barnyard where the hen crows louder than the cock" (Skeat, 1910; Wilkinson, 2002).

In the same line, several treatises on the education of the sexes used identical images to warn against the dangers of empowering women. Sometimes men are ridiculed by identifying them with hens, like in Ball's description of a husband dominated by his wife in terms of "She is the Cock and I am the Hen." As a matter of fact, as will be seen later on, lack of masculinity and even homosexuality will often be attacked through hen symbols. On other occasions the target is the woman, as in "Marriage of Wit and Wisdom" (1570), where not adhering to the patriarchal canon established for women as silent and submissive creatures is rendered linguistically through the semantic field of hen, as observed in the figurative use of "cackle" instead of other speech verbs belonging to the semantic field of human beings: "She can cackle like a cadowe" or "A young wife and a harvest hen, /Much cackle will both; /A man that hath them in his clos, /He shall rest wroth." (Thiselton-Dyer, 2010).

Heir of the classical and medieval traditions, Shakespeare superbly commingles the twofold and antithetical images of the hen

in the portrayal of his characters (Findlay, 2010:184-185). On the one hand, the hen appears as the archetype of maternal care, love, protection and domesticity, as seen in the characters of Macduff and, above all, Rosalind. On the other hand, this fowl also stands for overbearing and fussy women, like the female figures of Volumnia, Mistress Quickly or Kate.

In *Macbeth* Lady Macduff is portrayed as a fiercely protective and nurturing woman. Her husband's desertion of the family is even seen in terms of animal imagery, as a flight from the nest, and her protective attitude towards her children places her in the role of the mother hen. In the climactic scene when Macduff finds out that his family has been murdered, the image of the chicken awakens the notions of vulnerability at the time that suggests the image of the protective mother: "He has no children. All my pretty ones? /Did you say all? O hell-kite! All? /What, **all my pretty chickens** and their dam/At one fell swoop?" (4.3. 217-220).

Within the same play, another metaphoric usage of *chicken* applied to females is encountered. This time the addressee is Lady Macbeth, who is referred to as *chuck* (i.e. a corruption of *chick* according to the *O.E.D.*) by her husband:

Lady Macbeth:What's to be done?
 Macbeth: Be innocent of the knowledge, **dearest chuck**, /
 Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night, /
 Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day (III, iii, 44-47)

Despite the fact that Shakespeare builds this character as a strong woman, the use of this term of endearment not only shows the affection professed by her husband, but also hints at the domestic ideal surrounding the role of women.

In addition to the human senses of *chicken* as "children" and "beloved," a new figurative meaning emerges from Shakespeare's pen. In *Cymbeline* the playwright makes numerous references to different types of fowl with the purpose of linking the history of Britain to classical mythology and also of creating a social hierarchy by likening people to animals. In several instances men are called *chickens* to deride

their cowardice when fleeing away from the battlefield. This metaphor is clearly grounded in the behavior of the animal, which tends to run away when it feels a menace: “Forthwith they fly/ **Chickens**, the way which they stooped eagles” (5.3.41).

This domestic baby animal is laden with negative connotations when applied to adult males, since it highlights the opposite qualities of the virile rooster, particularly when juxtaposed to the bird prey “eagle.” In a similar fashion, one encounters the metaphoric use of “capon” as an insult for those men who are sexually impotent and have no social power, as seen in Cloten’s description in the following terms: “You are **cock** and **capon** too, and you crow, **cock**, with your comb on” (Act II, scene ii).

The loving disposition of the hen finds its best counterpart in the romantic female lead of *As You Like It*. The faithful Rosalind, who falls in love with Orlando, speaks of the mood changes of a married woman and her jealousy is conveyed through the stereotypical roles attributed to both rooster and hen:

Rosalind: Now tell me how long you would have her after you
have possessed her.

Orlando: Forever and a day.

Rosalind: Say “a day” without the “ever.” No, no, Orlando,
men are April when they woo, December when
they wed. Maids are May when they are maids, but
the sky changes when they are wives. I will be
more jealous of thee than a **Barbary cock-pigeon**
over his **hen** (Act IV, scene i)

Co-existing with these loving images of hens, Shakespeare also gives voice to strong feminine characters through the same bird. The construction of such metaphors, however, more often than not, hides negative views about strong women, adhering to the norms imposed by the patriarchy. Such is the case of Volumnia, the mother of Caius Martius Coriolanus. Far from the stereotypical image of defenseless woman in need of a man for protection, Volumnia is a widow who has profound control over her son’s life, both in his personal and military-political life. Although she compares herself to a doting hen:

There's no man in the world/More bound to 's
mother, yet here he lets me prate/Like one i' th' stocks.
/Thou hast never in thy life/Show'd thy dear mother any
courtesy/When she, **poor hen**, fond of no second
brood,/Has cluck'd thee to the wars and safely
home,/Loaden with honour. (5.3. 160-4)

her extended speeches seem to activate the image of the overbearing, fussy and talkative animal which were so in vogue in medieval proverbs (Findlay, 2010:184-185).

Another depiction of a fussy woman in the guise of a hen can be gleaned out through the character of Mistress Quickly. The hostess of the Board's Head Tavern in Eastcheap London is likewise a powerful woman. Despite being married, she is economically independent since she owns her own inn. Certainly, from a patriarchal point of view, empowered women were seen as a threat, which accounts for her negative portrayal in *Henry IV*, part 2. Shakespeare rescues Chaucer's well-known hen to present a hysterical woman:

Falstaff: God-a-mercy! So should I be sure to be heart-burned.
Enter the Hostess
How now, **Dame Partlet the hen**? Have you inquired yet
who picked my pocket?
Hostess: Why, Sir John, what do you think, Sir John? Do
you think I keep thieves in my house? I have searched, I
have inquired, so has my husband, man by man, boy by
boy, servant by servant. The tithe of a hair was never lost
in my house before (*Henry IV*, part 1, scene 3, act iii, 47-56)

The scene recreates an argument between Mrs. Quickly and Falstaff over whether or not she picked his pocket when he fell asleep in the bar. The Hostess demands Falstaff pay her for the debt he has accumulated, but he pretends he was robbed the night before. Mrs. Quickly makes a big fuss and is presented as a vociferous woman.

Another example of an outspoken woman is Kate, the main character in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The play *par excellence* associated with animal imagery—the title itself already condenses the core of the

drama: the taming of a shrewish wife—plays on the antithetical images of *hen*, as a submissive and domineering woman. By means of verbal puns which convey sexual innuendoes, the exchange between Katherina and Petrucchio suggests how a fussy hen will be domesticated, in other words, how a strong woman will become docile and subservient to her husband even if physical violence is to be exerted on her:

Katherina: What is your crest—a coxcomb?

Petrucchio: A combless cock, so Kate will be **my hen**.

Katherina: No cock of mine, you crow too like a craven (2.1.)

Although the hen is an animal deeply rooted in the feminine world, Shakespeare uses this fowl in the portrayal of weak male characters, anticipating the 17th-century compound of “hen-pecked husband” (*O.E.D.*) and the 20th-century secondary sense of “flamboyant feminine male homosexual” (*O.E.D.*). In the *Winter’s Tale* Leontes gives Antigonus grief because he is a wimpy husband unable to control his vocal wife, Paulina, whose outspokenness and nagging criticisms are completely inappropriate given the social expectations of female behavior of the age. Playing on the traditional animal couple associated with both sexes, Leontes reverses the roles while evoking again Chaucer’s hen to ridicule his friend, accusing him of being a “woman-fired, **unroosted**/ By they dame Partlet here” (2.3.74-5).

Attacks to masculinity are also channeled by means of hens in *Don Quixote*. Cervantes makes use of this animal so deeply aligned with domestic women in order to draw gender boundaries (Ciallella, 2007:32-33). In several episodes some of the male characters seem to play what would be regarded as a feminine role since they stay at home, granting them the offensive description of *hens*. When seeing Sancho at home instead of with his master Don Quixote, Teresa quotes the proverb “long live the **hen** even with its pip.” The implicit comparison between the squire with the hen highlights the reversal of gender roles. After all, Teresa is simply suggesting Sancho leave the house and search for the isle that Don Quixote has promised. In other words, adventures and social betterment were the duty of a man whereas women should be confined to the domestic sphere.

Later on, it will be Sancho himself that resorts to the same proverb in order to encourage Don Quixote to continue with his adventures. His defeated master, tired of his misfortunes, has decided to stay home, adopting, therefore, the position reserved to women.

Don Quixote cheered up a little and said, "Of a truth I am almost ready to say I should have been glad had it turned out just the other way, for it would have obliged me to cross over to Barbary, where by the might of my arm I should have restored to liberty, not only Don Gregorio, but all the Christian captives there are in Barbary. But what am I saying, miserable being that I am? Am I not he that has been conquered? Am I not he that has been overthrown? Am I not he who must not take up arms for a year? Then what am I making professions for; what am I bragging about; when it is fitter for me to handle the distaff than the sword?" "No more of that, señor," said Sancho; "let the **hen** live, even though it be with her pip; 'today for thee and tomorrow for me;' in these affairs of encounters and whacks one must not mind them, for he that falls to-day may get up tomorrow; unless indeed he chooses to lie in bed, I mean gives way to weakness and does not pluck up fresh spirit for fresh battles; let your worship get up now to receive Don Gregorio; for the household seems to be in a bustle, and no doubt he has come by this time;" (p.443)

A strong sexual symbolism attached to the figure of the hen in the 17th century. In addition to the amorous disposition of the animal, phonetic considerations might have played a major role for crediting fowl names with obscene connotations, since the term "fowl" is homophonous with "foul" meaning "filthy" (Leach, 1964). This idea of dirt resonates in the plays of the time where the names of fowl became a common vehicle to refer to prostitutes in English theatrical performances (Partridge, 1993; Chamizo & Sánchez 2000). Images of hens conjure the image of promiscuity in some of Quevedo's satirical poems. In the *Letrilla VI* women who cuckold their husbands are compared to hens. The only difference is that whereas the former lay eggs, the latter lay horns.

The early years of the 18th century saw the rise of journalism and the actual vogue of the periodical essay began with the publication of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. With these two periodicals Addison and Steele held a mirror of London society. Their sketches of characters include females who are compared with chickens or hens depending on their age: “Madam, I have nothing to say to this Matter, but you ought to consider you are now past a **Chicken**; this Humour, which was well enough in a Girl, is insufferable in one of your Motherly Character” (*The Spectator*, no. 216).

Also in this century avian metaphors to refer to males pervade literary texts. Once again, by identifying men with a female species the former are being degraded. Such is the case of Robert Burns’ poem “Henpecked Husband,” which, in the line of the medieval shepherd, offers an animalistic portrayal of a domineering wife, who is metaphorically labeled as a “bitch,” at the time that conveys a negative and ultimately violent perspective on marriage while encouraging the so-called “henpecked husbands” to assert patriarchal authority over their wives.

Henpecked Husbands

Curs’d be the man, the poorest wretch in life,
The crouching vassal to a tyrant wife!
Who has no will but by her high permission,
Who has not sixpence but in her possession,
Who must to her his dear friend’s secrets tell,
Who dreads a curtain lecture worse than hell.
Were such the wife had fallen to my part,
I’d break her spirit or I’d break her heart;
I’d charm her with the magic of a switch,
I’d kiss her maids, and kick the perverse bitch.

The Romantic spirit against the constraints of civilization led to a celebration of nature and, therefore, of animals. The Victorians ascribed the hen and the rooster with the attributes of domestic bliss. The relationship between these two animals continued the classical tradition that reflected the idyllic married couple (Ritvo, 1987; Dekkers, 2000).

In addition to delimiting the social roles of both husband and wife, hens and chickens alike kept on channeling stereotypes about the female sex. Given that Victorians valued, above all, beauty and silence in a woman, as condensed in the dictum “women should be seen but not heard,” writings of the time are rife with avian imagery in order to either praise or condemn females. Obviously, the latter case would entail the use of chickens and hens, as seen in the next fragment belonging to the Uruguayan essayist Herrera y Reissig. In his description of local customs of the passers-by, the essayist provides a social catalogue with detailed descriptions of the fashionable garments for women and men as well as their customs. Some young women chatting in a park catch the attention of the essayist, who portrays them as “chatty chicks:”

The urban park, within a short distance from Montevideo, and with its reputation for having an artistic beauty and natural attractions, caught my attention and in twenty minutes I found myself immersed in that live emerald, where a noisy repertoire of characters were enjoying themselves: women with bright garments, with hats like rural houses [...] groups of Spring nymphs, of **chatty chicks** escorted by young men in heat (1905).⁶

The same century characterized by strong gender divisions also witnessed the advances of the feminist movement. In response to the pernicious widespread acceptance of the Victorian image of a “proper” woman, which was very often channeled through the symbol of domestic birds,^{vii} women’s writings exploited avian motifs with the aim of vindicating the rights of women. The novels of Brontë, for instance, employ the visual image of the woman configured as a caged bird whose flight represents her freedom (Shefer, 1990).

A similar yearning for escaping the confinement of the domestic sphere is felt in the South-African novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). Lyndall, a non-conventional woman who bears a child out of wedlock, dreams about a future free of restrictions for females. Her male counterpart, Waldo, however, represents the rigid world in which they dwell. He constantly reminds her of their position and refuses to

change the norms of their society. Such an attitude makes Lyndall compare Waldo to an old hen:

“Like an old **hen** that sits on its eggs month after month and they never come out?” she said quickly. “I am so pressed in upon by new things that, lest they should trip one another up, I have to keep forcing them back. My head swings sometimes. But this one thought stands, never goes—if I might be the one of these born in the future; then, perhaps, to be born a woman will not be to be borned branded.” (p.188)

As could be expected, those who opposed the women’s movement rescued the traditional pair rooster/hen to support their ideas based on the natural order. Lawrence’s argumentative essay “Cocksure Women and Hensure Men” must be interpreted in this context. Written in response to the woman’s rights movement, when the movement was at its climax demanding the right for women to vote, Lawrence vehemently opposes the new role of women and men by turning upside down the fowl imagery. Just as Shakespeare had done before when attacking the weak personality of Antigonus by calling him a *hen*, Lawrence vertebrates his essay upon the analogy of the hen and the rooster, drawing the roles of the female and male sexes based on those animals:

There are the women who are **cocksure**, and the women who are **hensure**. A really up-to-date woman is a **cocksure** woman. She doesn’t have a doubt nor a qualm. She is the modern type. Whereas the old-fashioned demure woman was sure as a **hen** is sure, that is, without knowing anything about it. She went quietly and busily clucking around, laying the eggs and mothering the chickens in a kind of anxious dream that still was full of sureness. But not mental sureness. Her sureness was a physical condition, very soothing, but a condition out of which she could easily be startled or frightened. (cited in Boulton, 2003:115)

On the other side of the Atlantic, identical animal imagery was being used to attack the new roles being given to women and men. The new right of women to vote was seen as a threat to the establishment and particularly to men, as can be seen in the political pamphlet below, where the hen and the rooster play opposite roles. Although retaining their sexes, the hen/woman is depicted with the typical attributes of the rooster/man, that is, confident, cocky, and strutting, leaving the barnyard/home. The rooster/man, by contrast, is shown in a submissive position, crestfallen and submissive, being left in the confined domestic sphere to bring up their chickens/children. The image is accompanied by some lines which humorously play on the semantic field of “hen,” more precisely with the terms “henpecked” and “henpecking,” charged with unfavorable overtones that denote a weak man.

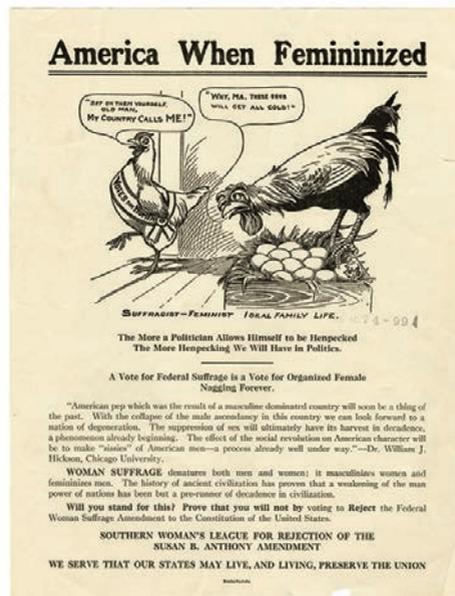


Figure 3. Political pamphlet against the suffragette movement in the U.S.A.⁸

In the medical field, the anatomy of a woman continued to be explained with the analogy of the hen. Apart from the correlation between their reproductive functions, the physical abilities of females were regarded as inferior to those of males and likened to a hen:

she can swim, she can dance, she can ride; all these things she can do admirably and with ease to herself. But to run, nature most surely did not construct her. Like the domestic hen which at times attempts to fly, woman running displays a kind of precipitate waddle with neither grace, nor fitness nor dignity. (*The Globe*, 1890, cited by Mitchinson 1994:74)

With the Industrial Revolution, manufacturing underwent a drastic change and so did the breeding and rearing of chickens and hens.⁹ From the barnyard ambience to the mass production in factories the hen left the domestic sphere to gradually become industrial food. Hand in hand with this process of industrialization came the notion of deprivation of individuality due to the living conditions of the animal, usually squashed in a tiny space, just fed for future consumption and deprived of movement to speed the process of gaining weight. Such living conditions make the animal practically undistinguishable, which might account for their present figurative usages of *chicken* and *hen*, being virtually synonymous with girls and women respectively, as seen in the following excerpts taken from the magazine *Rolling Stone*: “You can’t go off with these random **chicks** who just walk up and give you their number” (No. 964/965 Dec/Jan 30/13, 2004/2005-01-15, p.90) and *Cosmopolitan*: “Travel Miss Adventures—**hen** weekends with a difference” (June 2002, p. 4).

3. IMAGES OF WOMEN AS CHICKENS AND HENS IN TODAY’S MEDIA

Images of females in the guise of chickens and hens are still alive in Western thought. Stationery products with logos such as “groovy chick,” companies devoted to organizing “hen parties” and nursery rhymes that praise the domestic virtues of the animal, like the popular “The clever hen” (“I had a little hen, the prettiest ever seen,

/She washed me the dishes and kept the house clean; /She went to the mill to fetch me some flour, /She brought it home in less than an hour”) prove that the hen continues to be a powerful feminine symbol in today’s society (Hines, 1999; Eckert, 2003).

The original significance of the hen as a motherly creature devoted to the rearing and care of their offspring continues to exist in the press today. Articles that report deadly events involving shootings, wars or terrorist attacks rescue the classical image of the hen as the archetype of maternal love in the representation of females that take care of children in dangerous situations. The first headline, which will certainly bring home to us the previous portrayal of *Macbeth*’s Lady Macduff, captures such a motherly sense. A woman is said to act as a human shield in order to save some children from being shot:

(1) **“Mother hen”** protects kids during mall shooting (*Koi*, December 11th, 2013)

The same idea of protection is transmitted in the next headline dealing with the changes females go through once they reach the state of motherhood:

(2) How a fancy-free girl about town became an overanxious **mother hen** (*The Telegraph*, February 11th, 2014)

But even in the description of powerful women, like in the case of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, notions of power and strength, traditionally associated with males, are downplayed in favor of the feminine symbol of the mother hen. It is likely that by conceptualizing the ruler of a country as a hen, a less threatening image to the patriarchy is conveyed. Besides, the use of the motherly hen seems to connect with the tradition that represents a nation through maternal metaphors.

(3) Here he recalls Baroness Thatcher, the **“Mother Hen”** (16th April 2013 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/we-called-her-mother-hen>)

Given that the embryo of the hen metaphor rests in its

motherly role, it seems logical that such a bird be intrinsically linked to her offspring, which, in turn, will figuratively represent younger females. As a matter of fact, according to the *O.E.D.* *hen* denotes a wife or a woman, especially a middle-aged or old one whereas *chicken* is applied to a girl or a young female, as seen in these extracts:

(4) Give those **chicks** on *Girls Gone Wild* some competition (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2005, p. 188)

(5) Denise Welch is the center of attention in orange bikini on **hen** do in Majorca (*The Huff Post*, 2014, 15th February)

From a physical standpoint, the identification of women and girls with this type of fowl seems to adjust to the wide repertoire of small animals used in the conceptualization of females (e.g: *cat*, *bunny*, *pigeon*). The size of these animals seems to correspond with the physical appearance of women, who, when compared to men, tend to be of a smaller size.

In addition to stature, weakness in an animal appears to be a favorable trait for crediting the animal name with a positive evaluation, as opposed to animals of a considerable size and strength, which usually comprise a less condescending attitude (e.g: *cow*, *seal*). In fact, as seen before, negative portrayals of women often included images of big beasts, like the depiction of the shepherd's wife as a whale. Actually, research has shown that desired women tend to be identified with small animal metaphors. Consider, for example, the metaphorical uses of *bunny*, *bird*, *cat* and, of course, *chicken* (Hines, 1999a, 1999b), which can certainly account for their sexual connotations in the following passages:

(6) What a difference a year makes! Trashy street kids TLC have dumped the baggy togs and developed into **sexy chicks**. (*Nineteen*, February 1995, p. 57)

(7) From the **hottest chicks** [...] this is my very best mag (*Top of the Pop*, January 2004, p. 40)

Sex oozes from chicken and, to a lesser extent, hen imagery. Due to the fertility of the animal and their high production of eggs, these birds acquired negative connotations, becoming terms of opprobrium to refer to loose women and prostitutes. This notion of promiscuity still pervades the media, as reflected in the following article in which one-night stand girls are identified with chickens:

(8) One Naughty Night Won't Ruin Your Rep Even the most discerning **chick** might wake up thinking, *I can't believe I made out with our office intern*. Don't stress that you've sullied your good name...you can rebound... (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2005, p. 136)

Linked to the ideas of size and weakness is physical violence. Certainly, the smaller size and lesser strength of the animal give man a decided advantage in the successful application of physical force, as shown in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Yet, despite its small size, the same does not hold true for the image of the hen, as shown in this article giving advice to grown-up women about how to conceal the effects of the passing of the time on their bodies with cosmetics:

(9) Face it, you have become a **middle-aged hen** and can't go out without these make-up tricks (*In Touch*, June 2002)

The negative stance derived from this image of the hen might be explained in terms of age. Obviously, one of the main features that sets chickens and hens apart has to do with the youth of the animal. Chickens are baby animals, but the name *hen* is given to female chickens once they have surpassed one year. Therefore, youth in an animal frequently conveys positive connotations, which might account for the favorable overtones generally attached to the metaphorical names of offspring (Hines, 1999; Halupka-Rešetar, 2003). Getting older, on the other hand, is stigmatized when the affected is the woman (Nilsen, 1994). In fact, there are examples galore of animal pairs reflecting this dichotomy that associates youth with positive connotations whereas the more mature animals are tinged with negative ones. Consider, for instance, *cat* as opposed to *kitten*, *nag* in relation to *filly*, and, of course, the animal pair under

discussion, *chicken* as compared with *hen*.

Another relevant aspect presumably reinforcing this juxtaposition that associates chickens and hens with attractive and less sexually desirable females pertains to notions of edibility. Needless to say, both animals are reared for consumption, either to make use of their flesh or eggs (Baker, 1981; de la Cruz Cabanillas & Tejedor Martínez, 2006). However, whereas the tenderness of the meat of chickens is highly esteemed, hens are usually reserved for dishes of lower nutritional value, such as broth or soup. There exists a well-known correlation between people's understanding of sexual desire with their experiences of feeling hunger or thirst and the object of desire is often represented in terms of food. Actually, research across different languages has shown that eating and food are commonly used to express sexual desire, sexual satisfaction and to evaluate the sexual desirability of a person (Lakoff, 1987; Emanatian, 1995; Kövecses, 2002; Gibbs, Lenz and Francozo, 2004). Thus, in so far as they are consumed as food, the figurative uses of *chicken* and *hen* may transmit this notion of sexual appetite. This conflation of food with sexual desire is certainly at work in the following instances of *chick*:

(10) Studly Rob Sutter vowed to keep his hands off the **sexy** new **chick** in town, Kate Hamilton, but when he finds her working late one night, the two wind up burning the bawdy midnight oil. (*Cosmopolitan*, March 2005, p. 254)

(11) Secret Sex Fears All Guys Have. **Chicks** aren't the only ones who panic predeed. See what dudes stress about. (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2005, p. 74)

In addition to disclosing the negative connotations attached to getting older, the pair *chicken* and *hen* also tails with society's views on marriage. As already mentioned, since Antiquity the rooster and hen embodied the perfect married couple while the chicken was conceived of as their child. So the image of the hen became deeply embedded in the institution of marriage, which reminds one that the traditional party held to celebrate the last moments of a single woman is labeled in British English *hen party*:

(12) For a girl's pre-nuptial gathering, check out these **hen parties** (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2005, p. 182)

(13) From the engagement, through the stag and **hens**, the big day itself and the honeymoon - we've got it all mapped out (*The Mirror*, 2013, May 26th)

Chickens, by contrast, because of their age, have not been associated to a male partner, which accounts for the use of *chick* to refer to single ladies:

(14) When to marry is a huge decision in most women's lives, and these days, many sexy **single Cosmo chicks** are putting off getting hitched until their mid to late 20s and even 30s (*Cosmopolitan*, April, 2005, p. 183)

Regardless of their age, the life of both chickens and hens heavily depends on a rooster. This fowl are gregarious animals that live together as a flock, in which the rooster is in charge of establishing order and control. In fact, so strong is this dependency that removing the rooster from the flock results in disruption among chickens and hens. This idea of lack of independence and need of a male figure is conveyed through the following figurative use of *chick*:

(15) Even the toughest **chick** needs a guy (*Top of the Pop*, February 2000)

Traditionally, the constant noises made by chickens and hens were paralleled to women's talk. As seen before, women were praised for their obedience and discretion and a woman's tongue basically meant a threat to male power. This archetypal image of chatty females is still commonplace in today's press. In the following fragments the relationship between women with chickens and hens is established not only through avian imagery but also through the use of the speech verbs "gossip" and "talk:"

(16) Some guys can't stand their **chicks gossiping** about them (*CosmoGirl*, 2001)

(17) Indulge yourself in a **hen night** to **talk** with your friends (*Cosmopolitan*, May 2002)

It is not sheer coincidence that the same image of a loquacious bird is evoked in the identification of female t.v. presenters. The next excerpt taken from *The Guardian* newspaper provides a review of a popular talk show on British television that is conducted by women. The references to hens are not limited to the explicit use of the metaphor, but the passage is rife with figurative senses pertaining to the semantic domain of this fowl. So, both presenters and audience (mostly composed of females) turn into “hens,” the atmosphere of the studio is described as “hen-night air” whereas laughter and talk become “cackling:”

(18) There’s a certain **hen-night air** to proceedings. It has been compared to Afternoon Yak, the chatshow featured on The Simpsons (when Homer tunes into the Oestrogen Channel: “Today’s topic is men”. [Audience]: “Boooo!”) Male guests look understandably terrified – it’s four against one after all. Martin Kemp’s rictus grin the other week said it all. It was difficult not to feel sorry even for Danny Dyer, although his way of dealing with it was to flirt **with the cackling women** and even kiss them (“pwopah nawty!”), provoking uproarious laughter and whooping from the all-female studio audience. It’s difficult to imagine a male equivalent of the show ever being made. (*The Guardian*, 26th January, 2011).

The metaphorical sense of hen as a “fussy and noisy woman” is illustrated in the following cartoon taken from *Week* magazine. The image supposedly represents the t.v. program *The View*, an American talk show hosted by five women. The images used for both British and American programs are like peas in a pod. Yet, what makes this cartoon more striking is the context in which it was drawn, since it dates back to the day on which US President Barack Obama was going to be interviewed in the show (July 29th, 2010). The deeply entrenched parallelism between men/women with rooster/hen is brought to the fore once more. However, not only do the cackling hens hint at the medieval lore of verbosity and hysteria, but also suggest the need of male order, implicitly represented by Obama.

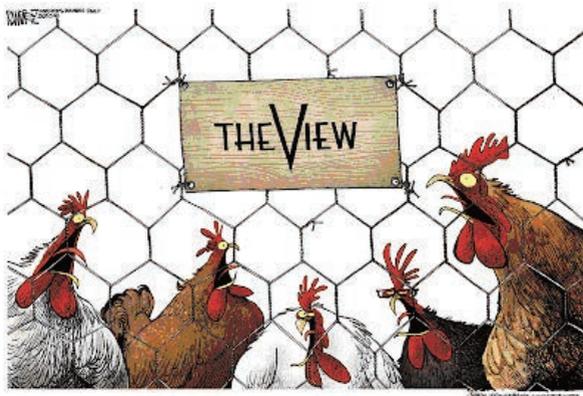


Figure 4. Cartoon illustrating the t.v. talk show *The View*

<http://www.commonsevaluation.com/tag/the-view/#sthash.FBTewafg.dpbs>



Figure 5. Image of the t.v. talk show *The View*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_View_\(U.S._TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_View_(U.S._TV_series))

The cartoon certainly reveals the chicken metaphor in its full splendor given that the t.v. studio is a barnyard where hens are

confined thanks to a wire fence. Domesticity clearly underlies the metaphorical conceptualization of women in the guise of this fowl. In fact, as opposed to wild animals that enjoy complete freedom, the whole life of domestic animals gravitates around the house. Pets and livestock co-exist with people, but whereas the former tend to live under the same roof as their owners and are kept to provide company and entertainment, only are the latter enclosed in the farm and reared for consumption. This image of domestic confinement has been used throughout history to justify the natural role of women as housewives. Despite the fact that more and more women have entered the job market, the media still resort to these farmyard animals in the representation of females.¹⁰

(19) Not long ago, most women's Sunday-night addiction was watching four stylish single gals in the city. But now, damn near everyone is tuning in to catch the backstabbing antics and salacious sex-capades of sizzling married suburbanites on the huge hit *Desperate Housewives*. Which got us wondering: Do **stay-at-home chicks** actually ever feel *that* desperate? To whet our curiosity about this new breed of babe, we asked a bunch of real-life housewives for their uncensored answers. (*Cosmopolitan*, Feb. 2005, p. 167)

(20) Don't be a **stay-at-home hen** (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2005, p.167)

Along with the patriarchal view of women as mothers and housewives, subservience vertebrates some of the figurative uses of the chicken and hen metaphor. Unlike other animals that are bred for sport, pleasure or research, farm animals exist to be exploited and eaten. They render service to man either by helping him in farm labor or by producing foods. In previous texts analyzed images of chickens and hens certainly mirrored the conception of women as domesticated servants. Centuries have gone by and a similar belief is channeled through the following figurative use of *chick*:

(21) Be a nice **chick** and surprise your guy (*Cosmopolitan*, February, 2011)

Lack of intellect is also conveyed through images of chickens and hens. Previous texts have shown how none of this sort of poultry is associated with intelligence, as is the case of other birds like the owl, the hawk or the eagle; but, on the contrary, they stand out for their naïve, nonsensical and, at times, stupid behavior—particularly evident in medieval tales in which chickens and hens were tricked by predatory animals. Idiocy continues to be a distinctive semantic value in some of the figurative uses of *chicken*, judging from the extract below, in which women who run risks when having unprotected sex are categorized in the guise of this bird:

(22) The STD You Don't Know. Safeguard yourself from fertility-robbing PID. Women who consistently used condoms during intercourse were half as likely to develop pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) as were **chicks** who relied on rubbers only occasionally or not at all, according to a study in the *American Journal of Public Health*. (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2005, p. 236)

From Antiquity to present day the WOMAN AS CHICKEN metaphor has revealed society's views regarding the role of women. The success of such a metaphor is not only shown in its survival but also in the metaphorical networks created by such a metaphor. Hence, the domestic *chick*, apart from having become interchangeable with *girl*, has generated a whole network of spin-offs. So, a film produced for females is no longer a girl movie, but a *chick flick*, an actress performing in a girl movie becomes a *chick flick chick*, material to produce a film for women turns into *chick flick fodder*, the lyrics of songs dealing with women's concerns are *chick antics*, parties for women turn into *chick fetes*, literature devoted to women is labelled as *chick lit* and men who date several women become *chick magnets*.

(23) **Chick-flick** alert: This month, Goodwin stars in *Mona Lisa Smile*-think *Dead Poets Society* with short pleated skirts- (*Vanity Fair*, Jan 2004, p. 75)

(24) Friday 12/17 Entertainer of the Year 2004 Calling all star-watchers: In this sassy look at 2004's biggest –and busiest– celebs, experts name Lindsay Lohan as

Hollywood Hottie, Renée Zellweger as **Chick Flick Chick** and Jude Law the reigning Role Hog (six flicks in all!). (*Us*, Dec. 20th, 2004, p. 106)

(25) Her Irish eyes are smiling. In the Ahern family, it's usually Dad—Irish Prime Minister Bertie—who has people saying, "Let's make a deal." But last week, it was the turn of his daughter, Cecilia Ahern, 21, pictured with friends David Keoghan. She sealed a \$1 million two-book contract with US publisher Hyperion, just days after Harper Collins reportedly snapped up the British and Irish rights for more than \$300,000. Her as-yet-unfinished debut, *P.S. I Love You*, follows Holly, a woman whose boyfriend dies of a brain tumor but leaves her one letter for each month of the year after his death. Sounds like **chick-flick fodder**—and Ahern's agent told Reuters she expects a movie deal to be done this month. (*Time*, Jan 20th, 2003, p. 60)

(26) Courtney Love, America's Sweetheart. She's known for her **rock-chick antics**, but it's time to check out her melodic rock. (*Cosmopolitan*, March 2004, p. 50)

(27) Lots of dishing at this **chick fete** ...hang with the girls more. Research shows that when a woman chills with friends while she's stressed, her bod produces more oxytocin, a hormone that makes people feel calmer. (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2005, p. 186)

(28) There's a secret about **chick lit**, that diary-style fiction genre (spawned by *Bridget Jones's Diary*) featuring quirky, feisty protagonists on a mission to land their dream life, or at least shoe. It's not only fun to read, but it's also teeming with tips about love and the many challenges of courtship and relationships. (http://love.village.com/snd/0,,doyenne_rvq3,00.html, 11th April, 2005)

(29) Naturally, you'd be with a hot, confident, **chick magnet** of a boyfriend. But it's hard not to get steamed

when other girls find him just a tad too irresistible. (http://magazines.ivillage.com/cosmopolitan/men/menu/articles/0,,426365_533694,00.html 29th April, 2005)

In like manner, the identification of middle-aged and married women with hens has branched off. Thus, bachelorette parties are called *hen parties*, trips and outings turn into *hen weekends* and *hen nights* and, just like before, literature targeted to women is labeled as *hen lit*.

(30) Find me a woman who looks forward to a **hen party**
Hen parties are the bane of most women's existence. With thousands of them packing their bags to have some 'organised fun' this weekend, Rebecca Clancy asks why they have to cost so much? (*The Telegraph*, 15th February, 2014)

(31) Here's a one-word open letter to all those women who, on their **hen's nights**, don't want to get all drunk and leery, don't want to get kitted out in embarrassing, tacky gear, who just want to have a bit of pampering, a quiet vino and a good old gas with their girlfriends (<http://www.stuff.co.nz/sundaystartimes/3985002a19516.html>)

(32) **Hen night** and **hen weekend** shows in Newcastle (http://search.ivillage.com/search/ivillage?ivi&partner_tag=ivillage_hearst_us_websearch&q=hen+weekends&restrict=Cosmopolitan&filter=p 3/15/2007)

(33) Women's Lit, Chick Lit, **Hen's Lit**—All Great (<http://www.amazon.com/Womens-Lit-Chick-Hens-Great/lm/1KG3NBWIMH4T>)

4. DISCUSSION: UNDERSTANDING THE WOMAN AS CHICKEN METAPHOR THROUGH THE "PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS" METAPHOR

From ancient times human beings have used their knowledge of the natural world in constructing a meaningful social existence and

the animal field has provided one of the richest metaphorical sources (Cooper, 1992; Talebinejad & Dastjerdi, 2005). In fact, people have often resorted to animals in order to explain human behavior (Kövecses, 1998, 2000, 2002) and, as this article has tried to show, females have often been understood in terms of chickens and hens.

Animal metaphors, no doubt, originated from people's first-hand experiences. In earlier times, societies were mainly based on agriculture and the subsistence of whole communities depended on the knowledge of the animal world. Being able to recognize which animals could destroy the crops, were poisonous, had healing properties or were suitable for work must have been of vital use. Because hens were soon domesticated, contact with this animal was part and parcel of everyday life. Hence the observation of their traits as well as behavior served man to draw parallelisms with the feminine sex.

Animal metaphors not only have a cognitive basis rooted in human experience, but they are also culturally motivated, that is, they reflect the attitudes and beliefs held by a particular community towards certain animal species and, therefore, may vary across cultures (Deignan, 2003; Echevarría, 2003; MacArthur, 2005). Despite the fact that, as time has gone by, in our modern industrialized societies there is a clear estrangement from animals, every animal has its history and as such it transmits "knowledge that is still shared as part of our cultural repository, but no longer directly experienced" (Deignan 2003:270). By means of texts of a very different nature hens have come to symbolize mothers, wives, middle-aged, old, bossy, outspoken, promiscuous females and, at times, even prostitutes, just as chickens have acquired the senses of young, sexy, defenseless and often promiscuous girls. As a matter of fact, such is the myriad of senses evoked by this sort of fowl that in some circumstances, as already seen, even men are conceptualized in the guise of this type of bird.

The hen as a feminine symbol, then, reveals a clear dichotomy in terms of praise and abuse. Nevertheless, judging from the varied senses analyzed at different points in history, there seems to be a general tendency to convey negative views about women by means of this fowl. In fact, perhaps with the exception of the maternal image all of the other senses derived appear to convey patriarchal views about

the role of women in society. So being a domestic animal in charge of laying eggs and taking care of their offspring nicely corresponds with the traditional belief that a woman's place should be her home while her duty should entail the upbringing of her children and care of her husband. Analogously, the fact that hens are of a relatively small size, make twittering sounds and are neither intelligent nor independent runs parallel to the chauvinist notion that women are weak and therefore need a man for protection since they are not very smart, but fussy, noisy and engage in idle talk.

The negative import attached to most of the figurative senses of *hen*, *chickens* and of animals in general can be accounted for when recalling the previous folk model of The Great Chain of Being. As explained before, this theory organizes the cosmos hierarchically depending on the qualities and behavior of every existing thing, from the lowest (and more imperfect) to the highest (and closer to perfection). Animals, of course, rank lower than people since the former are ruled by their instincts and the latter by their reason. So by comparing people to animals, they are being descended in the hierarchy, and, thus, the animal-based metaphor is likely to become a vehicle to convey undesirable human characteristics (Talebinejad & Dastjerdi, 2005). After all, what separates people from animals is the rational capacity that enables human beings to control instincts and behavior. It is ultimately this notion of control, or rather, lack of control, that constitutes the bedrock for the metaphorical identifications of people with animals.

The PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor, then, presupposes that there is an animal or instinctual side inside each person and civilized people are expected to restrain their animal impulses, letting their rational side rule over them. The metaphors OBJECTIONABLE HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR (Kövecses, 2002), ANGER IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR (Nayak & Gibbs, 1990), PASSIONS ARE BEASTS INSIDE US (Kövecses, 1988), OBJECTIONABLE PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS (Kövecses, 2002), A LUSTFUL PERSON IS AN ANIMAL (Lakoff, 1987) or CONTROL OF AN UNPREDICTABLE/UNDESIRABLE FORCE IS A RIDER'S CONTROL OF A HORSE (MacArthur, 2005) conceptualize extreme behavior and, therefore, lack of control, by

resorting to a common scenario: the animal kingdom. Seen in this light, failure to restrain one's instincts results in the degradation of human beings to the animal realm. So, for example, the inability to control appetite, sexual urge or verbosity are linguistically channeled through the figurative senses of *pig*, *bitch* and, as seen, *hen*, respectively.

Nonetheless, although being a lower form of life, the names of animals are likely to become vehicles for the transmission of undesirable characteristics and behavior, a closer look at metaphorical animal identifications can show that this is not always the case, for certain animal terms do capture the positive features of people (e.g. *lion*/courageous person; *owl*/wise person). In this regard, it is relevant to mention that within the semantic field of animal terms there exists a clear disparity in their metaphorical uses depending on their application to males or females (Nilsen, 1996; Fernández Fontecha & Jiménez Catalán, 2003). Suffice it to say, for example, that whereas *fox*, *dog*, *stud* and, of course, *rooster* are charged with favorable overtones, for they denote a clever, crafty and good-looking individual, their feminine partners, that is, *vixen*, *bitch*, *mare* and *hen* stand for promiscuous, fat, ugly, old and fussy women. This dichotomy associating the male sex with positive connotations whereas the female one carries negative ones might corroborate the general tendency in language that shows a clear bias against women (Fasold, 1990; R. Lakoff, 2003). Yet, because most animal metaphors highlight the notion of control, it may very well be argued that lack of restraint in human beings is more objectionable when the agent is a woman.

Apart from the diverse historical contexts in which the figurative senses of *chicken* and *hen* have been forged, ethnobiological classifications of animals may help decipher the underlying assumptions motivating both metaphors. These taxonomies usually rely upon five basic parameters, namely, habitat, size, appearance, behavior and relation to people (Wierzbicka, 1985, 1996; Martsa, 2003). Such factors may be informative in understanding the metaphorical senses of both animal terms when applied to females.

In terms of habitat, animals can be classified into two broad categories: wild and domestic. The first live in the wilderness, are independent and, therefore, not subject to man's control; but, on the

contrary, they may even pose a threat to them. The opposite applies to the second, since they depend on man for their survival, are tame and somehow confined to the domestic world.

As could be expected, the set of animal images portraying women as wild creatures is relatively scarce (López-Rodríguez, 2009), given the aforementioned notions of independence and danger attached to them. Predatory beasts applied to females have different origins: the land (e.g.: *coyote, fox/vixen, lioness, tigress, she-wolf, hyena*), the sea (e.g.: *seal, whale, walrus*) and the air (e.g.: *crow, magpie, parrot, bat*). Whatever their provenance, however, nearly all of them seem to be tinged with negative connotations, implying ugliness, fatness, old age, verbosity and promiscuity.¹¹

In the encoding of these metaphors physical traits together with relation to people appear to justify the negative import attached to wild animal terms. Certainly, with the exception of birds, all these creatures are of a considerable size, both in terms of height and weight, and, therefore, do not adhere to the previous metaphor DESIRED WOMAN AS SMALL ANIMAL (Hines, 1999) to which, in theory, *chicken* and *hen* belong to. Apart from physical considerations connecting women with smaller animals since, when compared to men, they tend to be of a smaller size, the notion of control underlying the generic PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS metaphor seems to be at the core for making these wild animals terms of derision for females. Because bigger animals are more difficult to subjugate, it might be implied that a woman's freedom is a threat to man and, therefore, should be linguistically castigated for trespassing the domestic confines traditionally assigned to their gender. Along with this, canons of beauty might likewise prompt the negative views attached to big wild beasts since, particularly in modern society, thinness has become practically interchangeable with beauty whereas fat women are objects of derision.

The case of *fox/vixen, lioness, tigress* and *she-wolf* deserves considerable attention because these terms condense the sense of attractive females (*O.E.D.*). Despite being positive on the surface level, these metaphors encapsulate a strong sexual component which ultimately reduces women to the status of sexual objects (i.e.

preys to be hunted by men).¹² Interestingly, although the above predatory animals stand out for their smartness, slyness and independence, none of these traits are selected in their metaphoric application for females, but, by contrast, sexual innuendos are seen at work, hinting at the metaphor SEX IS HUNTING (Chamizo & Sánchez, 2000) whereby men take the active role of the pursuer whereas women assume the passive role of the prey. Therefore, although at first sight these metaphors may seem to empower women, a closer look reveals that once more they are depicted as the ones to be controlled by men.

Within the wild category, bird species also provide a prolific source of metaphors. *Crow*, *magpie*, *bat* or *parrot*, to mention a few, metaphorically denote females. Even though these birds, just like chickens or hens, are small and, therefore, should adjust to the metaphor that conceptualizes attractive females in the guise of small animals, none of the terms are charged with favorable overtones, for they refer to ugly and talkative women. Indeed, judging these animals on the basis of appearance, one soon realizes that none of these birds are associated with intelligence (as is the owl), nobility (as are the hawk or the eagle) or even beauty (such is the case of the swan), but rather they stand out for their ugliness and chatter, which historically speaking have been the two traits looked down on in women.

As opposed to wild beasts, there is a wide repertoire of animal metaphors pertaining to the domestic ambience, either the home (*cat*, *dog*, *canary*, *parakeet*) or the farmyard (*cow*, *heifer*, *mule*, *filly*, *sow*, *nag*, *rabbit*, *chicken*, *hen*), which are applied to women. When compared to the previous beasts, the numbers are striking since domestic creatures by far outnumber wild ones. Such an imbalance seems to respond to the patriarchal view that states that a woman's place should be limited to the confines of the house and be submissive to man. Yet, conforming to these ideals does not guarantee a positive evaluation in the metaphor, since other factors like physical appearance, servitude and edibility play an equally significant role.

Firstly, a pivotal distinction needs to be made when it comes to domestic animals: pets and farmyard. The former live with the owners and their main function is to provide company and

entertainment. The latter live close to the owners but are exploited for man's advantage.

Although one would think that pets should be used as terms of endearment since they arouse feelings of affection, when applied to females they tend to be insults. The very word *dog* refers to an ugly female and even to a prostitute (Eble, 1996). Similar considerations apply to *cat* and, of course, to the largely taboo *bitch*. Even the infant words *puppy* and *kitten* together with the baby language *bowser*, *bow-wow*, *pussy* and *mud-puppy* convey the senses of ugliness and promiscuity. This awkward correspondence between the most beloved pets and women can be explained on historical grounds, since witches were credited with supernatural powers that enabled them to assume the form of these two animals (Sax, 2001).¹³ Another hypothesis surrounding the negative stance attached to such metaphors might stem from notions of productivity. In fact, when compared to barnyard animals, pets do not render any type of service to man and, from this point of view, are useless.

Another animal commonly kept as a pet is the bird. Common species of domestic birds include the canary and the parakeet.¹⁴ All these terms are usually charged with affective connotations to refer to loving women, particularly girls. Here the sense of domesticity is reinforced by the fact that these animals are in cages, and, thus, seem appropriate to stress the role of women in the house and controlled by men.

Unlike pets, farmyard animals are exploited for man's advantage, either for service or for food. Servitude and edibility, then, underlie the metaphorical usages of these types of animals. There is one set of animal words that depict women as *cow*, *heifer*, *mare*, *mule*, *filly*, *sow* and *nag*. The identification is probably based on the strictly biological functions of producing and rearing offspring (Shanklin, 1985; Brennan, 2005). All the terms listed refer to big mammals and size again seems to explain the negative overtones of the metaphors when applied to women, for they convey the senses of fatness and ugliness—and in the cases of *mule* and *nag* even stubbornness and verbosity. The only exception in this category is found in *filly*. Defined as “a lively young girl” (*O.E.D.*) this animal commingles the senses of big size and

young age. Yet, it appears that just like in the pair *hen/chicken* the age factor has a heavier clout than the size one when endowing the metaphor with positive connotations.

Last but not least, there is a group of bird names within the farmyard ambience whose metaphorical uses resemble those of *chicken* and *hen*. So *biddy*, *quail* and *pigeon* can be used figuratively in the identification of females. All these birds share the values of small size, domesticity and nourishment. Yet, whereas *chicken*, *quail* and *pigeon* denote women who are young and sexually attractive, neither *biddy* nor *hen* hold any hint of physical beauty, since they suggest old or middle-aged women who tend to be ugly, fussy or clumsy (Hines, 1999). Once again, youth is an animal prompts positive connotations.

5. CONCLUSION

Patriarchal views regarding the role of women have been successfully transmitted and perpetuated throughout history by means of the WOMAN AS CHICKEN metaphor. Negative views about the nature and social position of the female sex have gradually attached to this animal species.

Despite the fact that in its origins the figurative use of hens when applied to females conveyed favorable overtones, since, based on its biological functions, it highlighted the notions of maternal love and protection; as time went by, the metaphor clearly underwent a process of pejoration. In fact, misogynistic views regarding notions of weakness, lack of independence, inability to work outside the domestic sphere, intransigence, talkativeness, fussiness, promiscuity and noisy disposition became deeply associated with this animal term.

The survival of this metaphor in today's society is well attested not only in its widespread use and acceptance, but also in the metaphorical networks generated. As this article has tried to show, images of women in the guise of chickens and hens pervade the media and the assumptions conveyed through such linguistic products are not too distant from those of bygone days.

NOTES

- ¹ The fiery comb of the rooster also made this animal a symbol of fire and, ultimately, of light.
- ² In Christian symbolism the rooster epitomizes Passion too. According to the Bible, prior to being arrested by the soldiers, Jesus foretold that Peter would deny him not only once but three times before the rooster crowed on the following morning, and so did he. At the rooster's crowing, Peter remembered Jesus' words and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75). So the rooster came to represent Peter's denial of Christ and also his remorse and repentance, and given that later on Peter went on to become the leader of the Church, the rooster also came to stand for vigilance.
- ³ It is in the Middle Ages that the term *cock* become taboo, being replaced by *rooster*. In this regard McDonald (1988, p. 26) says that "the word cock was originally used in ancient times as the name for certain fowl- as indeed it still is. Apparently because of the resemblance in appearance between a chicken's neck and a water tap, the name water-cock was given to taps in the Middle Ages [...]. Then the resemblance between a water tap and a penis, in both shape and function, suggested the use of the word for a penis as well. North America with its puritanical traditions did not like such associations, a fact which largely explains why, even to this day, water cocks are called faucets and cocks are called roosters in the USA." Yet, the adjective *cocky* is quite often in English.
- ⁴ Illustrations taken from http://habetro.typepad.com/habetrot/2007/02/faith_will_prot.html.
- ⁵ This idea is superbly condensed in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, when Petruchio makes it clear that as a man he will rule over what is his, and this includes not only his house and animals, but also his wife: "I will be master of what is mine own./She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,/ My household stuff, my field, my barn,/My horse, my ox, my ass, my any thing,/And here she stands, touch her whoever dare!"(III.ii. 231-35).
- ⁶ My own translation: The original chronicle in Spanish reads as follows: "El Parque Urbano, a corta distancia de Montevideo, y con su reputación de belleza artística y de naturales atractivos,

tentó mi curiosidad y en veinte minutos me encontré en plena esmeralda viviente, donde retozaba un fandango de humanidades de todas las layas: mujeres de atavíos chillones con sombreros como viviendas de campo, en los que no faltaban animales ni plantas de los más curiosos, hombres endomingados con levitas cortas o largas, anchas o ridículamente estrechas, pero sí muy lustrosas y cadenas de reloj; por lo menos, como la de Prometeo dando gravemente el brazo a espesas consortes; grupos como de ninfas primaverales, de **pollas parleras**, escoltadas por pebetillos en celo, con un escarbadiente de caña en la mano bailante y un “habano” de dos céntimos entre los dientes aceitunados, y en fin, chorros caprinos de chicuelos enloquecidos por Menini, con su ferro-vía ó por las góndolas pedantes de los laguitos para muñecas del célebre parque”.

⁷ By contrast, Faulkner’s female characters are somehow depicted as hens, suggesting the idea of confinement and submission to a male. In fact, as Díaz-Diocaretz points out in “Faulkner’s Hen-House: Woman as Bounded Text:” “women exist, in Faulkner’s discourse, as hens, protected, surrounded by boundaries that act as fence and restrictions, creating confinement and shelter.” (1986: 235).

⁸ Image taken from the on-line Tennessee State Library and Archives. “Remember the Ladies!” Women Struggle for an Equal Voice. <http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/exhibits/suffrage/struggle.htm>.

⁹ Despite the fact that during the Industrial Revolution animal imagery flourished in order to depict the harsh working conditions of people, who were often portrayed as any sort of beast, including chickens and hens, in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* the rural population who had to emigrate to the city tries to come to terms with their new industrialized reality by comparing the factories with hens: “Quick they were whirled over long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses, all small and of brick. Here and there a great oblong many-widowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black ‘unparliamentary’ smoke, and sufficiently accounting for the cloud which Margaret had taken to foretell rain.” (p. 96).

¹⁰ Interestingly, in tune with politics, Hilary Clinton was compared with a chicken during the 2008 presidential campaign in the USA. Pundits created a fried-chicken Hillary Meal Deal mug which

read as follows: “Two fat thighs, two small breasts, and a bunch of left wings.” Several articles in the press echoed such an animal image. See, for example: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2028091,00.html>, <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/lets-get-over-our-hang-ups-and-judge-women-in-power-on-their-merits/story-e6frerfo-1225950161315?nk=9e53472dc52c52a7b1e14e6c87f04e59>.

- ¹¹ When applied to females, *coyote* refers to *an ugly female*, especially in the collocation *coyote date*, which, according to Eble (1996:100), denotes “a woman who is so ugly that when her companion for the night wakes up the next morning and she is asleep on his arm he would rather chew off his arm than wake her up.” According to the *O.E.D.* *fox* means “an attractive woman,” just like *vixen*, although the latter also possesses the values of “ill-tempered” and “quarrelsome woman.” *Lioness*, *tigress* and *she-wolf* usually allude to sexually active females or women who take the initiative in the sexual arena whereas *hyena* figuratively suggests a hysterical, loud and chatty woman.

All the maritime animals (*seal*, *whale* and *walrus*) denote big, fat, and usually ugly females whereas the metaphorical senses of birds are equally negative. *Crow* is defined as “a woman who is old or ugly,” and even “a promiscuous female.” This last value of promiscuity is likewise transmitted through *bat*. As for *magpie* and *parrot*, their metaphorical senses when applied to women suggest chatterboxes.

- ¹² In this regard Baker makes it clear that the connection *man-fox/vixen* is that of predator and prey: “[T]he term “fox” or “vixen” is generally taken to be a compliment by both men and women, and compared to any of the animal or plaything terms is indeed a compliment. Yet considered in and of itself, the conception of a woman as a fox is not really complimentary at all, for the major connection between *man* and fox is that of predator and prey. The fox is an animal that men chase, and hunt, and kill for sport. If women are conceived of as foxes, then they are conceived of as prey that is fun to hunt. (1981:169)

- ¹³ *Cat* denotes “a malicious woman, a loose woman and a prostitute” (Partridge, 1970). It is likely that because cats are independent and treacherous, metaphorically the term is used as an insult for females.

¹⁴ *Bird*, *canary* and *parakeet* denote a young woman. In US college slang it also refers to a female student, particularly in the collocation “canary dorm” (a female residence) (Eble, 1996).

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